

Fighting Reasons: Motivations for Combat Sports Participation

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Sociology) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

June 2018

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

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Combat sports has been emerging with the rise in popularity of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) bringing forward various martial arts styles with it. Why are people deciding to participate in combat sports? And why do they decide to compete in combat sports? These are the questions I will be answering in my research, focusing on the role of embodied emotions and identity in the decision to compete in combat sports. Theories of emotions and identity are discussed in relation to the social roles individuals play to demonstrate the influence they have on the decision to compete in combat sports.

Acknowledgements

This is an acknowledgement of the help from my committee members Dr. Valerie De Courville and Dr. David Howes. A special thanks to my participants which included my training partners and coaches. Lastly, a very special acknowledgement and thanks to my supervisor Dr. Amy Swiffen for all her guidance. Whom without their help, this research would not be possible.

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Preface

I think it is important to start with some of my background information to better understand where my perspective and interpretations are coming from. I was born in the Middle-East with my ethnic background being Sri Lankan and Lebanese. Being mixed race made me aware of the effects of race socially due to racial discrimination and prejudices I have experienced. I moved to Canada when I was in my late teens where I finished my last two years of high school in the GTA of Toronto before moving to Montreal for post-secondary education where I completed a specialization degree in Sociology and Anthropology with a minor in Law and Society. Before moving to Montreal for post-secondary education I decided to take on Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) to quit smoking cigarettes for overall health benefits and to learn to defend myself. I always enjoyed watching fighting movies and activities that were fighting related and after almost getting robbed I thought I should be more serious about learning to defend myself. After finishing my undergraduate degree, I decided to take half a year off before doing my Masters in Sociology where I decided to focus on combat sports due to my participation and passion in combat sports. I conducted most of my interviews for this research in a Muay Thai gym I train at, I have combined around eight years of martial arts training. I have slightly drifted away from MMA and became extensively involved in Muay Thai and have now eleven fights, an amateur Muay Thai word title, Kickboxing title and I am a coach at the gym I train at now. Obviously, my passion for the sport led me to merge what I do outside school to becoming my research topic in my graduate studies. I was at one point about to leave the sport due to injuries, which led me to question why it is I am still fighting, I felt that the reasons did change, but I did not know what they were and I could not figure it out. Thus, the research question "Why people fight?" made sense for me to try to find out why I and other fighters compete. With that being said, I decided to continue to be involved in the sport and compete in combat sports.

Introduction

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is one of the most popular combat sports right now and has arguably made its way into mainstream culture, bringing with it the introduction of the various combat sports that are involved with it. MMA and combat sports participation generally involves a lot of physical risks compared to many other sports. So, why are people participating and competing in combat sports despite the risks involved? The literature demonstrates that there are various social variables that influence the decision to participate in combat sports. However, the literature does not address the role of identity and emotional reasoning. I want to understand how all the social variables relate to the role of identity and emotion in the motivation to participate in combat sports. To try to do this, I designed a qualitative research project that involved interviewing individuals currently participating in combat sports. In my research, I am looking at more variables than have been discussed in the existing literature, as well as the difference in perspectives of male and female fighters (the existing literature tends to focus on one or the other). Overall, I am contributing to the literature on combat sports by focusing on the role of identity and emotion/body to better understand the motivations for participating and competing in combat sports.

Important themes and debates in the literature and fieldwork are the idea that MMA participation and interest is a response to a tension between the civilized role we are trying to maintain in society and the more instinctual/animalistic aspect of us that combat sports satisfy. This idea is used to explain the appeal of combat sports to a variety of social classes for different reasons as opposed to just the lower classes. Another theme that emerges is the allure of combat sports to males and females due to the sense of safety it provides them. My research shows how fighters use embodied emotional reasoning in their decisions to participate in combat sports. The theoretical framework I used to understand the role of identity is geared toward addressing reasons for the continued participation in combat sports despite the physical risks, as opposed to trying to understand the reasons for initially becoming involved. It links James M. Jasper's concept of emotional reasoning, Pierre Bourdieu's concept

of habitus, and Irving Goffman's theory of role play (dramaturgy), to demonstrate the role of the embodied and emotional aspects of the experience of being a fighter on one's identity.

To analyse the interviews, I used a thematic analysis that categorizes data into themes and subthemes. This approach will be described in more detail in chapter two. Through this approach I came up with two main themes. The first I term "Individual Level" because it addresses what my respondents characterised as individual experiences and motivations for combat sports participation. Within this general theme five sub-themes emerged: "Childhood experience", which refers to the involvement with combat sports (if any) of my interviewees during childhood; "feelings about fighting", which discusses personal motivations for combat sports participation, such as emotion management. Furthermore, the sub-theme "embodied experience" refers to how those I interviewed described the importance of a sense of bodily maturation (mental and physical), physical skills (self-defence), and health benefits gained through competing in combat sports. The sub-theme "fear or risk" refers to the emotional element in practicing combat sports. The section on "emotional experience" explores the satisfying emotional sensations emphasised by respondents as they discussed their reasons for fighting and lastly the sub-theme "combat as identity" refers to aspects of a fighter's identity that is implicated in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. Here, I draw on Bourdieu to emphasize the social and cultural capital being a fighter offers, as well as the heavily ingrained habits of living a fighter's lifestyle that is hard to detach from.

In general, the "Individual Level" analysis indicates that an individual's childhood socialization process involving combat sports is the least common factor in why my interviewees compete in combat sports. Themes that came up the most often were the attraction to having a fighter's identity, the satisfying (and controlling) emotional sensations and bodily improvements that respondents experience, and various personal motivations that respondents associated with their unique personality or life circumstance. However, an important nuance is that satisfying emotional sensations and bodily improvements were the most common motivation expressed when it comes to *continuing* to compete in combat sports,

while personal motivations (e.g. emotion management, staying out of trouble, improving health conditions) were the most common motivation for initially deciding to get involved in combat sports.

The second main analytic perspective I took focused on what I term “Social Level” because it addresses the various social roles that are played by most members in our society. Within this broad theme I developed six sub-themes; “environmental (Habitus) influence” explores the influence of an individual’s surroundings in their decision to continue to compete in combat sports, such as social pressure from training partners and lifestyle habits; “community”, which refers to the influence of relationships with other members in the combat sports community on the decision to continue to compete in combat sports; “societal restraint,” which addresses how workplaces require restraining emotions, instincts and is oppressive which is relieved through competing in combat sports because it offers the ability to release tensions and repressed emotions; “social class” which refers to the influence of people’s socio-economic background on the motivations to compete in combat sports; “gender”, which addresses the influence of gender roles on the decision to compete in combat sports and finally “race”, which refers to how the challenges of being racialized individuals are evident in the decision to compete in combat sports. The interview results demonstrate that the most common “Social Level” factors in the motivation for combat sports participation are a response to feelings of workplace oppression that require restraining emotions, followed by social pressure since six (Majority) of my interviewees discussed the influence of social pressure from friends and coaches. Followed by emotional relationships with other combat sports community members. Although, within the theme “Social Level”, workplace oppression was the most commonly expressed motivation for initially participating in combat sports, one distinction that emerged was that social pressure was the most commonly expressed motivation for continued participation in combat sports.

In general, it seems that the motivation for initially joining combat sports seems to be experienced in terms of individual level factors, based on the number of participants that

discussed them and how often they were mentioned. While in the motivations for continuing to compete in combat sports, social level factors came into the foreground, with social pressure, the emotional relationships with others in the combat sports community and having a fighter's identity (social/cultural capital and engrained habits) all being discussed.

Overall, the findings of my analysis are consistent with the existing literature, though there are some differences. The importance of social pressure was not addressed in the literature, community and race are not addressed adequately in the existing literature but both, social pressure and community especially, were emphasized by my participants as important in their decision to continue to compete in combat sports. For instance, several of my participants mentioned social pressure from their coaches and teammates and the need to help others in the community as something that motivates them to stay. With relation to race, there is literature that briefly discusses it, but only one study ties it into the decision to compete in sports. As discussed in more detail below, much more typically, it is social class that is focused on. In contrast, my research drew out not only the influence of economic class in the decision to compete in combat sports, but also the fact that economic deprivation can be caused by racial inequality.

The first chapter of the thesis explores the literature that is available on combat sports. Authors that are important to this discourse are Wacquant who specifically discusses boxing, and Spencer and Green who concentrate on MMA. The second chapter will discuss my theoretical framework consisting of Bourdieu on habitus, Goffman on social roles and Jasper on emotional reasoning, as well as, my methodological limitations and approach, which is a thematic analysis that focuses on providing multiple sub-themes that connect to the overarching theme of identity. Additionally, the third and fourth chapters are analyses of my fieldwork, the fifth chapter is a synthesis of the literature and the fieldwork findings and the sixth and final chapter concludes my research.

Chapter One: Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature that is available on combat sports. I will start with a little background history on the rise of sports and MMA exploring what MMA has to say on emotions and the body to set the stage for a discussion of my theoretical perspective in chapter two, then I explore themes that come up repeatedly in the academic literature, such as social class and gender.

History

Elias (2008) discusses the growth of sport from a more “crude” and violent style towards a more civilized form of physical activities (p. 116-117). He elaborates how the tolerance of inflicting pain on others was higher in the past compared to nowadays, with the term “sport” meaning different things as it does today (p. 118). Fighting sports participants in the past were regarded with respect and honor if they won, the fighters had the “warrior” status which is different from what it is today (p. 118-119). As opposed to today where a fighter, such as a “boxer is considered a specialist”, in the past, specifically in Greece, the fighters were regarded with much praise and fame, it was culturally more significant and brought the fighters social, economic and cultural capital (p. 123-124). Similar to my research discussing racialized individuals gaining social/cultural capital by competing in combat sports. In the past, in Greece the word “conscience” indicating an inner feeling of guilt due to a wrong thought or action committed was not apparent (p. 127). This Elias states, demonstrates how their culture did not come to a stage of individuality and “internalisation” (p. 128). There was more of a dependence on other members within society to form a framework of morals (p. 128). So, people on their own did not have inner restraint on actions and feelings that are now considered to be violent (p. 128).

Also, Elias (2008) states in the past “physical insecurity” was higher which meant that there was more of a need to defend one’s home and to inflict pain and damage on intruders which

decreased the sensitivity of violence towards others (p. 128). Thus, the social circumstances were different which created a different “social framework” than our more sensitive framework (p. 128). Elias ends the first chapter of the genesis of sport by saying that Sociology deals with the sphere of sport as a distinct category that does not involve other social spheres which he disagrees with by saying that just like other aspects of society that are intertwined and influence each other, sport is influenced by other social elements, which is what my research illustrates through bringing in the influence of gender, social class and race in the decision to compete in combat sports (p. 132-133). Elias emphasizes how sports was toned down because of the need for workers to continue to be productive members of societies and not be injured always or dead (p. 144-145). For example, Elias (2008) states “to punish a form of physical violence which in their own eyes, from the point of view of the state, was useless, a waste of good muscle power-was indicative of a stage in the development of state organisation at which the use of physical force had not yet become as effectively monopolised as is nowadays the case” (p. 146). Thus, the use of physical violence was “pleasurable” for many people in the past, but as the state learnt that it reduces social progress they controlled the use of violence by only allowing people with permission (p. 149). Elias concludes his chapter by saying this reduced the pleasures of life and led to our present day monotone routines which are made pleasurable by the “invention of sport” which is a more controlled and regulated form of physical violence than the past (p. 149). With relation to my research, Elias exemplifies that the decision to participate in sports, such as to compete in combat sports, is due to a natural instinct for violence among humans that makes life pleasurable (p. 149). Compared to the past, violence is viewed nowadays as wrong among society’s members because the state portrays violence as something that needs to be controlled and tamed (p. 148-149). But this was not always the case.

Elias’s discussion on the natural instinct for violence is reflected in rise of the most popular combat sports today, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). MMA started with the idea that anyone with a specific martial arts background can challenge another from a different martial arts background to test which martial art is more effective, but as time passed and the sport evolved MMA has

become the art of fighting where participants have come to understand that they have to be educated in multiple combat disciplines to be a good mixed-martial artist. No longer do athletes focus on mastering a single martial art but instead they acquire skills in several of them. This includes the core combat sports such as Muay Thai which involves striking (punches, kicks, knees, elbows and clinching), Wrestling (grappling) and Brazilian jiu-jitsu (submission grappling). Although, other martial arts are used as well. Researchers have attempted to explain the popularity of MMA in terms of a tension between so-called natural violent instincts and the demands of maintaining a civilized role in society, as well as MMA's ability to provide excitement through the experience of a dangerous situation, which is not as common in our civilized society as the past (Garcia & Malcolm 2010). Thus, the research looking to explain the popularity of MMA speculates that there is tension between our natural instincts and society's constraints which is brought forth from the conventional view between emotion and rationality which I will discuss in the next section.

Emotion and the Body

Incorporating research on Sociology of emotion and the body to better understand the attraction among many people towards combat sports or extreme sports in general, brings to light the multi-layered and complex situation that we are dealing with. In addition, bringing in the role of identity, we will gain more insight into what motivates individuals to participate in combat sports. This is because it provides a whole sphere of possibilities as to why anyone would do what they do, in this case risking serious bodily injury. Overall, the literature seems to indicate that the reasons for motivation to participate in combat sports are linked to emotions and embodied experience. Research on emotion and the body suggests there are embodied affective experiences motivating one to participate in combat sports.

According to Jasper (2013), conventionally, we know that thinking is regarded as more reliable, as opposed to emotional responses. However, emotion studies demonstrate that feeling is a legitimate part of thinking and helps us come up with solutions for our dilemmas. This work argues there is more similarity between feeling (emotions) and thinking than

difference, and that thinking and feeling work together when we make decisions (p. 26-27, 41). Have you not heard someone right after trying an exciting experience say “I am definitely doing that again”, here they have already made their decision based on thinking about the experience they have enjoyed which involves bringing up certain embodied sensations and feelings, as well as, emotions towards that experience which are wrapped up together (thinking, embodied feelings and emotions) in the decision to do this specific experience again. In addition, Barbalet (1998) discusses the three approaches to emotions and rationality. The first is the conventional approach that views emotions as disrupting reason and thinking through clear knowledge and thought (p. 37). Emotion is viewed as arising from the body which disrupts our mental thought processes leading to making decisions that are regarded as unreliable (p. 38). This approach views emotions as uncontrollable and we must take back control of ourselves by “suppressing” emotions and let our reason take the lead (p. 35-36). The second approach is known as the critical approach, here Barbalet (1998) describes this view of emotions as supportive to thinking and reason in decision-making (p. 39-40). The critical approach views emotion as the back-up help for reason, that is if reason cannot solve certain problems then emotion comes in. Furthermore, he states that not in all cases is emotions beneficial to decision-making, but in goal-formation for example, it is (p. 41). For example, Barbalet says “one of the leading functions of emotion is to set goals or purposes for action, both mental and practical” (p. 60). Thus, emotions within the critical approach is explained as leading to action as opposed to absolute reason which will try and take into account all the possible scenarios resulting in no action taken (p. 42). Finally, Barbalet says that emotions in the critical approach explains how emotions arise, such as fear, through “somatic markers” (embodied feelings) which leads to decisions (p. 43). Lastly, the radical approach describes emotions and reason as intertwined (“continuous”) in thinking and making decisions, where the passion for choosing a goal demonstrates this connection (p. 54). The radical approach understands the relationships between emotion and reason similar to the critical approach where emotion comes in when logic cannot help. Overall, Barbalet states the opposition described in the conventional view between emotions and reason has some holes that are made visible by the critical and radical approaches (p. 54). There is also the latest branch of emotion studies that takes a

neuroscientific stance, Feldman Barrett (2017) in her book says emotions do not exist and it is something created by the brain depending on the situation we encounter (p. 30). She explains how we interpret situations based on past experiences of what we felt (embodied) or how we understood those experiences through creating concepts of emotions that we used to try to make sense of what was happening to us, this is accomplished by the process of categorization by the brain (p. 26, 85). Looking back at past experiences to make sense of what we are experiencing when we feel something that is embodied, we try to understand it and through the process of categorization is where the construction of emotion occurs (p. 85). Thus, emotions are constructed and not real.

With that being said, I am taking the critical approach that Barbalet discusses and with relation to combat sports, the embodied emotional experience of participating and competing could be one of the factors that influences individuals to decide to continue to pursue such a dangerous and risky sport. This is a hypothesis that I tried to test throughout my interviews by constructing questions along the lines of: Is the embodied emotional experience a major factor in influencing your (and/or others) decision to participate in combat sports? I define embodied emotional experience as physical sensations and feelings that bring up certain cerebral experiences, specifically emotions. This works vice-versa as well. I had to at times rephrase and breakdown what I meant by embodied emotional experience in more conventional language for my participants for them to better understand the question. I broke down the concept of embodied emotional experience by first isolating the two definitions and explaining them separately, explaining embodiment as a physical sensation such as the feeling of “your heart beating fast” and “panting”. Then describing the emotional element through our definitions of emotions such as fear or anger as more of a cerebral experience that bring up thoughts of negative experiences. With that being said, the results demonstrate that most participants think that embodied emotional experience is important in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. With embodied emotional experience being the second most important factor in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports according to how often it came up in the interviews and how much importance respondents seemed to place on it.

There is research, such as by Breton (2008) that shows that extreme sports not only bring one to focus on the present moment, which is very hard for many to do as we stress about the past and future, but also makes participants feel “alive” (p. 9-10). With the feeling becoming addictive when contrasted with the day to day challenges of society (p. 1-2, p. 9-10). Thus, the addictive feeling of being in the present moment and alive connects to the choice to partake in such activities, which must be made through some form of thinking accomplished through experiencing feelings while practicing extreme sports. With relation to extreme sports, Lupton discusses the appeal of risk-taking in a life that would otherwise be too boring (2002, 113). She illustrates through her interviews the discourse of control which discusses the desire to have the freedom to decide what they want to do without letting emotions, such as fear restrict them (p. 121, 122). We can see how Lupton reflects Jasper’s emotional reasoning theory as she discusses thinking processes accompanied by experiencing certain emotions and sensations.

In addition, Lupton (2013) discusses the collective partaking in risky activities that forges a collective bond, she uses Durkheim’s term collective effervescence to demonstrate this (p. 209). Lupton expresses the importance not only of stimulating emotional responses through risk-taking, but also controlling one’s emotions through such extreme activities (p. 215). The reason to learn to control emotions through partaking in risky activities demonstrates my theoretical framework on emotional reasoning in the decision to compete in combat sports. Similar to my fieldwork data, Lupton also brings up how the attraction of risk-taking is gendered, where females partake in such activities to counter the traditional feminine norms of “control” and males partaking in risky activities to live up to masculine norms of “heroism” (p. 223-224).

At the same time, combat sports can offer participants transformational experiences through embodiment (Channon & Jennings, 2014, p. 773; Green, 2011, p. 377). It allows them to learn about themselves (their body and mind). Physical and mental transformation through the use of the body can be one of the main reasons people continue to participate and compete in combat sports (Channon & Jennings, 2014, 7p. 73; Green, 2011, p. 377; Lupton, 2013, p. 212).

The evolution of the individual in the decision to participate in combat sports through embodied transformation and the feeling of being alive connects to Jasper's theory of emotional reasoning. Whether after or during the experience, the feelings and emotions of embodied experience are part of how the individual reasons to decide to continue to be involved in combat sports. In some literature on combat sports, the work on the body and the harm done to the body is juxtaposed with the love and passion that fighters have for the sport, which seems to override concerns about harm to the body in the fighter's mind, but also creates meaning for the fighter (Spinney, 2006, p. 709; Wacquant, 1995a, p. 523; Wacquant 1995b, p. 88).

I take the perspective that emotion and embodied experience are key players in determining the outcome or decision to continue to participate and compete in combat sports. The complexity of this is apparent when we take into account identity in the emotionally-informed decision-making process to continue to participate and compete in combat sports (Milton, 2004, p. 129; Wacquant, 1995a, p. 523; Wacquant, 1995b, p. 88). I suspect that many decide to continue to pursue combat sports due to a link between identity and embodied emotional experience, which can be viewed in thinking with emotions and feelings that Jasper discusses. Thus, while research on emotions and identity in combat sports is limited, the literature that is available suggests that connections can be made between the emotional and embodied experience of combat sports and one's identity as a fighter. For example, identity is briefly brought up by Brent & Kraska (2013) when they discuss the importance of participants needing to construct "lasting identities" outside their conventional jobs (p. 367-368). The construction of a fighter's identity gives meaning to the participant's lives as opposed to their conventional jobs that they derive little meaning from or identify with. Moreover, Lupton (2002) illustrates through her interviews the discourse of emotional engagement which focuses on deviating from social restrictions and norms through heightened emotions and sensations that helps bring people closer to nature and the self (p. 119, 121, 122). Thus, like my research tackles, Lupton discusses identity and the self as a motivation to venture into emotional engagements, such as risk-taking (i.e. combat sports).

In addition to identity, researchers such as Cynarski and Slopecki (2016) have argued that in an era of extreme commercialization in most areas of human activity MMA has become popular with people from various social classes due to its connection with the idea of a traditional “warrior-hero” lifestyle, which consists of perseverance, strength and being the “good guy” (p. 2-3). But why is MMA particularly attractive compared to other sports? Building off Cynarski & Slopecki, I believe MMA is attractive compared to other sports because of its individualized and violent aspects. A fight pits one individual with a particular background and values against another, which not only is important because we are a society that values individuality, but also because for a spectator it is easy to identify directly with an individual on a personal level as opposed to a whole team. In the context of MMA or combat sports, it is easier to identify which side you support since there are only two individuals involved, as opposed to team sports where you might not like all of the players on the team. Furthermore, the extreme violence satisfies the desire for winning against a rival opponent through direct physical damage, as opposed to other sports where winning means just throwing a ball in a net, for example. The high risk of injury captivates audiences, as Cynarski and Slopecki call it “a brutal spectacle” (p. 3).

The importance of the idea of escaping social constraints in the appeal of combat sports is consistent in much of the research. For example, Brent and Kraska (2013) discuss how ‘cage-fighting’ has attracted many participants and audiences as a response to “highly rationalized modes of governance” (p. 357). They argue there is an interrelationship between “contemporary mechanisms of control” and sport fighting, which reflects the tension (“struggle”) between civility and barbarism (p. 357). Similarly, in an analysis of women in sports, Thing (2001) explores how the appeal of sports to participants is related to the “restraint of emotions” required in modern society (p. 275). Thus, we can see that in general in the literature the idea of a tension between an animalistic aspect of humans and the modern civilized role that we are trying to maintain in society is common in the current scholarship on the motivation to participate in combat sports. With that being said, there is literature that criticizes this view that emotions is something we repress, but I believe emotions can be repressed as my participants demonstrate this through their responses, although in a different

way which I will discuss further in my second analysis and discussion section.

Other researchers have also analyzed the popularity of MMA and linked it to the violence of the sport. Garcia and Malcolm (2010) argue that the development of MMA is largely due to the “quest for excitement” in a world that has minimal real life dangerous situations that bring up such sensations; combat sports provides such excitement through a dangerous and risky situation (p. 39, p. 41-42). The allure of violence and the sensation of excitement is reflected in research on women’s participation in MMA as well. Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm (2014) discuss how women who participate in MMA describe their experiences in “softer” sports as not “exciting” enough (p. 80-81). They also show that shame is used as a “social control mechanism” to keep women out of the sport due to the gendered perception of women as more “civilized” and naturally unaggressive compared to men (p. 81). This implies that women experience additional constraint in modern society, because not only are opportunities for violent excitement limited, they are relatively more limited for women because of gender norms. Overall, Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm state that women’s increased participation in combat sports is largely a response to such constraints.

Thus, on the one hand the literature assumes a tension between a natural human instinct for violence and the demands of maintaining a civilized role in society. While on the other, it suggests there is a social narrative of individual heroism (appeals to cultural narratives of the “warrior-hero” as the “good guy”) that allows for identification. I plan on testing these ideas in my research by paying attention to whether or not the motivations of people’s involvement in combat sports connect with the idea that they experience such a tension. Furthermore, I will explore how individual sense of identity is involved in deciding to compete in combat sports. This contributes to the existing literature because it will test the assumption of a violent instinct while adding an analysis of the role of identity/self.

Social Class

Sidanius, Pratto, Laar and Levin (2004) have used an approach about hierarchies in social groups, known as social dominance theory, which I apply to the realm of social class to suggest combat sports participation by the oppressed (lower classes) is a method of counteracting feelings of exploitation in the workplace. Social dominance theory focuses on multiple “levels of analysis” (“the psychological, the interpersonal and the structural”) of social oppression within groups, as opposed to other theories that mainly concentrate on one level of analysis (p. 871). Sidanius et al. describes how these various levels impact one another (“individual differences” affecting “institutions”), which leads to a social hierarchy within groups (p. 871). The goal of social dominance theory is to better understand the “social organizations” that produce “discrimination and oppression” and sustain the hierarchy (p. 872-873). This theory can be connected to my research by viewing motivations to participate in combat sports as a solution to what Sidanius et al is describing. For example, as opposed to the workplace where the lower classes do not feel respected or empowered, they might look for ways of empowering themselves to gain some type of respect or power, such as physical strength and technique to defend themselves through combat sports participation. These benefits that are offered in combat sports are reasons why many are motivated to participate and compete in combat sports. Thus, I use social dominance theory to demonstrate that individuals compete in combat sports due to discrimination and oppression in the workplace. Moreover, social dominance theory focuses on the reproduction of oppression and I connect my research on combat sports to Sidanius et al.’s work by demonstrating the role of combat sports participation as a method (solution) of counteracting this reproduction of oppression in the workplace. Lastly, I connected this theory to my fieldwork in the discussion section even though most of my interviewees are middle-class, there are some that are lower and who grew up lower which gave a good comparison.

Wetherell (2012) cites Reay discussing how she demonstrates the affective experiences of the working class that consist of “resentment” and “anger” which are reasons among the working class in my research for deciding to compete in combat sports (p. 109-110). Thus, emotional elements are involved in the socio-economic roles that lead to the decision to

compete in combat sports, which my theoretical framework demonstrates as well. Moreover, emotional capital is brought up in addition to social, cultural and economic capital; emotional capital is the ability to manage emotions, specifically in emotionally charged situations (p. 111-112). Wetherell states this ability is afforded to the middle-class through “psychological technologies” (p. 112-113). As opposed to the working class, which might lead them to decide to compete in combat sports to learn to manage their emotions as my research demonstrates. For example, working-class “features” include emotions such as “humour”, “rage” and “communal loyalty” used as “responses to social injustice” (p. 113-114). The use of community among the working class to counteract discrimination and oppression, which is found through competing in combat sports, reflects my use of Sidanius et al.’s work on countering discrimination and oppression through combat sports participation.

However, even though many researchers have found that participating in MMA is more prevalent among individuals from the lower social class (defined by financial status, job type and social status). There is research, such as Abramson and Modzelewski (2011) and Fletcher (2008) that demonstrate the contrary with various theories on the attraction to MMA of members from the middle class, for example its similarity to the ideals of America (Abramson & Modzelewski, 2011, p. 143, 170), and its ability to provide “temporary escape” and instant gratification (Fletcher, 2008, 310). Abramson and Modzelewski argue that members of the middle-class are drawn to “success” by participating in subcultures, despite economic and social costs (p. 143). On the one hand, there are “positive and affective” benefits (p. 143). For example, cage-fighting offers “bodily, interpersonal, and professional sacrifices,” as well as the “shared American ideals” that form the middle class “moral world” (p. 143). According to Abramson and Modzelewski, a cage-fighter lifestyle that consists of “self-improvement, authenticity and voluntary community” reflects middle-class American ideals (p. 143, 170). Thus, as opposed to combat sports offering a method of dealing with oppression and discrimination which social dominance theory assumes, Abramson and Modezelewski focus on how people from the middle class join combat sports because it reflects their cultural lifestyle. On the other hand, Fletcher has also suggested that risk sports such as MMA appeal to the

middle class because it provides a “temporary escape” from a social class that demands constant work and “delayed gratification” (p. 310). Lastly, Lupton (2013) connects risk to social class as she exemplifies the attraction of the “Other’s” bodies by White bodies due to their forbidden status because of the attached animalistic and primitive connotations towards it, especially when discussing its importance in the formation of middle-class identity (p. 234-235).

In conclusion, the literature shows that the social class of individuals is an important characteristic determining combat sports participation, but it operates in different ways for different socio-economic groups and individuals. At the same time, the research on middle-class participation in MMA reflects different arguments. On the one hand, it is argued that combat sports reaffirm middle class values and on the other it is argued that combat sports provide a temporary escape from the confines of middle class life. I explore this in my analysis of the interviews by comparing people from different class backgrounds’ responses on if they dealt with discrimination or oppression in the workplace and whether there were any economic or social costs to becoming a fighter and if that was a motivating factor for them to compete in combat sports.

Gender

Much of the literature on the role of gender in combat sports focuses on how females are participating in a male domain, where both male and female individuals get involved in combat sports to build confidence and skills they feel are necessary to feel and be safe in their environment. With males mainly participating to dominate and counteract being dominated by other men and females mainly to defend themselves against men. Thus, even though the relationship with the world based on gender creates different discourses as to why each sex decides to fight, the body is important for both. In addition, trans-identities were not discussed in the existing literature and because of my own limited access to a small part of the combat sports community in Quebec and Ontario, I did not have an opportunity to investigate trans-identities with relation to combat sports participation. With that in mind, future research focusing on trans identities within combat sports would be interesting.

Literature on men's participation in MMA, such as Jefferson (1998) discusses the importance that upbringing and past experiences (hardships, anxiety, etc.) have on men, and lead a lot of them to adapt to a "hard" and "masculine" persona (p. 81-82). According to both Jefferson (1998) and Messner (1990), men draw on masculine gender norms to counteract the challenges they face in their daily life, and therefore participate in combat sports to feel safe, specifically from other men through learning physical skills (combat techniques) and appearing "tough" according to male gender norms (1998, p. 81-82; 1990, p. 203). With relation to females, Mennesson (2000) states women's decision to participate in boxing is related to a sense of safety, this includes the necessity to defend oneself in a dangerous environment (male violence, sexual violence, robbery, etc.) (p. 21). According to Mennesson, the position of women is also different in that in doing this they also challenge gender norms, something that researchers have found some of them try to mitigate by displaying traditional femininity ('hard' or 'soft') (p. 21). At the same time, Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm (2014) discuss how being a female combat sports fighter gives them a sense of empowerment, community (safety), and identity (p. 81). In conclusion, the literature indicates that unlike women, men in combat sports are not resisting gender roles but identifying with them, while women negotiate the gender-nonconformity associated with participation in combat sports in various ways.

With that being said, the role of identity is not addressed adequately in the existing literature on the motivations to participate in combat sports. It seems that literature focuses mainly on the reasons people initially start combat sports and it is implied these are the same reasons why people continue to be involved in the sport, but the question is never explicitly discussed in depth. Research on gender touches on the role of identity a little, but for the most part it is discussing social forces as opposed to individual forces. The role of identity is more complex than the existing literature portrays, with identity being intertwined with social and individual forces and I argue it is important in the decision to continue being a fighter. The identity of being a combat sports fighter can make it very difficult to leave the sport, since doing so can mean losing a big part of their identity, which can create major psychological

challenges for them. Thus, avoiding this situation would motivate participants to continue to participate and compete in combat sports to feel empowered, safe and keep their identity safely intact. Thus, I am not only looking at why people initially decide to participate in combat sports, but also why they decide to stay. With that in mind, I will look at whether the same reasons that people decide to initially join combat sports is the same as the reasons why people continue to be involved in combat sports.

Race

I discussed the work of Jefferson (1998) on masculinity in the last section on gender, but Jefferson brings it in with relation to Mike Tyson (Professional boxer), being that Tyson is Black, Jefferson brings up the discussion of race in his paper. Jefferson devotes a decent amount of time to the challenges of being racialized and how this leads to the decision to compete in combat sports, but he is the only author that does this in the existing literature. Specifically, he discusses the influence of economic and social challenges of being a Black male, which like my research, demonstrates that racialized individuals are suffering from such challenges due to being disproportionately represented in lower-classes because of racial inequality (p. 94-95). Jefferson states some of the social challenges associated with being black is the stigma of them being solely “athletic” and “tough” which paves a particular path (i.e. towards combat sports participation) for them and limits other opportunities and possibilities (p. 94).

Chapter Two: Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Introduction

I am using a variety of theories to connect to my thesis with relation to emotion, embodiment, and the role of identity in being a fighter. With questions arising such as, what does participation mean for men and women? Are the benefits people experience from participating and competing in combat sports the same or different for members of lower

classes or middle to higher classes? Where do fighters draw the line to end competing and participating in combat sports? What factors do they take into account? Health reasons, economic reasons, and so on? What about the tension described in the literature between the uncivilized and civilized part of us, is there any tension in the first place? Do participants really think of the risks involved? Or do they turn a blind-eye? Does social pressure influence the decision to continue to participate in combat sports? How are combat sports connected to their sense of self/identity? All these questions I investigated in my research through the interviews I conducted. I asked these questions and others to my participants and came up with patterns and themes that led to the over-arching theme of identity. All these questions and theories help us understand the motivations behind people's decision to compete in combat sports.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will lay out my theoretical framework which will bring together Vosu's interpretation of Goffman's dramaturgical theory of identity, Bourdieu's concept of habitus as interpreted by Hurtado with relation to the relationship between identity and context, and Jasper's understanding of how emotional reasoning is also involved in these domains. While Jasper's work directly connects to the theory of emotional embodiment, I will explicitly develop the link between embodiment with Bourdieu and Goffman.

I use the work of Vosu (2013) on Goffman's theory of "dramaturgy" to understand the relationship between social roles (e.g. the "uncivilised" fighter and the "rational" citizen) and an individual's motivation to begin participating and to continue to participate in combat sports. Vosu describes Goffman's use of the metaphorical analogy of theatre to understand the nature of the self because Goffman sees similarities in how the self is constructed through social roleplaying and how an actor plays characters and roles on stage (p. 130). Drawing on Goffman's theory, I explore how what an individual does daily (how they play their social roles) molds their identity, which will make certain social roles hard to break away from as it impacts their identity. There is also a link between role playing and the habitus involved in training and

competing. I apply Bourdieu's work interpreted by Hurtado (2008) to better understand combat sports settings and how people involved become reflections of those settings. Hurtado goes through four key concepts of Bourdieu's theory of practice: (social) practice, habitus, fields and doxa (p. 131). In stable societies, social structures are reproduced by social practices (p. 131). Social practices are types of strategies utilized by members of a society to "maneuver" through the habitus, which can dialectically have an impact on the habitus itself with members acquiring the power to change the "game" (p. 132, 134). Hurtado defines habitus as the "durably inculcated system of structured, structuring dispositions" (p. 131). Basically, "habitus" is a powerful system created in a specific way to foster and perpetuate a certain kind of disposition. These dispositions continue to generate the social practices that members learn from the habitus they were residing in, mostly through early socialization (p. 131). Although, early socialization in combat sports was not a factor in molding a fighter identity among my participants since they did not participate in combat sports in their youth. Thus, as opposed to Hurtado's finding on the significant influence of early socialization on an individual's disposition, my research demonstrates that important socialization processes on an individual's disposition or identity can be accomplished at any point in time. Habitus is embodied in individuals, while simultaneously being a collective of individuals (p. 131). Thus, the concepts practice and habitus are important for identity formation because of the major influence they have on an individual's character and personality (disposition).

In addition, according to Hurtado (2008), Bourdieu's concept of a field is also relevant and described as "networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions, within which struggles or maneuvers take place over resources, stakes and access" (p. 132). So, a field is structured in terms of social positions and power relationships where access to resources are available, but limited (p. 132.) Thus, to accumulate resources, tension and competition arises. Additionally, within a field the players have "stakes", and also have access to resources/capital (p. 132). There are different types of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital (p. 132). On the one hand, cultural capital is associated with knowledge and skills (influenced by education) (p. 132). On the other hand, social capital refers to the network of social relations that the player may use to his/her advantage (p. 132). While economic capital

comprises the accumulation of monetary gain and assets. Thus, the concept of capital implies the accumulation of resources within the community and society generally, that would otherwise be lost if they stopped participating in the community, which is a reason people continue to compete in combat sports as my analysis demonstrates (p. 132).

The relationship between habitus, social practice and fields starts with habitus, when individuals come into a particular habitus they gain a “sense” of how things work in that environment through the social practices they are subjected to, which in turn they reproduce (Hurtado, 2008, p. 132, 134). With relation to fields, these social practices are strategies utilized through networking with other members to each of their advantage within the particular habitus to gain a respectable social position and accumulate resources, which is where competition arises.

The final element of Bourdieu’s theory of social practice that is relevant is doxa, or the unquestioned “axioms” of the field which is an important part of the habitus (Hurtado, 2008, p. 132). After being involved in a community for a certain amount of time, you stop questioning what is going around since it becomes who you are and the influence of others involved can easily influence your thoughts and beliefs, leading one to defend the community. In my interviews, I tried to uncover the unquestioned “axioms” that could lead to continued participation in combat sports due to the emotional embodied experience with the community.

Furthermore, citing Bourdieu, Wetherell (2012) discusses his use of habitus as “practice” that molds individual’s future actions (p. 104-105). Personality is constructed through what people do through routine practices in a specific social environment (p. 102-103). Even how people feel or in Wetherell’s terms “structures of feeling” and “feeling routines” are constructed through what people do daily (p. 103). The resultant beliefs of how everything is or should be seems so “natural” then to the individual (p. 105-106). Thus, the body and mind learn to go through the same motions as it has learnt in the past (p. 106-107). If we try to deviate from our habitus, there is a strong emotional response that arises from the social environment that urges us to do otherwise (p. 107-108). In addition, Wetherell exemplifies the complexity of affective experiences by stating that we are not just products of our habitus and mindlessly go through

emotional frameworks that we have learnt (p. 115-116). But rather, we negotiate emotional responses and regulate them at times depending on the situations (p. 115-116). Overall, habitus is not homogeneous, but rather heterogeneous and hard to pin point “static” dimensions of it (p. 116-117). People get influenced by various social positions they hold, not one position (p. 116-117). With that in mind, people have various affective frameworks that they occupy (p. 118-119). Thus, with habitus and affective frameworks being heterogeneous, identity is influenced, being a combination of various identities and heterogeneous (p. 118-119). This reflects my research on the importance of various social positions and reasons involved in the decision to compete in combat sports.

Bourdieu’s concepts involved: habitus, social practices, fields and doxa help us better understand combat sports settings and how people involved become reflections of those settings. Moreover, Bourdieu’s concepts help us understand how people involved in combat sports contexts are molded by their surroundings through taking up various social roles, which in turn become part of their identity and as a result, hard to separate from because of how ingrained it becomes as part of who they are. At the same time, playing social roles within a subculture also builds social capital that one may lose if they quit participating. This means that quitting combat sports can have very challenging consequences, such as experiencing an identity crisis, and these consequences might outweigh the physical risks and harms that come along with training and competing. Goffman complements Bourdieu’s discussion on the impact of habitus (environment/setting) as he focuses on the different roles we play in society depending on the environment and setting we are in and how these impact our sense of identity.

Research by Wacquant (2009) on boxing is an example of what I am arguing as he draws on Bourdieu, specifically the concept of habitus. Wacquant explores the relationship between the environment and the body of a boxer to illuminate the importance the body and context has in influencing the decision to participate or compete in combat sports (p. 81). He participates in the sport to investigate the impact of a boxing habitus on behavior and the body, which also demonstrates the relevance of the concept of role playing for understanding the

experience of being a boxer (p. 81). Through the concept of habitus, Wacquant analyzes the combination of physical and mental characters that compose the boxer (p. 81). The focus on the habitus of boxing on molding the individual's identity into a boxer, demonstrates how people become influenced by what they are surrounded by, leading them to structure a personality that reflects their habitus.

Another example of the usefulness of the concept of habitus is an ethnographic research by Spencer (2009) on Mixed Martial Arts, which discusses the social processes that are integral to the construction of an "*MMA fighter habitus*" (p. 119). He explores the physical dimensions of life in Mixed Martial Arts habitus (p. 119). Spencer goes through how body techniques are learned and become heavily ingrained as part of the identity of Mixed Martial Arts fighters, which can be hard to detach from (p. 119). An example of bodily practices is "*body callusing*" through use of reflexive body techniques, which is used to allow fighters to deal with the physical demands of the sport (p. 119). Thus, the bodily practices involved in being a mixed martial artist are an important part of the identity of a fighter. This link between bodily practices and identity can be a motivating factor for individuals to continue their involvement in the sport, despite physical harm and risk. Thus, we see the importance of the environment's influence on the body with relation to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which molds the individual into a certain disposition that is hard to detach and separate from.

Spencer's research on habitus illustrates that the link between identity and bodily practices within one's environment is an important factor in influencing the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. I explored this through my interviews with amateur and professional Muay Thai and MMA fighters from a variety of social classes (lower and middle) and both male and female. I constructed questions that focus on the importance of the environment on the body in influencing the decision to continue to participate in combat sports. I did this to help validate my hypothesis that habitus is an important factor in influencing the decision to continue to participate in combat sports.

My research also draws on the work of emotional reasoning by Jasper (2013) to suggest that what drives or motivates one to engage in combat sports is not a solely thinking process, but

rather as involving feeling (and emotions) (p. 26-27). There is a process of thinking that sets goals based on the embodied emotional experience of, for example, the passion for the sport that leads individuals to continue to be involved and play certain roles that mold their disposition and identity. The embodied emotional experience of participating and competing in a combat sports habitus involves playing roles that will shape an individual's identity and become one of the main motivations to continue to pursue such a dangerous and risky sport.

As opposed to my theoretical framework that focuses on the use of the concept of habitus to demonstrate the influence of one's environment on the individual's disposition to continue to be involved in that same environment. "Inside Clubbing" by Phil Jackson (2004) gives a different take on the influence of habitus on individuals which is also demonstrated in my interview responses. Jackson discusses the conventional lifestyle or habitus that is idealized by society. He argues that it leads a lot of individuals to create an alternative social habitus that fulfills their desire for deep meaningful relationships with people, which cannot be fulfilled by the conventional lifestyle offered by society (p. 171-172). By clubbing, individuals have the ability to let loose from their insecurities and anxieties through the use of drugs that allow experiences with others that go beyond the boundaries of social conventions (p. 173-174). These drug related experiences teach positive lessons to individuals through the intimate relationships they foster with others while being high that are reflected upon and implemented into their daily life which brings a higher quality of life and a more positive perspective (p. 175). In my interviews with some participants, Jackson's use of habitus was demonstrated as well. Specifically, being part of a particular habitus that motivates them to become part of another habitus, in this case becoming part of a combat sports community.

To summarize, my theoretical framework brings together Goffman's dramaturgical theory by Vosu with relation to identity, Bourdieu's concept of habitus by Hurtado with relation to the relationship between identity and context, and Jasper's with relation to emotion and reason. Jasper connects to the theory of emotional embodiment and I brought out the link with Bourdieu and Goffman more explicitly. With Jasper, I added an understanding of how emotional embodied experience is also involved in these domains. A sense of embodied

identity through living in a particular environment is a reason many individuals continue to participate in combat sports despite the risks involved and the physical damage received. I used their theories to validate this hypothesis through the questions I asked in the interviews. Using this theoretical framework guided me in structuring my methodology in a qualitative manner which made the most sense in getting data on individual emotional (embodied) experiences and identity.

Methodology

I explore the reasons people decide to compete in combat sports and the forms of reasoning they use for continuing to participate. Taking into consideration the embodied experience involved that consists of both pain and physical risk, as well as excitement and passion, I asked a variety of individuals (males and females) why they choose to partake in such extreme sports and how that participation is connected to their identity. I paid close attention to my participants' responses to see what they said about the physical and sensory aspects of their experience in combat sports. I devised questions to try to shed light on the emotional and affective influence on deciding to participate in such activities and dimensions of that experience. I added a raced, classed and gendered element to the analysis by incorporating theories of race, gender, masculinity and dominance to understand how these factors influence the experiences of my interviewees. Thus, the social factors that will be discussed provide guidance in analyzing the identity narratives I collected from participants and in formulating questions about how individuals decided which social roles are considered more valuable than others. It is important to bring to light the role of race in this research which is not addressed in the existing literature to the same extent as other social variables. With that in mind, I gained insight into how sub-narratives of my participants fit within the overarching narrative of identity, making visible the emotional, psychic, and physical complexity involved in such decision making. In this section, I will discuss the methodological approach used to conduct my research, which focuses on how the potential participants were approached, how I went about accomplishing this, connecting various identity narratives, a brief description of the fieldwork process all together and the questions I asked.

The methodological approach I used was a qualitative take which made the most sense in getting data given my theoretical framework focused on individual emotional (embodied) experiences and identity. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted. As well, a thematic analysis approach was used, which illuminates multiple important themes that connect to an overarching theme that brings them all together. I used interviews with open-ended questions to identify various factors that influenced my participants' motivation for participating in combat sports and then tried to understand how these factors are related to identity and what they indicate about the embodied aspects of a fighter's identity. I chose to use thematic analysis to interpret the interviews because it can take into account the different reasons people decide to compete in combat sports but still see that identity is at play. To access these themes, I tried to construct individual participants' identity narratives. Somers (1994) discusses the concept of "narrative identity", defined as a method by individuals to describe their identity through creating a narrative that makes sense to them, such as what they do on a daily basis; in this case: participating in combat sports and fighting (p. 634-635). Somers' work is a good example of how identity narratives can shed light on role playing, habitus and how what we do daily in the environment we are in molds our identity. The specific routine we go through day in and day out leads to a certain lifestyle that consists of constant repetition of particular actions which is easily implicated into our identity narrative because it becomes familiar and makes sense to us. Thus, what we do daily allows us to tell a story about what we do every day which becomes who we are.

An ethnography by Green (2016) on men involved in MMA is a good illustration of Somers' concept of narrative identity as Green examines how participants justify their participation in MMA through how they narrate their identity as fighters (p. 419). The main narratives that Green finds are: "sociobiological discourse" which refers to the gendered norms that are discussed as natural and biological, specifically when discussing the need to fight and have sex, as well as the unnaturalness of females fighting (p. 431-432). The narrative of "alienation from consumer society" addresses the critique among the participants of society's conventional path to happiness that involves getting a nine to five job and getting married, this critique among the

lower classes as they participate in MMA demonstrate the pride they take in the unconventional role they play which involves training and fighting (p. 437-438). While the critique from the middle and higher classes who participate in MMA consist of an escape from the competition and boredom of the conventional role they have taken (p. 439). Furthermore, the narrative of “it is a violent world” refers to the need to learn to protect oneself through learning martial arts in the midst of various dangerous situations. Among males this is revealed through discussions of the importance of living up to masculine norms by becoming confident and a protector of the defenseless and women (p. 429-430). The narrative “emulating the exotic” refers to creating meaning through living and learning martial arts abroad which is viewed as important knowledge within the combat sports community (p. 433-434). The narrative of “spirituality” addresses the importance of embodying the feeling of being in the moment and using martial arts as a way to accomplish this and approach life, instead of worrying and being egoistic (p. 435-436). Lastly, the narrative of “body as a project” refers to the satisfaction individuals feel in building the body to become a better version of themselves (p. 419, 441). Thus, Green argues that the attraction of MMA is it allows people to create a narrative that gives meaning to their life (“physical training and for making sense of social life”) (p. 419). The themes illuminate how this practice is more complicated than just being an exercise or sport (p. 419). The sport’s unstable position reflects the participant’s unstable identities, which leads them to construct identities around the narratives mentioned to make sense of their lives (p. 419).

I used Somers and Green as methodological guides through my interviews. Drawing on Jasper’s theories of emotional reasoning, I argue that Green’s work suggests that with the passage of time, the narratives that emerge in training and characteristics of training in everyday life become heavily ingrained in the identity of a fighter, not only in the sense of what being a “fighter” means symbolically but also in the sense of engaging in a series of regular practices (going to the gym, dealing with injuries, competing, etc.) that can be hard to separate from emotionally. Thus, it is not only the symbolic loss of being a fighter that comes with quitting MMA but also the loss of a way of being in one’s milieu and the bodily practices that

characterise it. Thus, this connection between embodied identity and emotion can be the reason for continued involvement in combat sports.

As part of the interview process, I had the participants narrate their identities and I analyzed these narratives through the subsequent questions I asked. Furthermore, I made sense of their narratives as I contextualized them in relation to the social factors (social class, gender, race, etc.) that came up in the literature. At the same time, I added several elements. For instance, I interviewed male and female fighters so as to be able to compare how gender influences the embodied identity of being a fighter and how these gendered dimensions might play out differently in the decision to quit or to continue to fight.

The participants in my study were individuals that have or currently participate in combat sports competitions, ages 18-40 years of age, male and female. Amateur and professional fighters were contacted for participation, but the majority of participants were amateur fighters since that is mainly the community I have access to due to my own participation in that community. Participants were identified based on their level, sex, age and type of combat sports competition experience. I initially gave participants the option of either deciding to choose to be identified by their first name or a fake name in this paper, but I decided to take the liberty to use a fake name for all my participants for confidentiality purposes since the combat sports communities in Ontario and Quebec are small and participants can be easily recognized by other combat sports community members by using their first names. In total, I conducted eleven interviews consisting of two professionals, and nine amateurs. Three of the interviewees were females and eight were males. I identified and recruited participants for the interviews by approaching people personally in the combat sports community who I know through my connections (friends, training partners and coaches) and I also asked some of them to suggest others who might be interested and to put me in contact with them to set up a time and place to meet, some offered before I even asked. Participants and the people they suggested were invited to participate in the same way, through oral/online conversation (Facebook messenger) and the invitation was informal and casual. I conducted in-depth interviews that spanned around two hours (each participant interviewed twice). The interviews

were open-ended to gain some flexibility to ask different follow up questions depending on the responses.

I asked them interview questions that are specific to their social position and upbringing. Specifically, how have their experience growing up influenced their decision to compete in combat sports. I also focused on the meaning of combat sports for the individual, reasons for getting involved, and the embodied and emotional experience of competing. One of my goals was to compare similarities and differences in how male and female fighters discussed these matters. Moreover, questions were divided between individual and social level to illuminate the complexity of the subject due to the multiplicity of factors involved. With relation to my theoretical framework, the individual level reflects the individual experience (emotional embodied experiences) that is socially mediated, and the social level reflects the influence of performing social roles in different environments. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will demonstrate the connection between the two levels through individual experiences (emotional embodied experiences) while performing social roles in different environments. Some of the questions that were used:

Individual Level:

1. What interested you in competing in combat sports?
2. What motivated you to start training for competitions?
3. How do you feel about the risks involved in combat sports?
4. What keeps you motivated to continue to compete in combat sports?
5. Do the sensations and emotions involved in competition influence your decision in continuing to compete in combat sports? If yes, how?

6. Do you think that people can rationalize (think) through their dilemmas and find solutions through emotions and feelings? Explain.
7. Do you think this is good or bad? Explain.
8. How is participating in combat sports connected to your sense of self/identity?

Social Level:

1. Do you think of various combat sports as communities?
2. Does participating in combat sports give you a sense of belonging?
3. What are the different reasons men and women compete in combat sports?
4. Does your socio-economic status influence your/others' decision to participate in combat sports? Why or why not?
5. Does race influence participation decision? If so, why?

By asking these types of questions I hoped to gain insight primarily on the influence of emotional embodied experience and identity on the decision to continue to participate in combat sports. Secondary importance are the various general factors on initially deciding to participate in the sport. In this section, I discussed the methodological approach (thematic analysis) I used to conduct my research which focuses on connecting various narratives to the over-arching narrative of identity, the potential participants I approached and how I went about accomplishing this, a brief description of the fieldwork process all together and the questions I asked. With that being said, next I will discuss the limitations of my methodology.

Methodological Limitations

It is important to address some of the limitations of the methodology I used in my research. Firstly, my ability to do a comparative analysis of gendered identity is limited. My goal was to have an equal number of male and female participants, though this turned out not to be possible due to the fact that there are proportionately fewer females than males involved in combat sports and my connections were limited. Moreover, I was not able to find any professional female fighters to participate in my research. Similarly, contacting trans-participants for this research was not possible because of my own limited access to a small part of the combat sports community in Quebec and Ontario. Nonetheless, I believe I have put together a good variety of fighters from different backgrounds that will illuminate the complexity of the role of identity in the decision-making process to compete in combat sports.

Secondly, in the process of conducting interviews, I felt that some questions were hard for my participants to answer because they never reflected on them before. This led to my participants discussing other topics that sometimes were beneficial to my research, but other times were not. Similarly, there was a language barrier with two participants who do not speak fluent English, and sometimes their answers were not directly related to the questions asked. Again, this led to discussing other topics that sometimes were not of use to the research. With that being said, I learned that next time I should come more prepared with the mindset that some questions will need to be formulated in various ways that can be more easily digested, whether this be on a linguistic or conceptual level.

Lastly, initially I was supposed to voice record while writing notes during the interviews to be able to go back if needed and listen to what I missed writing down. I ended up just writing notes because I was able to decide when to ask the next question which gave me time to write down the response to the question being undertaken and ask for any clarifications, as opposed to trying to keep up with a respondent answering a series of questions that would be hard for me to keep up with. Also, I do believe that what is important will stick and that taking notes and looking back on them will jog my memory of any additional important data and characteristics of my participants. With that in mind, I made sure to keep the time framework within a few

hours between when I wrote down the notes and when I looked them over to transcribe them on my computer to have the additional information that did come up to be more reliable and not have my memory distort the data of my participants. I felt that recording the whole interview would have me go back to it constantly and only make it harder to pin-point what is important and what was better left out. Although, this might have meant that I missed some data that would give a better holistic picture of the situation at hand.

In conclusion, the limitations of my research involve not being able to find a comparable number of female fighters to interview, which may somewhat limit the validity of a comparative analysis in terms of gender. The direct way in which I asked questions may have made it more difficult for some of my respondents to provide in-depth answers, and I relied on my memory and hand-written notes to identify themes and sub-themes, which means there may be details that I missed that could have been included had I recorded the interviews. Now I will move into the meat of my research, that is the interviews where I put to work my theoretical framework and methodology. First, I will discuss the “Individual Level” analysis to give an introduction of my participants, followed by the “Social Level” analysis. Then a section that links the two with the literature.

Chapter Three: First Fieldwork Analysis

Theme-Individual Level

Introduction.

The “Individual Level” analysis of the interviews comprises of six sub-themes: “Childhood experience”, “feelings about fighting”, “embodied experience”, “fear or risk”, “emotional experience” and “combat as identity”. I developed these themes by taking handwritten notes during the interviews. I then moved notes from my notebook to a word document on my laptop which made me go over my notes and simultaneously this process brought up more details of

my respondents' answers, which I filled in the word document. Furthermore, I organised my notes according to each question. By doing this, I was able to easily see for each question what the general themes and patterns among my participants were, group together responses of various questions and develop codes that were related to each other, which allowed me to generate the given sub-themes. I was then able to choose specific quotes for my research that I thought represented the sub-themes adequately and would give the reader a better understanding of my interpretations. I organized the sub-themes in the given order to introduce my participants and their initial experiences with combat leading to the main topic of my research, which is identity. I will start with the sub-theme "childhood experience" which addresses my participants' first encounters with contact sports, specifically combat sports and how this contributed to their decision to compete in combat sports.

Childhood Experience.

Half of those I interviewed were involved in contact sports when they were children, while the other half were not. The majority of the participants that were involved in contact sports were engaged in hockey and only two participants mentioned martial arts. One of them, Tom, is a male around thirty who "grew up in a bad neighborhood" in Quebec, which as a kid led him to practice traditional martial arts to learn to defend himself. Tom is a coach and an amateur fighter with a lot of fighting experience with over fifty fights in the amateur arena. The other is Kumar, a professional MMA fighter who is also around 30. He has twenty fights in total and joined martial arts (Taekwondo) when he was young because it was the national sport in the country where he was born. Kumar stopped participating in combat sports and later (young adult years) joined again. However, most of my participants when they were children had a brief introduction with combat sports for a few months as a way to learn self-defence. For example, responses such as these came up in the interviews, "a month of Karate (really young)", "Karate as a kid, but didn't like the rules and discipline, etc." and "a little bit of Taekwondo". Most of my participants did not express much about their brief introduction to martial arts, but I sensed that they did not enjoy it a whole lot.

When we take into consideration my theoretical framework on the influence of the emotional embodied experiences of social roles played in the combat sports environment which molds an individual's identity, the participants (Kumar and Tom) who were involved consistently with combat sports when they were younger would have been impacted into adulthood and we can see that they are currently involved in combat sports competition after many years. Thus, early socialization in a particular habitus or environment, specifically combat sports, is an important factor in their decision to participate in combat sports. Although, for the rest of my participants, early socialization within combat sports was not really a factor, most of them were involved in hockey which is a contact sport. With that in mind, as mentioned in my theoretical framework, individuals' identities and dispositions can be created later on in life, not just in early years. In retrospect, a follow-up question as to why my participants switched from hockey to combat sports would have given a better understanding of their motivations for participating in combat sports.

In addition to asking if they participated directly in combat sports as children, I also asked participants if they watched television to see if they watched anything combat related that might influence their decision to compete in combat sports. Half stated that in general they did watch shows, while the other half did not and there were various reasons as to why this was the case. In Peter's case, the reason was not having many TV channels to choose from. Another of my respondents reported that his parents did not allow him and his siblings to watch TV, and as a result did not watch combat sports during his childhood.

On the other hand, for the participants that did watch TV as children, there was only one that actually watched something combat related, which was pro wrestling. The rest of my participants that watched TV as children watched a wide range of shows such as "Pokemon and Digimon", "Anima (Yu Gi Oh, Poke mon)", "superhero cartoons" and "Transformers". Thus, even though half of my participants did watch TV, only one watched shows that were directly combat sports related. However, we can see that other participants that did watch other shows, did watch shows that were action based which still has aspects of combat. With that

being said, we can see that for most of my participants, the shows they consistently watched on TV could not be said to be significant sources of socialisation into combat sports participation, suggesting that this socialisation occurred later in their lives. Overall, it is apparent that being engaged with combat sports growing up was not a significant factor in the motivation of my participants to compete in combat sports later on.

However, several of my participants were involved in Hockey as children, which is a contact sport. Being part of contact sports, such as hockey, in childhood might lead to socialisation that links to combat sports. Peter demonstrates this when he says his “favorite hobby growing up was hockey mainly and soccer (competitively), but more or less aggressive sports I was part of” and when asked whether he enjoys competing, Peter says “I enjoy competing, being physically dominant is what I like. I prefer hitting people (in past sports)”. Here we can see how Peter specifies that part of his experience playing hockey involved aggression and being dominant, which demonstrates his tendencies towards choosing in the future more contact related sports, such as combat sports.

Feelings about Fighting.

In addition, I asked about participants’ experience with fights outside competition in childhood and adulthood before moving into a more in-depth discussion. I wanted to find out if having fights as children could be a form of socialisation that leads one to continue to fight in combat sports. Half of the participants were involved in a lot of fights outside competition, primarily in their earlier years, while others just had a few here and there, such as in grade school. Whether participants had a lot of fights or not, most of them did not demonstrate any thoughts behind the matter. For example, responses such as these came up: “Yes, first with brother”, “yes”, “yes, a few times”, “I have fought outside competition quite a bit”, “security job where there were a few at bars and when I was younger (a hand full)”, “I fought outside competition, but I can’t put a number so that is how much” and “elementary and got involved in possible fights at bars, but always talked the other guys out of it. I wasn’t motivated, but I got

punched in the face once, but I didn't react because I was surprised". A follow-up question as to why they fought outside competition and how did they feel about it would have given me a better understanding on the matter at hand. Although, we see the reasons in nuanced ways when asking different questions, such as having bad temper, which will be exemplified next.

Emotion Management.

Five participants discuss the importance of emotion management that could otherwise be expressed in negative ways. Tania says "As I was walking to my friends place I came across a Kung Fu gym, which is now the Muay Thai gym we train at and thought it would be fun to do this as I was thinking about the fact that I had a temper. I used to fight in bars often because of my temper and thought it would help to control me, I was drinking a lot in my punk phase". When asked why she started to compete in combat sports she says "I like fighting because it helps me control myself (bad temper)". With managing temper being a motivation, we can see the embodied feeling of managing an emotion in reasoning to decide to participate in combat sports. Tania is in her mid to late twenties and is also a Muay Thai coach with fighting experience at the amateur level, specifically in Muay Thai and Jiu-jitsu competitions. In addition, when asked if she had any fights outside competition, Catherine who is in her twenties and has seven fights says "yes, a hand full (I had anger problems). I am more content now. I had anxiety, OCD and depression which made me angry because I didn't know how to deal with it and the gym was an outlet for me". Here we can see the motivation of an outlet through combat sports participation to destress and manage emotions, such as temper. She elaborates on combat sports offering emotion management when she states "it helps me manage my stress/anxiety physically and mentally. I depend on my training to manage my emotions, since I do not like taking medication. I think people need to find ways of managing it. I have lots of energy and need to do something". Catherine not only discusses how the feeling of managing emotions is the reason as to why she fought outside competition, but also why she decided to initially join combat sports. Similarly, Sam answers the same question by saying "ya, a couple. Me and my friends organized a fight club, we had a lot of aggression so this helped us

blow off steam. But martial arts gave me that outlet and centered me". Here he brings up the need for an outlet to manage emotions as well.

Also, when asked what motivated him to train for competition Lucas says it "helps better deal with emotions in other aspects of my life". Malcom might not have brought up the importance of emotion management, but the way Malcom was communicating his response gave me the impression that he got into trouble because he had a temper. He says "I didn't go back to kickboxing until I was getting into trouble at school with people so my mom told me to do a sport and I remembered that I liked kickboxing so that is what I started doing". With that being said, we can see how embodied emotional experiences is involved in motivations to decide to participate in combat sports. Fighting is understood by five participants as an appropriate method of emotional management and release (feelings of temper and aggression) that could lead to being expressed in negative ways.

Embodied Experience.

In this section, I will cover participants' responses that exemplified the common discussion on bodily sensations in the decision to compete in combat sports. Specifically, physical/mental growth, self-defence purposes and improving health conditions.

Transformation.

The most in-depth answers came from those who expressed mental and physical transformation in their motivation for participating in combat sports. For example, Jake says "after my first fight I loved just how tired I was and that there was a lot to work on to get better, which opened up a whole new world. It teaches you discipline and mental toughness". We see the discussion on physical transformation, described as learning mental and physical toughness. When asked why he continues to compete in combat sports, Jake says "but now it's to gain experience". Here we can see the discussion of self-improvement through embodied practices (combat sports) in his decision to continue to compete in combat sports. Further, he

explains “people that do not have big egos and were given everything to them might come to realize that they haven’t worked for what they got and want to work for something to prove to themselves that they are strong”. Here we can see the idea of physical and mental transformation with the word “strong” being used to demonstrate this motivation.

Similarly, Peter also discusses transformation in his decision to compete in combat sports. He says “I really liked the workout which is what got me. My goals keep on getting higher, and once I knew it was possible, I wanted to turn pro. As long as my body is getting better and can keep going. If I was getting too many injuries and concussions then maybe I would stop, but goals keep me going. As long as I can keep progressing then I will keep going”. In this quote, Peter emphasizes constant transformation through embodiment which motivates him to compete in combat sports. He continues, “when you are cutting weight for a fight, even though people don’t really like it, it gets you to eat better and be healthier and you feel sharp mentally and physically”. Again, during fight preparation we can hear the experience of physical and mental transformation that motivates him to continue to compete in combat sports.

Similarly, Sam says “the discipline for training makes you grow as a person. More confidence in my body (trust that my body can do what I ask - it is a machine). Maturity is forced upon you, like some of my friends are not as driven as me when they have way more time than I do”. Sam expresses the importance of growth and maturity through the use of the body in combat sports which motivates him to continue to participate and compete in combat sports. Lastly, Kumar says “the motivation of the self-improvement keeps me coming back as well. You spar with a guy that is way better than you and he gets you a bunch of times, then in two months you are able to get some stuff on him”. We hear a similar sentiment being expressed here about the importance of growth in the decision to continue to participate in combat sports.

The embodied experience of transformation is also a factor seen among female fighters I interviewed, for example Catherine says “it is about pushing the body to see its limits and I used to do this in other aspects of my life and not in good ways”. She continues, “I like fighting. Yes,

pushing limits. I like to push my body's limits, even in ways that are not good for me (smoking, etc.)". We see the emphasis on pushing the limits of the body, but as opposed to Peter, there is a disregard to health in Catherine's response on transformation. Thus, Catherine's response also demonstrates the importance of physical transformation in the decision to compete in combat sports, which is an embodied experience.

Self-defense.

In this section, I will address how my participants expressed dealing with dangerous situations through learning self-defence as part of their motivation to compete in combat sports. Four individuals I spoke with described self-defence as a motivating factor in their involvement in combat sports. Catherine says "I only have my body and mind in a dangerous situation to take care of me and I want to trust my body". Here we can hear the importance of learning to defend oneself in a dangerous situation and the feeling of physical safety combat sports affords. Similarly, Tom says "I got interested because I lived in a bad neighborhood and fighting happened often so I didn't want to get beat up. And I got interested in competing because it is the best way to test myself to see if I could defend myself". Both Catherine and Tom discuss an embodied experience, specifically feeling safe from physical threat through learning martial arts practices. Lucus and Sam also discusses this theme. Lucus describes how after he got mugged he "felt like a victim" and did not want to feel like that again which is why he joined a martial arts gym and started training consistently. Similarly, Sam says "I got mugged and around then is when I started martial arts". We can see how a desire for an embodied feeling of safety motivated Catherine, Tom, Lucus and Sam to learn martial arts, pushing them into a particular environment of combat sport, which reflects Jackson's use of the concept habitus (un-habitual approach), as opposed to my use of it in this research.

Health condition.

Lastly, Malcolm focused on the discussion of his health condition in the decision to participate in combat sports: “I was diagnosed with diabetes and the doctor told me to do a sport and I came across a Kung Fu gym and thought it would be fun to do this”. Thus, there is not only an embodied, but also a rational component when my respondent takes into consideration his health condition in the decision to participate in combat sports.

Fear or Risk.

One pattern I found among the more experienced fighters is that they acknowledge the risks involved and are more likely to discuss its impacts. Besides the four participants that explicitly discuss how participating in combat sports is still worth it after thinking about the risks, the rest seem to avoid thinking about them in different ways. The participants that did not think combat sports were as risky as other sports also had a “risk is everywhere” perspective, which lead them to have a general attitude to disregard potential risk in favour of doing what makes them happy. For example, Tom says “life is unpredictable, anything can happen so I might as well do what I like and want. If you are prepared mentally (calm and confident) and physically it is not as risky”. We can interpret Tom’s reference to happiness as a demonstration of his thinking of risk and deciding to compete in combat sports involves embodied emotions, perhaps at the expense of the conventional understanding of the ability to think solely with reason. Similarly, Peter says “you can’t be scared always otherwise you wouldn’t get out and cross the street because you could get hit by a car. That is dangerous”. Similarly, three other participants say “no, all sports have risks (in different ways) and so does life”, “risks are in everything” and “life is dangerous anyways (you can go out and get hit by a car)”. Five participants demonstrate the idea of the inevitability of risks in the world we live in. That being said, almost all participants (whether they thought combat sports were riskier than other sports or not) had a “don’t think about it” perspective, such as Tania who feels that if she thinks about the possible consequences that it will hinder her from reaching her goals. Similarly, four other participants state “I don’t think about them really”, “don’t think too much about it”, “I don’t really think about it” and “I kind of block it out, I don’t think about it much”.

In addition, Peter says “I got more fucked up in Hockey which is where all my injuries came from basically and I think Football and Rugby are harder on the body. Any high level contact sport is dangerous in its own way, pick your poison”. Similarly, other participants say “I think that there are other sports that are riskier” and when asked if combat sports is riskier than other sports one participant says “no, football for example (a lot of concussions)”. Only one participant Tyler discusses the complexity as he sees both sides of the coin when he says “it can be riskier, but it can be tamer depending if your fight was intense or not for you”. He continues, “like in certain situations in Football it could be worse as opposed to fighting where you are trained to defend yourself and have the necessary tools”. It seems that in general the participants that felt that combat sports are not riskier than other sports only bring up other high level contact sports. But what about other sports, such as Soccer or Badminton? A follow up question would have been given a better understanding as to why these participants only thought of contact sports when asked about sports in general.

For those (8) that felt that combat sports involve more risk, responses such as these come up: “I know there are a lot of risks involved”, “I always done risky things and I know there are a lot of risks involved”, “ya, that is why I want to leave while I’m still okay, so I won’t be fighting for long”, “there is definitely risk, level of risk is high compared to team sports where it is not that bad”, “I do see it as more of a risk overall, but there are a lot of sports that are up there with it”, “there is risks everywhere, but if you fight you are jumping into more risk”, “yes, but there are other sports that are more risky, like Football and Hockey”, and “yes, but it depends on the sport, your position, etc”. Thus, a majority of those interviewed felt that combat sports are riskier than other sports, while the rest felt that they were not. There are important differences in how the participants perceived the idea of getting injured or hurt, but overall most (10) do think about the risks involved in combat sports. Other comments demonstrating the contemplation of risks in combat sports and the belief it is still worth it to compete comes from Jake who says “No fear, but it is in my head (I think about it)” and Lucus (more experienced of the fighters) who says “I accept them before deciding to fight, I understand that I might die”.

Lucus has a history with contact sports, such as Football and combat sports, and the impacts it has had on his body is important in better understanding his answers as it gives it a context with relation to the awareness of the risks he has that are involved in combat sports. For example, Lucas says, "I had a lot of concussions from Football", which led him to be aware of the risks involved in contact sports.

Several participants talked about balancing the importance of fighting with the risks involved. I asked the participants if they thought other combat sport athletes take into account the risks involved. On the one hand, most of my participants believe that other athletes are aware of the risks involved in competing in combat sports, like Lucas who says "at a certain point, you become aware of it", Peter who says "I think everyone is well aware. I suppose in a way we disregard it or accept it. You can't turn a blind eye to it like Football for example, but you accept it" and Tom states "the majority (people that stay) understand the magnitude of the damage that can be received and prepare and think about it". On the other hand, three participants believe that most combat sport athletes turn a blind-eye to the risks involved, for example "I think a lot of participants do underestimate the risks involved" and "ya, maybe because they don't want to be scared by that". Jake discusses how there are some fighters that ignore the risks when he says "some say fuck it, just go go go, it won't happen to me". But he also said there are others who do reflect on the risks before deciding on their next move. He states "some take calculated risks, they think about it". Although, whether participants felt that athletes turn a blind eye to the risks or are well aware of the risks involved in combat sports, both emphasized that there are riskier sports such as Hockey and Football.

Overall, most of the fighters I interviewed try not to think about the risks and ignore them in different ways because they feel it will hinder them from reaching their goals. It makes sense not to think about the risks constantly because then you will not be able to perform well because of fear of the consequences, as Lucas said "If you are afraid to get hurt, that's when you get hurt"; similarly, Catherine says "I think that in order to compete you need to not think about the risks". Thus, fighters learn to control their emotions, particularly fear, which

simultaneously brings in an interactional process of emotion management. Even when you are ignoring risks to mitigate fear there is still an emotional management component involved due to the needing to find ways of putting those thoughts out of one's mind. Next I will look more deeply into the emotional aspect of being a fighter and how emotional experiences factor into the decision making process of becoming and staying a fighter.

Emotional Experience.

When going through the answers of the participants, I found that most expressed that emotional reasoning through emotional experiences were an important factor in deciding to compete in combat sports. For the females, it seemed important mainly because it helped them manage their emotions. For the males, on the one hand, a common motivation was on the "high" of being in a fight, for example three responses state "you feel invincible. I am a calm guy, nothing really makes me feel super excited so it feels good" and "it is about the rush, I used to like to play games, but it is not that entertaining anymore when I can actually be experiencing the feeling of being in a fight. I can be the entertainment as opposed to playing games for entertainment" and Jake says "for the high you get, but this is more of a bonus". Although, one female participant emphasizes the "high" of the fight when she says: "Fighting gave me that thrill I was looking for". If more female participants were involved in the research I might get a more equal ratio for both male and females participants of the type of answers pertaining to the importance of the "high" of a fight in the decision to compete in combat sports.

Another common motivation in the decision to compete in combat sports among male participants was the fear that is overcome after the fight which makes them feel tough and not like a 'pussy'. Jake says "the feeling of death or that you will die really leaves you with no care in the world and when that goes you have a sense of relief and appreciate the small things". He continues, "after my first fight I loved the feeling of being invincible". We can see how the experience of overcoming the feeling of fear and feeling invincible in return is involved in Jake's decision to continue to compete in combat sports. Furthermore, when asked why he decided to compete in combat sports, Jake says "I started because of the fear". Here we can see not only

the motivation to overcome fear of getting into a combat sports competition, but also the role of emotions in the decision to compete in combat sports. Similarly, Kumar says “when it comes to competing, that fear, as much as I hate it. The opportunity to face your fears is good and attracting”. When asked Sam if emotions and sensations influence his decision to compete in combat sports, he says “you live through all the emotions in life during your fight and it is amplified. Lots of fear and emptiness (I’m numb, super-buzzed), but at the end there is pride and joy with the feeling that all the stress paid off”. Here Sam expresses the element of overcoming fear and the satisfaction following the event that motivates him to compete in combat sports. Although, one female participant expresses the same sentiment when she says “ya, but before I fight it stresses me out a lot. I don’t like that feeling like I am going to explode, but I want to beat it cause I feel better later (I used to get stressed a lot as a kid)”. The way my participant was expressing her response, it seemed like she was discussing the fear that comes with having a fight and the satisfaction of overcoming the fear even though she did not explicitly state this fact. A follow-up question as to what this feeling she discusses is would have given me a better understanding of her response.

Several fighters also mention the calm state they feel during a fight. With relation to the calm state felt by participants, responses such as these were typical: “the people yelling, everything is meditative and the razor focus you get in fighting (mindfulness) I don’t get in any other context;” another fighter says, “It brings me to the moment (clears my head from thoughts) and just flow which I like;” and yet another: “I like that feeling where everything makes sense” and “I don’t think of other things when I’m here”. Here we see the importance of combat sports competition and training offering the ability to clear the mind (calm) which is appealing to these participants with words and phrases such as “mindfulness” and “brings me to the moment” being used by them to express this. In general, three forms of emotional experience were expressed. The motivation of enjoying the calm state (four responses), the motivation of the high of the fight (three responses), and the motivation of overcoming fear (three responses).

In addition, emotional reasoning through the feeling of confidence is another factor that is emphasized among participants, which they mostly did not directly claim as a significant factor in deciding to compete in combat sports, but it is very apparent if we take a closer look at their responses. For example, when asked whether participating in combat sports increases your emotional intelligence and extroverted side of your personality, Jake says that his participation had a “huge impact on building the extroverted part of my personality and confidence, but also made me more confident in being introverted, I tell people that I need to be alone when I do and I don’t feel bad, sorry, etc.” There is also an aspect of identity in this feeling of confidence. He continues, “now when I speak, I speak, socially I am more confident and I do not care who is around. I think this is because I don’t feel like I have anything to prove”. Here we can see how Jake feels that he has gained confidence from fighting that helps feel more comfortable with who he is. Training and fighting leads to a personality trait that is valued, which connects to a feeling of confidence with one’s identity. Similarly, one of my participants says “it was a whole new world for me where I had to interact with normal people as opposed to my homeless punk friends. I was intimidated cause I couldn’t talk to people, but it helped me with gaining social skills and confidence, before I would drink and then only be okay socially. When I first came to the gym I didn’t talk to anyone for months, until some of the girls came to me. I am friendly, but you need to come to me first then I will talk a lot”. Thus, the benefits of gaining confidence through participating in a combat sports community are recognized and valued among those I interviewed, which is a motivation to continue to compete in combat sports. The confidence and sense of self that some fighters experience through learning combat sports reflects my use of the critical approach on emotion and reason, as well as, Jasper’s emotional reasoning concept in deciding to continue to compete in combat sports.

Another emotional aspect of practicing combat sports discussed among those I interviewed is passion or “fighting spirit”. For example, Kumar says “when I started MMA it was because of the intensity that other sports didn’t have. I started really getting the fighting spirit when I started MMA at twenty-three years. I just became passionate about learning the techniques and wanted to be able to implement them in a real setting”. He continues “what keeps me

going is I love it so it makes me come back the next day". These discussions of "the fighting spirit" and "love" is an expression of the emotional experiences he has through participating in combat sports. This emotional experience is also an embodied one, as it is linked to the physical experience of "intensity". Malcom shares Kumar's idea of the "fighting spirit" when he says "I am a warrior and I try to bring it to everything. The warrior through good and bad is courageous through adversity. Especially, in a job where I have to deal with/see a lot of shit". Malcolm is a social worker dealing with at risk youth which is why he says he sees a lot of negativity. Catherine can perhaps relate to the idea of passion for the sport, as she says "I tried to find something I was passionate about, I was just partying before and I liked it but still". Similarly, Peter says "I just liked to fight and always had the intention to fight". Thus, several participants discuss how the feeling of passion for combat sports was important in their motivation to continue to participate in combat sports.

An interesting pattern emerged in the answers of the participants in my research on the question of the role of emotions in making decisions in general. Many of the respondents communicated the idea that they thought that emotional decision-making is more authentic because it comes from their true self. For example, Tyler says "I think it is good and bad that we make decisions based on emotions because you are reacting to who you are, but sometimes you need to take a step back and think. You could be biased in your thoughts and your mind can play tricks on you. You can know the right and smart decision, but you do the other because you are attached". Carol also expressed both perspectives, saying "mainly it is not smart because it is a natural response to things, it isn't consistent, thinking is more solid. But emotions can influence one to think more critically. For example, you have a feeling that this is not the right thing to do even though the people around you are telling you that it is okay". However, other participants described a more calculated and instrumental approach taken the role of emotions in decision making. For example, Lucas says, "for me, I try to be rational because I am an emotional person, it will make me feel better, but emotion is involved. Our decisions are either we go for pleasure or to avoid pain, which is very emotional. You can be rational and be driven by emotion". Similarly, Sam says "every decision is based on both, a

certain percentage each, but it depends though. Most emotional decisions are not the good ones in my work, but it depends. We can rationalize through emotion, but that is called maturity. We need to take into account our emotional needs and our responsibilities". In general, we can see in all these responses that emotional reasoning is part of making decisions around participating in combat sports. Going back to Jasper's emotional reasoning theory, the importance of emotional embodied experiences that are expressed throughout the interviews illustrates not only feelings towards physical practices, but also reasons for deciding to compete in combat sports.

Combat as Identity.

My central research question is how does combat sports connect to my participants' identities? How is it a factor in their decision to continue to compete in combat sports? For the most part, participants feel that combat sports are connected to their identity to a large extent. They often insisted that it does not fully define them, but recognized it is definitely an important part of how they see themselves and how others see them. For example, Jake says "it's what I do and it is a big part of my identity. But I don't want what I do to define me. It's just what I do". However, as he further elaborated it seemed clear that central components of his sense of himself were linked to being a fighter. Jake continues, "I wanted to see if I could take a punch, all my friends saw me as the tough guy in high school, but in the back of my head I wasn't sure. I had no motivation to fight outside, but I wanted to see if I was a pussy". We can see that this statement links to identity, specifically in gendered identity with relation to playing a masculine role. There is a desire to see if one is "manly". Also, he states, "fighting will help me reach the person I want to be, it is a means to an end". This quote demonstrates how participation in combat sports gives Jake a sense of agency in being able to actualize what he perceives to be the best version of himself. Jake was known as the "jock" in high school because he played sports, such as Hockey, which sheds light on the context that his responses are coming from and probably influenced his perception of masculine social roles. Similarly, when asked whether he enjoys competing, Peter says "I enjoy competing, being physically dominant is what I like. I prefer hitting people (my positions in past sports)". Here we can see how he

specifies that he enjoys being dominant, which I argue reflects his sense of identity. Thus, one's identity as a fighter can be motivating to continuing competing in combat sports because of how playing such a role in that particular environment generates that identity, but it can also be a factor for initially deciding to compete in combat sports, specifically if looking for constructing a masculine identity which affords social/cultural capital.

Conclusion.

In my analysis of individual level factors involved in participating in combat sports six sub-themes emerged: "Childhood experience", which refers to the socialization processes (if any) of my interviewees with combat sports during childhood; "feelings about fighting", which discusses personal motivations for combat sports participation, such as emotion management. Furthermore, "embodied experience" refers to the sense of transformation (mental and physical) and physical skills gained through competing in combat sports; the theme "fear or risk" refers to the emotional element of practicing combat sports and "emotional experience" consists of the motivations relating to satisfying emotional sensations. Lastly, the theme "combat as identity" refers to the influence of having a fighter's identity (social and cultural capital) in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. I organized the sub-themes in this order to introduce my participants and their initial experiences with combat progressing to the main topic of my research, which is identity.

After going through the interviewee's responses, it seems that "childhood experience" is not a common factor among my participants in determining whether they would compete in combat sports as only two of my respondents mentioned it in the course of the interview process. However, for those two individuals their childhood experience with combat sports was a factor that motivated them to participate as adults. Many participants mentioned what I would call having a fighter's identity due to the social/cultural capital offered. With most participants discussing satisfying (and controlling) emotional sensations (calm state, facing fear, high of a fight), bodily improvements (maturation) and personal motivations (emotion management). Most factors influencing the decision to compete in combat sports came from

responses that involved mentioned emotion management followed by bodily improvements and as a result, these were the most important reasons in deciding to compete in combat sports among those I interviewed. Emotion management and bodily improvements seem to be the most important motivation among those I interviewed when it comes to continuing to compete in combat sports. I believe that the influence of having a fighter's identity are underestimated among participants in their decision to continue to compete in combat sports. This is because the importance of having a fighter's identity came out in responses to other questions in nuanced ways, as opposed to being explicitly stated in the responses to questions on that specific subject.

Chapter Four: Second Fieldwork Analysis

Theme-Social Level

Introduction.

This chapter discusses how the social roles played by all participants and how these roles influence their decision to compete in combat sports. The analysis is organized into sub-themes, the first of which is "environmental (Habitus) influence", which refers to the influence of an individual's surroundings in their decision to compete in combat sports, such as training partners and friends; then "community," which refers to the influence of relationships with other members within the combat sports community on the motivation to continue to compete in combat sports. The next is "societal restraint," which is a term I use to capture the meaning of my respondents' references to workplace oppression and tension that needs to be released, such as through combat sports participation. The sub-theme "social class" refers to references to socio-economic background that came out in the interviews. The sub-theme of "gender" refers to the role of gender norms in the motivation to compete in combat sports. Finally, the theme of "race" refers to how my participants mentioned being in a racialized or non-racialized position on the decision to compete in combat sports. I created this group of sub-themes to demonstrate the importance of the embodied and emotional dimensions of social positions and

roles on the decision to compete in combat sports. Moreover, I organized the sub-themes in this order according to how often they came up in the interviews, since social pressure came up the most often, I started with discussing the sub-theme relating to environmental factors.

Environmental (Habitus) Influence.

This section focuses on the influence of environmental surroundings on the decision to compete in combat sports. This includes social pressure from peers, coaches, authority figures and the lifestyle of being a fighter. All these factors reflect my theoretical framework on the influence of habitus on the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. Specifically, the influence of routine motions based on the type of environment an individual resides in that engrains habits and molds a certain type of disposition that is hard to detach from with the added pressure from social influences to continue to live such a lifestyle within that environment.

Social Pressure (Peers and authority figures).

A majority (6) of my participants felt that environmental factors such as social pressure from people around them was an influence on their motivation to continue to compete in combat sports, though none indicated that they felt it was a major factor. The rest of the participants (5) did not feel this type of pressure was an influence at all. For example, responses such as these come up, "I am doing it for me, not for anyone else;" "not externally [motivated], it is internally for me;" "no, I do not do what I do not like;" and "no, but to prove people wrong is a bonus". With that being said, a couple of these respondents also said other things that reflected at least a little bit of social pressure coming from coaches and peers. For example, even though she starts out saying that social pressure is not a factor in her motivation to compete in combat sports Carol also admits "but on a subtle level, yes when coaches ask me to take a fight that I do not want to because I feel like I need a break, etc. Also, peers expect something from me". Similarly, Tyler's response discussed social pressure when I asked what got him interested in competing in combat sports: "when I liked wrestling and people told me

that I was good. I always had the intention of competing when I started (especially in MMA) and I was strong for my size". We see the perception of others' influence Tyler's sense of himself and decision to compete in combat sports. From the half of my interviewees that did not believe social pressure was an influence on their motivation to continue to compete in combat sports, two still demonstrated the influence of others around them. Even though they expressed the idea that they are fighting for themselves and not for anyone else. Thus, even in the case of participants who denied that the views of others affected their decisions about combat sports participation, there was still a sense in their other answers that some form of social pressure does play a role.

Three other participants discuss social pressure coming from authority figures as a factor in their decision to participate in combat sports. Sam says "I was diagnosed with diabetes and the doctor told me to do a sport and as I was walking to my friends place I came across a Kung Fu gym, and thought it would be fun to do this as I was thinking about what my doctor said". Thus, a doctor's advice was a motivation in the decision to participate in combat sports. Another participant, when I asked what motivated him to train for competitions, said that it was when his Jiu-jitsu coach "didn't put down the idea to fight like he would with other people". Thus, we see another authority figure's influence in the decision to compete in combat sports. Similarly, Malcom says "I didn't go back to kickboxing until I was getting into trouble at school with people so my mom told me to do a sport". Here we see the influence of social pressure in the form of an authority figure (mother).

Those participants who did speak explicitly about social influence on their motivation to participate in combat sport mainly said that it was those within the combat sports community that were the source. Their friends, teammates and coaches would encourage them to compete and expected them to perform at a certain level. For example, when asked whether social pressure influenced her decision to continue to compete in combat sports, Tania says "ya, when people ask me when is your next fight?". To give some more context, usually when you are a fighter the common conversation starter in the gym is "when is your next fight?" and

Tania is saying that this makes her feel like she needs to be productive and keep fighting. Furthermore, preparing for the next fight is what participants of the sport assume other fighters are doing all the time, so they ask, but Tania exemplifies how this makes her feel like she should consistently be competing. Lucas as well says “definitely, pressure from friends and family to continue, to live up to their expectations, to win in front of them, etc”. Similarly, Jake says “ya, it is subtle. It is from other people around me that expect me to perform at a certain level. They ask “are you gonna knock him out? and it is more than that to keep fighting, I get annoyed when people say stuff like this”. Not all who expressed a sense that the perceptions of others influenced their participation in combat sports in a negative way. Malcolm, stated he sees the people around him as motivation rather than pressure: “From the kids I teach, I feel more motivation, not pressure”. I think that these descriptions of feeling a form of social pressure also express the bonds of community and how they are implicated in the emotional reasoning involved in participating in combat sports.

Lifestyle.

One of my participant’s responses succinctly expresses Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, specifically how individuals get molded by their surroundings which leads their identity to reflect their environment. Lucas stated, “it is who I am, but I chose to be in this environment and to be molded by it, I didn’t just be a passive subject to my surroundings. I think the difference between animals and humans is that we can change our environments. But, then again I did not choose to be mugged and everything that followed seemed to be put into place”. This response captures how individuals get molded by their surroundings which leads their identity to reflect their environment. Lucas getting mugged not only led him to a martial arts gym because of social influences where he was molded by that martial arts lifestyle, but also decided to be part of that environment and molded the environment he was in by becoming a coach and influencing his surroundings. Specifically, engaging the social practices and “sense” of the game as Bourdieu discusses. Thus, playing the social role of fighter and coach led Lucas to understand the game and then change it. Similar to Lucas’ response, Malcolm says “I see myself as my biggest accomplishments (Muay Thai professional fighter). I

am not shy to say that and I think who you are is what you put most of your time into". Malcolm, like Lucus' response demonstrates the influence of a martial arts lifestyle in molding a specific identity which reflects that environment. Overall, whether it is social influences such as lifestyle, pressure or motivation, it seems that engrained habits and the perceptions and views of others around fighters motivate them to continue to compete in combat sports which demonstrates the influence of environmental factors and emotional reasoning on fighters.

Community.

Talking with participants about the relationship they have with other combat sports competitors in the gym, there were two patterns of responses that emerged. First, a common discussion was the feeling of "family" when talking about an individual's feeling towards friends at the gym. A sizable minority of my participants (5) described a type of brother and sisterhood with their training partners, where the connections between participants are strengthened through the adversity they face together in training, fight preparation and on fight day. Malcom says his friends at the gym are "part of my family". Lucus says that his training partners are "closer than my family. The trust is important (give and take). We need to help each other get better, I help you when you need me and I trust that you will do the same. It is easy to quit on a gym, but not on a family". When asked why he started competing in combat sports Sam says "he wanted to honor the gym after people said that his gym sucked". Thus, we see the relationship with his community in his decision to compete in combat sports. Peter who is one of the experienced fighters (professional) says "I think fighting is a team sport, as important as family because without them you can't do much. I consider some of my training partners as close friends, most of my friends are in training". These quotes exemplify a close family-like bond.

Some fighters did not use the term "family" but they also expressed strong bonds with their friends at the gym. For example, Jake says his training partners are "my best friends, it gives me a sense of belonging". When asked why he continues to compete in combat sports, Jake says

“to put the gym on the map”, which demonstrates his relationship to the combat sports community he is a part of is a factor in his decision to continue to compete in combat sports. Other responses echoed this view, Sam says that his bond with his training partners “goes back to a sense of belonging”. He continues, “you don’t get these relationships outside where you see each other’s weaknesses and other sides compared to other friends outside even though I am close to them. There is a non-verbal communication which is stronger here. I don’t feel judged in the gym, I feel more authentic compared to outside”. We can see from this response that being able to see each other’s weaknesses leads to a shared intimacy and a bond is forged which is rare outside this context. We can see an embodied element in the relationships with other members of the combat sports community when Sam brings up non-verbal communication. In addition, Tyler says “I consider relationships with my training partners important because you spend the most time with them and you need to surround yourself with good people and I consider some of my training partners as close friends”. Tyler discusses how some of his teammates he is close with and these relationships are important. Similarly, when asked if combat sports give him a sense of belonging, Peter says that they do, “once you are fighting and part of it you feel like you belong to a team. When you compete and train together it is deeper as well”. The end of this response demonstrates the deeper connection one has with their teammates when they train and compete, likely because of the embodied experiences they have with each other while training for fights together, which includes sparring, etc. These quotes exemplify a close bond and sense of belonging, as well as an embodied element in the relationships with other members of the combat sports community (training partners). This connection to the combat sports community is part of what motivates some of the respondents to continue to fight, especially those who have been in the sport the longest. This reflects my theoretical framework in that over time participants gradually get more accustomed to their environment and lifestyle (engrained habits) of that specific environment, which molds the individual’s disposition as they play the emotional embodied role of fighter. This also shows the critical approach on emotions that I take and the role of emotional reasoning in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports when taking into account relationships with other members in the combat sports community.ⁱ

However, most of my respondents (7) explicitly stated that their bonds with others at the gym were secondary and instead it is all about the work. These participants felt that in the gym business needs to be taken care of and that is the primary focus. For example, Catherine says “you have to focus on your goals and not get caught up in other people’s drama, there is gym drama I realized”. We can see in this quote that the reason she focuses on the task at hand when at the gym as opposed to the connections with the members of the community is because of the politics. This suggests more of an emotional distance from others in the gym than is reflected in the comments of those who spoke of family-like feelings. Tania also expressed the sense that the social aspect of being part of a gym was secondary to the drive to train. She says “it is an added bonus to be in a community, but I am a lonely person and very individual. I come here to train and that is the main goal and if I meet people then good”. Tania demonstrates the focus on “goals” as priority over meeting people and becoming close friends. Similarly, when asked if loyalty and duty to your gym and teammates are part of the motivation to continue to participate in combat sports, Kumar says “no, I do this for myself and my family (provide a living for my family through the sport)”. Although one participant discusses both the family concept in combat sports and his own goals and achievements in the decision to compete in combat sports. Thus, for most of the fighters I interviewed, personal motivations for competing in combat sports was expressed more at an Individual level than a social level.

Overall, there were two patterns that emerged when I asked participants about their feelings towards the combat sports community. The first pattern describes the relationships with other combat sports members in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. The second pattern demonstrates individual goals (personal motivations) in the decision to compete in combat sports as opposed to community bonds. Lastly, two participants brought up an embodied element in the relationships with other members of the combat sports community (training partners).

Societal Restraint.

One of the motivations emphasized in the literature and in my interviews is the sense that combat sports provides an opportunity to escape from societal restraint. Most participants from various class backgrounds (none of my participants were from the upper-class) believe that there is a lot of societal restraint imposed on individuals, particularly in the context of work and employment, and that is one of the reasons many turn towards combat sports as an avenue to release tension. For example, Tom discusses how combat sports is an outlet to destress. I quote: "Because they need stress relief and their jobs are not very stimulating". Jake goes into more depth on the matter when he brings up his work in a bar: "Ya definitely, I fuckin hate it. I was trying to find an out and I did and I am working towards it.... I don't like the way my old boss and my current boss/higher ups talk to me sometimes, but I have to bite my tongue when I feel exploited because I need my job. For me as a fighter I am not just a leader, I am being told what to do and when I feel like I am being exploited I can't say anything and it makes me angry". We can see an emphasis on class (opposition) and ensuing emotions. To the same question Catherine states "I have thought about that a lot. A nine to five job is bullshit and doesn't make sense, we are slaves and miserable". Similarly, Tyler says "ya that fucks with people. We used to hunt for food, now we are a slave to get money to go to the store to eat. This represses a lot of our aggression that was released when we were able to hunt and kill". Overall, several participants discuss their feelings about the poor treatment of workers in society, with two using the word "slave" to describe this situation. As a result, my respondents linked their participation in combat sports to gaining a sense of empowerment and to release tension to counteract such feelings.

Other participants discuss the idea of combat sports as an outlet for tensions that result from social restraints more generally. When asked why she thinks higher classes get involved in combat sports, Catherine responds "we still just animals and we have instincts and for some people it is more than others. We like to think we are better, but we still have the same instincts. Animals have a purpose like to fight, kill, etc., we are the weird ones". She continues, "we at some point had to defend ourselves and so on. That just doesn't leave. Animals and people need to exercise for an outlet (otherwise we get anxious)". What Catherine is describing

as repressed instincts are embodied emotional experiences that are part of participating in combat sports.

Social Class.

When asked if those involved with combat sports tend to come from specific class backgrounds, most participants (six) felt that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to get involved, although three participants feel that individuals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds are attracted to combat sports. Some responses regarding social class came out in nuanced ways when asked if they thought race plays a role in the decision to become and stay a fighter. The responses suggest that my participants see social class and race as tightly intertwined. My respondents felt that one's race is a strong indicator whether one would compete in combat sports, but that social class is even more powerful in this context. For example, Carol says "it is more individual as opposed to a group. You can be White and come from the low-class". Similarly, Tyler says "if you see large numbers of races [in combat sports], it is because they are living in poverty and deprived from things". Thus, through asking my participants questions about the role of race in deciding to compete in combat sports, social class (economic deprivation) emerged as an important factor in why fighters get involved in combat sports. Why is this the case? Sam articulates an answer when he says that "any group that feels exclusion will join and training/fighting levels out differences. Once you are in the ring, you are equal". For Sam, combat sports provide an equalizing context that counteracts inequalities outside the ring. Similarly, Catherine who grew up lower class states that "I see people in sweaty t-shirts in the gym so it takes away that illusion of that image they are projecting outside in society. It becomes about personality and who you are in the gym and brings people from different backgrounds together since it levels out the playing field by allowing the lower classes to maybe kick the asses of higher classes. You would talk to people you usually wouldn't". This idea of "leveling out the playing field" suggests that participating in combat sports brings a sense of equality among different classes, since being rich will not help a fighter win in the ring.

Six participants believe that lower classes are more likely to compete in combat sports because they have “more reason to fight” (quoting Carol who grew up lower-class). I believe this means that competing in combat sports is a source of income because combat sports is one of the few accessible avenues for many people in the lower social strata to gain income to survive in a society where its members rely on money. Malcom’s response reflects this as well when he says “guys from lower classes feel they can only be successful with music and sports, as they see other people in school do good”. The economic deprivation experienced by lower-classes is counteracted through participating in combat sports. Participants also expressed that combat sports culture aligns with middle-class values of self-improvement and blue-collar/working class values of working hard, which is another factor in what many felt drew participants to combat sports. Sam’s response reflects this when he says “some working class people would have the means to their goal, but they have that grinding mentality (It would take them far)” and Tyler says “ya, I don’t know many rich that fight because they like it”. As opposed to Sam, Tyler demonstrates the element of liking combat sports to practice it which is an emotional element in the decision to compete in combat sports. With that being said, a follow up question on what Carol means by “more reason to fight” would give a better understanding of what she actually meant. Similar to Carol, Kumar says “but it depends, like if you are used to working hard then you might have a bigger will to fight compared to someone that had things handed to them. But I don’t wanna stereotype and say that is how it is for everyone”. Thus, we see my participants demonstrate how for some fighters it is their experience of class inequality that in part motivates them to stick with competing in combat sports.

It is important to note that the class dimension is not only about economic deprivation, there is also an emotional element if we take into consideration the feelings involved in being able to make up what you cannot outside the gym. This is an important component that my research is contributing to the existing literature on motivations for combat sports participation.

Gender.

In this section, I first look at whether my participants feel there are different reasons as to why women and men participate in combat sports, followed with whether there are different benefits afforded to men and women through participating in combat sports. Many of the participants believe that the reasons for competing in combat sports come down to an individual desire. In conversation about whether men and women have different motivations for fighting, Catherine says “it is a very individual personal thing cause it takes a special person to choose to do this. It is sometimes people that you would never think. I wonder why does this person does it? Doesn’t look like someone that would compared to me and my experience”. Here she discusses the personal element in the decision to compete in combat sports. Similarly, when asked if there are different reasons why men and women decide to compete in combat sports, Tania says “both are for the same reasons. Girls can like a manly activity and vice-versa”. Here Tania does not seem to take into account gender norms, but rather she says how people can do whatever activity they want, even if it is considered “manly”. My last female participant did not express anything on this topic and a follow-up question to get a response would have been useful. Thus, the female fighters who did express views on the difference gender makes tended to de-emphasise differences in the motivation to participate in combat sports, but both male and female participants emphasized individual goals.

I did notice a pattern for my male participants. Several of their comments reflected a desire to align themselves with masculine gender norms while noting that for women it is about deviating from norms of femininity. One of my male participants sums it up well, “it comes down to men having to live up to expectations and women wanting to reconstruct their roles”. Furthermore, another says “every guy looks up at fighters (it’s primal, something we had to do). The characteristics and confidence and so on is looked up to as well. For females, they feel like they have to let loose from all the restraint put on them from society to be pretty and neat”. Another male participant stated that “for girls they feel more empowered, secure and can defend themselves. For guys it is about being macho”. The feeling of empowerment that the last participant speaks about resonates with the idea of deviating from feminine gender norms, such as submissiveness, while the feeling of being “macho” resonates with aligning oneself with

norms of masculinity. Lastly, when asked whether transformation was a factor in his decision to compete in combat sports Sam says “I look more like a man”. This implies the motivation of becoming the masculine ideal through combat sports participation.

The male fighters I interviewed recognise that female fighters are countering traditional gender norms when they participate in combat sports, while men are trying to identify with traditional gender norms. With males discussing gender norms more often than my female participants in their responses, we see the influence of gender norms on male fighters among my interviewees might be stronger than on female fighters among my interviewees which could be why male fighters live up to masculine norms by competing in combat sports since fighting to a large extent is accorded a masculine status because of the type of persona (identity) and skills it offers individuals. This includes combat skills, confidence, toughness and so on. On the other hand, two male participants agree with Catherine and Tania when one says “ya, but it might be a personal issue (background experience), not a gender issue. Overall, proving to oneself how strong they can be”. Similarly, another male participant says “the same if we talk about the reasons, the reasons are the same. Gender has nothing to do with it. Someone that wants to take that root, it is a person that likes to face their fears and challenge themselves for them”. Overall, some participants believe there are different gendered meanings involved in the decision to participate in combat sports, while for others the motivations are similar.

Another interesting pattern that came out of interviews with female participants is how they think there are different benefits for both men and women fighters, while my male participants think there are the same benefits for both men and women fighters. This might demonstrate that female fighters reflect more on their social position as a woman compared to male fighters due to the inferior status accorded to females in society. For example, when asked whether there are different benefits for men and women fighters, Peter says “it is the same. I think it brings equal benefit to both, but guys are more attracted biologically. I am not an expert (on gender), but I think they both benefit, confidence and it is the same for all”. We can see here an emphasis on confidence as benefits for both genders, though also the idea that fighting is a

more natural interest for men. Similarly, Jake responds to the same question by saying “confidence is number one, healthy and strong”. Tyler says “both people feel more confident, I feel comfortable in talking freely. Girls might get that empowering feeling”. We can see Tyler emphasizing similar though not identical benefits for men and women, using words like “empowerment” for females and “confidence” for males. Lastly, Kumar answers the same question by saying “physically and mentally... the benefits are not different”. In general, the male fighters I interviewed saw the benefits of participating in combat sports as the same or similar for men and women.

On the other hand, female participants tended to discuss how there are different benefits for males and females. Catherine expresses this view when she says that combat sports are “good for both, but different for both. Girls are empowered (which is hard for them right now). And for boys, it is an outlet (These activities are not recognized in schools and are being cut as well). They are not socialized and no outlet”. Catherine emphasizes the benefit of an outlet for males, presumably for pent up energy or aggression, while women gain a sense of empowerment from combat sports. Again, we hear the word “empowerment” for females which is an emotional element and an embodied experience. This feeling of being empowered among females might be due to the fact that to participate in combat sport means defying traditional gender norms in society where women are expected to be submissive compared to males. At the same time, Catherine’s response implies a notion that combat sports are a benefit to men because it provides an outlet for their ‘natural’ energy/aggression. In addition, Tania says “males are seen as needing to know how to fight so this helps them fulfill their masculine role and for females it is more of a surprise to see that they know how to fight which gives them more attention”. She focuses on the benefit for men to be able to live up to masculine norms through combat sports competition participation, while for females they are deviating from the feminine norms by performing male skills which gains them more attention. My last female participant did not express anything on this topic and a few follow-up questions to get a response would have been useful for this topic, but there was a language barrier with this participant which did not help the situation.

Race.

When asked whether race is a factor in the decision to participate in combat sports, Tyler states “ya, me being Native American gave me an attitude not to take shit from people. Try and take something from me”. There is not only a sense of pride that Tyler is demonstrating, but also respect that he is demanding. Thus, competing in combat sports might give a sense of the respect, which motivates him to continue to compete. When asked whether race is a factor in the decision to participate in combat sports, Sam (White male) says “if I look at the classes I will say yes. I don’t know why, being a White guy though. Because of racism people might want to learn to defend themselves”. Sam emphasizes noticing that a lot of racialized individuals participate in the combat sports gym we train at. Both Tyler and Sam discuss racialized individuals being exploited, which is a reason driven by an emotional feeling that might lead to compete in combat sports to learn self-defence and gain respect. But Lucus (White male) expressed a different perspective on the matter, as he states that “race influence what combat sports you decide to join in, Indians and Wrestling, for Hawaiians fighting is their identity and Moroccans’ practice Kickboxing”.

With that being said, compared to non-racialized participants, racialized participants (two out of five racialized participants) talked about the link between class and race in their responses. The non-racialized participants focus on general concepts like “exclusion” and cultural differences. Compared to the three participants (non-racialized) that felt individuals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds compete in combat sports. Indeed, my racialized participants are or were economically deprived and so, focus on the socio-economic status of people, specifically the lower class. A follow up question to racialized participants about their perspective on class issues would have given a better understanding on the topic at hand. With that in mind, most of my participants felt most people that compete in combat sports are from lower socio-economic backgrounds which has a racialized majority. Thus, according to my participants racialized people are more likely to compete in combat sports because they more likely to be part of the lower classes which comes with specific challenges, such as economic

deprivation, lack of safety and disempowerment, that can be counteracted through combat sports participation and competition.

Lastly, race came up in the responses to the importance of the family concept in combat sports because four out of five respondents that emphasized the importance of family are White. While three out of five respondents were persons of color who emphasized a focus on goals as opposed to the family concept in combat sports. The reason for the disconnection among fighters of color in my fieldwork towards the combat sports community might be due to the cultural differences experienced by being racialized individuals residing in a White culture, which would be interesting to research further in future studies.

Conclusion.

Overall, this second fieldwork analysis titled social level comprises of sub-themes discussing the influence of social roles played by all participants on the decision to compete in combat sports. Such as, social pressure and lifestyle, relationships with other members of the combat sports community, workplace oppression, socio-economic status, influence of gender norms and being racialized or non-racialized. I created this group of sub-themes to demonstrate the importance of social factors in the meaning of being a fighter. I organized the sub-themes in this order according to how often they were mentioned by my participants. There are many similarities and differences between the participants' perspectives on the aforementioned sub-themes. Yet, there are also some common themes. Based on what most participants said and how often, the results demonstrate that a central motivation for combat sports participation among those I interviewed is the environment (social pressure), relationships with other members of the combat sports community and workplace oppression (and socio-economic status). With two least common discussions being on gender norms and being in a racialized or non-racialized social position. Although, I would state that workplace oppression is the most commonly discussed motivation for initially participating in combat sports, while social pressure is the most commonly discussed motivation for continued participation in combat sports.

Chapter Five: Literature and Fieldwork Synthesis

Introduction.

In this chapter, I will discuss the connections between the literature on combat sports and my field work findings. First, I will rank the sub-themes and themes for initially getting and staying involved in combat sports. Then, I will concentrate on the factors that deviate from the literature and how there were a lot of data in the interviews that I can build off with relation to my theoretical framework. Lastly, there were interesting correlations and deviations between my interview data and the literature on emotion management, gender, social class and instincts.

Ranking sub-themes.

In my analysis of individual level factors involved in participating in combat sports five sub-themes emerged: “Childhood experience”, which refers to the socialization processes (if any) of my interviewees with combat sports during childhood; “feelings about fighting”, which discusses personal motivations for combat sports participation, such as emotion management. The sub-theme of “embodied experience” refers to the bodily maturation (mental and physical) and physical skills gained through competing in combat sports; the sub-theme “fear or risk” refers to the emotional element involved in competing in combat sports; “emotional experience” consists of the motivations relating to satisfying emotional sensations and lastly the sub-theme “combat as identity” refers to the influence of having a fighter’s identity (social and cultural capital) in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports. I organized the sub-themes in this order to introduce my participants and their initial experiences with combat progressing to the main topic of my research, which is identity.

After going through the interviewees’ responses, compared to other questions/sub-themes that involved more experiences with combat or experiences that led to their decision to compete in combat sports, on the one hand, it seems that “childhood experience” is the least

common factor in determining whether my participants decided to compete in combat sports because the responses about their childhood socialization processes did not involve many experiences with combat sports, except for two participants. On the other hand, a commonly discussed factor is having a fighter's identity due to the social/cultural capital offered. With most participants discussing satisfying (and controlling) emotional sensations (calm state, facing fear, high of a fight), bodily improvements (maturation) and personal motivations (emotion management). Thus, most factors influencing the decision to compete in combat sports came from responses that involved emotion management, followed by bodily improvements and as a result, these were the most important reasons in deciding to compete in combat sports among those I interviewed. Emotion management and bodily improvements seem to be the most important motivation among those I interviewed when it comes to continuing to compete in combat sports. I believe that their connection to having a fighter's identity are underestimated among participants in their decision to continue to compete in combat sports. This is because the importance of having a fighter's identity came out in responses to other questions in nuanced ways, as opposed to being explicitly stated in the responses to questions on that specific subject.

My analysis for social level factors discussed the influence of social roles played by all participants on the decision to compete in combat sports. Six sub-themes came out of this analysis, such as, influence of an individual's surroundings in their decision to compete in combat sports, such as training partners and friends; relationships with other members of the combat sports community, workplace oppression that leads to tension that needs to be released through combat sports participation, various socio-economic backgrounds of individuals which dictates the types of motivations they have for competing in combat sports, influence of gender norms and being racialized or non-racialized individuals. I created this group of sub-themes to demonstrate the importance of social positions and roles on the decision to compete in combat sports. I organized the sub-themes in this order according to what motivations were discussed most often among my participants, since most responses discussed environmental influences (social pressure), I started with discussing habitus. There

are many differences between the participant's perspectives on the aforementioned sub-themes. Yet, there are also some common themes. Based on what most participants said and how often, the results demonstrate that the number one motivation for combat sports participation among my participants is social pressure and relationships with other members of the combat sports community, followed by workplace oppression, socio-economic status, gender norms and lastly being in a racialized or non-racialized social position. Although, I would state that workplace oppression was discussed most often for initially participating in combat sports, while social pressure was discussed most often for continued participation in combat sports.

Inconsistencies between literature and fieldwork.

My interview findings deviate from the literature on the topic of social pressure, community and the experience of race, especially social pressure and community were emphasized among my participants as important in their decision to continue to compete in combat sports due to the value they accord to the relationships they have with other members within the combat sports community. While the literature does address race in various ways, it never really ties it into the motivation to compete in combat sports, nor builds on the importance of the subject of race, specifically being racialized/non-racialized and combat sports participation. On the one hand, in the article on being a "prizefighter" by Wacquant (2000), he brings up the influence a Black sociologist William Julius Wilson has had on his work, specifically Wilson's work on race, but Wacquant never brought up the connection between deciding to be a prizefighter and being racialized (p. 83-84). Moreover, in Wacquant's article on boxers' feelings about their sport, similar to my research, he discusses the influence of social class and describes how Black people mainly comprise of the lower class and thus, are more likely to join Boxing to gain income (p. 521). However, Wacquant does not go into details on the influence of race in the decision to compete in combat sports, but rather focuses on social class. Also, Mennesson (2000) who discusses female boxers with relation to gender norms, brings in the discussion of English and French boxers and their cultural combat sports, but never discusses the impact of

race in the decision to compete in combat sports, and focuses solely on gender norms within those combat cultures and others (p. 27).

My research through asking questions on the role of race in the decision to compete in combat sports drew out among my participants not only the discussion of class in the decision to compete in combat sports, but also the discussion on the majority of individuals in the lower-classes being racialized individuals that participate in combat sports because of economic deprivation and for an embodied and emotional sense of empowerment which is correlated with racial inequality. Thus, those individuals I talked to from the lower classes were disproportionately racialized and expressed a motivation to participate in combat sports to counteract oppression and economic deprivation by gaining a sense of empowerment and income. Here we can see the connection with the existing literature on the connection between social class and race being discussed, but it deviates from the literature when discussing emotional and embodied experiences. Although, Jefferson (1998) discusses identity with relation to race which my interviews did not bring out. Specifically, the construction of a Black identity that is limited to an athletic disposition. With that being said, my research does look into the influence of social roles on an individual's identity which is in the realm of what Jefferson brings forward in his discussion on identity.

Deviations and Correlations - Theoretical framework and emotion and the body.

My theoretical framework was based on Jasper's conception of emotional reasoning which focuses on how emotions are heavily involved in people's decision-making processes. I bring this theory in to my research to demonstrate how emotional reasoning is involved in the social roles we choose to be part of and we choose to be a big part of our identity. Emotional reasoning in the decision to participate in extreme sports is not discussed explicitly, but implicitly, which is what I bring out, specifically in the decision to compete in combat sports which the literature does not bring out in the context at all. With relation to social roles, I use Goffman's dramaturgy approach of the self in order to understand the social role of being a

fighter and how it might interact with other social roles, such as being a man or a woman. I not only bring out the connection between the roles of social class, gender and race and an individual's decision to compete in combat sports, but also how emotional reasoning consists of the various social roles mentioned, in the decision making process to or not to compete in combat sports. The literature does not really discuss the influence of emotional reasoning with relation to social roles, as opposed to my research which takes a critical approach to emotions and reason. With relation to individual forces, emotional reasoning also came up in my fieldwork data, such as emotion management, passion for the sport, etc. Although, the existing literature does not bring up the influence of emotional reasoning on individuals in their decision to compete in combat sports.

Within social roles that we emotionally reason from, Bourdieu's concept of habitus or the influence of the individual's environment and surroundings on their emotional experience I use as well. For example, emotional relationships with community members that leads to continued participation in combat sports among my participants and the workplace that led some of my participants to participate in combat sports to release emotional tension. Lastly, the influence of social pressure feelings within the combat sports community on their decision to continue to compete in combat sports was mentioned often among my participants. Thus, there was a correlation with Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the resultant emotional reasoning theory by Jasper with my fieldwork data. Unlike the existing literature, my research discusses the emotional reasoning within one's environment that influences the decision to be part of a particular environment.

Moreover, identity is a big part of my research that specifically looks at the emotional attachment to identity which involves emotional reasoning when deciding what social role one mainly wants to be part of their identity. As well as, how having a particular identity can influence one to continue to be part of the same environment due to a molded disposition that reflects their environment that is hard to detach from, such as a combat sports competitor. Almost all participants said that combat sports are a large part of their identity which entails

them playing the social roles that ingrain a certain type of character, in this case a combat sports competitor. Furthermore, even though participants said that combat sports do not define them completely, I think the impact of the expectation of others on their behaviors are underestimated among my participants. This is because in many of their responses to other questions, the importance of the element of identity came out in nuanced ways. For example, when asked how is combat sports connected to their identity, they would discuss how it was a large part of their identity. Although, when asked to narrate their identity, most would not mention anything related to combat sports. Thus, there is a contradiction and most of the questions made visible the factor of having a fighter's identity in their decision to compete in combat sports compared to what they were responding to the question that asked them to narrate their identity. Which is why the influence of combat sports as identity is underestimated among my participants.

My research heavily focuses on identity, while the existing literature briefly brings it up, with the exception of Green (2016). Moreover, my research and the literature bring out identity as a factor in the decision to compete in combat sports, but in slightly different ways. On the one hand, my research mainly focuses on the emotional attachment and benefits to an identity (fighter) that leads to a continued participation within that same environment. On the other hand, the literature mainly focuses on the motivation for joining an environment (combat sports) to construct a particular identity, which my literature addresses to a lesser extent. For example, Green (2016) argues the attraction of MMA is it allows people to create a narrative that gives meaning to their life and the sport's unstable position reflects the participant's unstable identities, which leads them to construct identities around the narratives mentioned earlier to make sense of their lives (p. 419). Moreover, identity is briefly discussed by Brent and Kraska (2013) when they discuss the importance of participants needing to construct "lasting identities" outside their conventional jobs (p. 2367-368). The construction of a fighter's identity gives meaning to the participant's lives as opposed to their conventional jobs that they derive little meaning from or identify with. Lastly, Jefferson (1998) discusses the connection between race and an athletic identity, such as a boxer. Thus, similar to the three sources mentioned, my

research brings out the influence of identity on the decision to compete in combat sports, but unlike the existing literature, my research focuses on identity heavily and as a factor in the continued participation in a community that also brings forward the aspect of emotional reasoning involved in having an identity due to the emotional attachment to the identity.

Lastly, in my analysis I found there was a lot of positive connections between my fieldwork data and the literature on emotion and the body. The literature on emotion and the body discusses the influence of emotional embodied sensations that is used to make sense of an individual's involvement in a particular sport, such as combat sports. This thinking accompanied by emotional embodied sensations reflects part of my theoretical framework that discusses the ability to reason with emotions and the body that emphasize the emotional connection to the environment and social roles they occupy, specifically in the decision to compete in combat sports. With relation to the literature and theoretical framework, my fieldwork demonstrates through my participants' responses the experiences they have with combat sports has started and continued for various reasons, such as to defend oneself, overcoming fear, passion, for physical and mental maturation, for an outlet, etc. Most of the reasons have an emotional dimension to them which shows that the decision to fight involves emotional reasoning which is emphasized in my theoretical framework and the existing literature.

Deviations and Correlations - Emotion management, gender, social class and social restraint.

In my fieldwork data, there was a lot of discussion on emotion management as a factor in the decision to compete in combat sports which the literature also brings up, such as Lupton (2002, 2013). Although, the literature discusses the motivation as controlling emotions, such as controlling fear to feel a sense of agency and freedom in deciding their own actions without the constraint of emotions. As opposed to my research that discusses the feeling of satisfaction after overcoming fear, as well as managing other emotions. Thus, there are differences, but

also similarities in the discussion of emotion management between my research and the existing literature.

Additionally, there were interesting connections between my analysis and the literature on gender. Whether to gain confidence, respect or a sense of empowerment, my participants emphasized that female combat sport athletes are in some sense deviating from feminine gender norms, while males are being gender conforming. At the same time, they all discussed feelings of confidence and empowerment that come from participating in combat sports. These patterns were also emphasized within the literature as authors focused on the fact that males were working hard to identify with masculine culture and to feel strong and tough, specifically to avoid being dominated by other males. Furthermore, we can see the importance of an emotional embodied experience of masculine identity in the decision to compete in combat sports. While for females, the literature like the interviews finds that female fighters contend with resisting feminine norms and gaining a sense of empowerment for various reasons, such as to avoid being dominated by males.

There were also connections between my analysis and the literature on social class. My participants' responses allowed me to see the nuanced ways that social class can be understood as a motivating factor when asked about the role of race in the decision to compete in combat sports. Specifically, in the interviews participants discussed how the lower-classes getting involved in combat sports were due to emotional and financial reasons. Similarly, the literature mainly demonstrates that people from lower classes compete in combat sports to counteract the economic deprivation they experience, although my research also focuses on the emotional elements involved in their motivations to compete in combat sports. In addition, my interviews, similar to the existing literature, discusses how the middle to higher classes get involved for various reasons, such as societal restraint, thrill, physical and mental maturation, outlet for pent up energy and attention. Thus, among my participants' responses, the emotional reasons for the lower-classes, such as empowerment; and the middle to higher classes, such as thrill, demonstrates the emotional reasoning in the decision to compete in

combat sports, which is not explicitly brought out in the literature, unlike my research. Moreover, my participants' responses about the middle to higher classes demonstrates that there is also an embodied experience in the decision to compete in combat sports when we discuss repressed emotions through societal restraint.

Lastly, I also found similarities in what my participants said and the literature on the role of violent instincts escaping social restraint in the motivation to participate in combat sports. One of the main motivations that was expressed throughout the interviews that is consistent with the existing literature that the draw of combat sports is in part a response to the restraints of society and the roles we occupy. However, one difference that did emerge was that in the literature, there is a tendency to assume a natural human "instinct" for violence but in my fieldwork, my participants view the feelings of frustration and sense of restraint is as a result of the conventional jobs held by people within society, which are not stimulating, but repetitive and exploitative. Thus, I found that the so-called instinct for violence is a result of built up resentment that results from economic exploitation, as opposed to the violent instincts being simply natural. After listening to my participant's comments, there seems to be an important connection between social class and freedom, where freedom is valued among them, but is restricted within the working class due to economic exploitation. Thus, freedom is gained in the ability to express the repressed emotions and instincts that result from the experience of economic exploitation and inequality. This theme of built up resentment among my participants demonstrates the conventional approach between emotion and reason they take and the importance of an emotional embodied experience in the motivation to compete in combat sports.

Conclusion.

Overall, the connections between the literature review and the findings of my field work are multiple. It seems that for initially joining combat sports the most common motivation discussed among my participants is personal motivations (emotion management) from the

“Individual Level” theme because of the highest number of participants that discussed it and how often it was mentioned, followed by workplace oppression that restrains instincts and emotions, socio-economic backgrounds of individuals, playing gender roles, being racialized or non-racialized individuals and childhood socialization process involving combat sports. While for continuing to compete in combat sports the most commonly discussed motivation is social pressure (habitus) and emotional relationships with other combat sports community members from the theme “Social Level”, followed by satisfying emotional sensations (emotion management) and bodily improvements (transformation), and having a fighter’s identity (social/cultural capital). Other important themes in my fieldwork and the literature are the appeal of combat sports to a variety of social classes for various reasons as opposed to just the lower classes (due to financial and emotional reasons), the allure of combat sports to males and females due to the sense of safety it provides them by offering community, skills and identity. Furthermore, the discussion on emotion and the body in relation to personal (individual) experiences with combat demonstrates how through embodied emotional experience we decide to participate in combat sports, which is largely due to the pleasure we feel through such an experience.

Looking at factors that came out of my analysis that deviate from the literature include the role of race, social pressure and community in the motivation to compete in combat sports, which I believe has not been addressed adequately in the existing literature. My interviews demonstrate the importance of the experience of economic exploitation and inequality in motivating racialized individuals to initially participate in combat sports, which allows them to gain a sense of empowerment and income. Furthermore, as opposed to the literature, my participants demonstrate the feelings of social pressure influences their decision to continue to compete in combat sports and how feeling like part of a community and helping teammates is the main motivation for continuing to participate in combat sports. With community and social pressure, in regards to relationships with others and race, in regards to oppression involving emotional reasoning in the decision to compete in combat sports. Social pressure involves emotional reasoning in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports because pressure

and expectations from others you care about bring up feelings and emotions. Moreover, community involves emotional reasoning in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports because the relationships of fighters with other members within the combat sports community is discussed among my participants as a family type relationship. Relationships with other members in the combat sports community is about helping their teammates that are like family which inevitably involves an emotional element in the decision to continue to compete in combat sports because of the length of time it takes to build such intimate bonds. Furthermore, the intimacy is forged among members of the combat sports community due to the emotional embodied experiences involved in training together, which involves sparring, etc. While for race, the emotional reasoning comes out of the feelings of oppression that is a result of being racialized because of the majority of people of color that make up the lower-classes who experience economic deprivation, which my participant's responses demonstrated in nuanced ways. This emotional embodied element of feeling oppressed is involved in the decision to compete in combat sports because combat sports participation is a method of counteracting the oppression involved in being racialized and thus part of the lower-class's experience of economic deprivation.

Whether discussing the role of gender norms in one's life, the challenges of being racialized and part of the lower/higher socio-economic social classes or for individual reasons in the decision to compete in combat sports, the incorporation of emotional reasoning is inevitable if we take into account the emotional attachments to social roles being played by individuals that become part of their identity, such as a combat sports competitor.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

After going through the interviewee's responses in my individual level analysis, it seems that childhood experience with combat sports was the least common factor mentioned by my participants in their motivation to compete in combat sports because the responses about their childhood socialization processes did not involve many experiences with combat sports or that

led to deciding to compete in combat sports. Compared to other questions/sub-themes that involved more experiences with combat or experiences that led to their decision to compete in combat sports. Furthermore, having a fighter's identity due to the social/cultural capital offered was discussed often as a motivation for deciding to compete in combat sports. With the factors most often discussed being satisfying emotional sensations and bodily improvements (transformation), and personal motivations (emotion management) was discussed the most among my participants in influencing their decision to compete in combat sports. So, we can see the influence of individual forces in the decision to compete in combat sports among my participants.

In my social level analysis, based on what most participants said and how often, the motivations for deciding to compete in combat sports most often discussed among my participants was habitus influences, such as social pressure, relationships with other members of the combat sports community and workplace oppression (and socio-economic status). Lastly, the influence of gender norms and being in a racialized or non-racialized social position among my participants as motivations on the decision to compete in combat sports were discussed the least compared to other discussions.

As opposed to the existing literature, this research explicitly discusses the motivations among my participants for initially deciding to participate and compete in combat sports; and deciding to continue to compete in combat sports. For initially deciding to compete in combat sports, personal motivations and workplace oppression that restrains instincts and emotions (and socio-economic background) was discussed the most often among my participants. The personal motivation discussed often among my participant was emotion management. But, being racialized or non-racialized individuals, playing gender roles and childhood socialization process involving combat sports were not discussed as often among my participants in the decision to compete in combat sports. While for deciding to continue to compete in combat sports, social pressure, relationships with members of the combat sports community, satisfying emotional sensations (emotion management) and bodily improvements was discussed most

often among my participants. Ending with the influence of having a fighter's identity (social/cultural capital). Although, the influence of having a fighter's identity in the decision to compete in combat sports are underestimated among my participants. This is because the importance of having a fighter's identity in the decision to compete in combat sports came out in their responses to other questions in nuanced ways, as opposed to being explicitly stated in the responses to certain questions on those specific subjects. Overall, I found patterns that mostly correlate than deviate from the existing literature.

Moreover, social pressure, community and helping other members and individual experiences as factors in the decision to compete in combat sports was discussed often in the fieldwork, but not in the literature. Lastly, race was not discussed in the literature on motivations for competing in combat sports, with the exception of Jefferson (1998), but was present in the fieldwork data, specifically how the majority of the lower classes are racialized individuals who join combat sports to gain income and a sense of empowerment to counteract economic deprivation and oppression.

I investigated individuals' motivation to participate in combat sports through the interview questions I asked, which were developed out of reading the existing academic literature on combat sports as well as my own experience as a combat sport practitioner. Some of the questions I asked include: What benefits do people in each gender category receive from participating in combat sports? Is there any difference? And when we turn to social class questions such as: Why do middle to higher classes participate in combat sports if they already are financially stable and do not need to take such risks for financial reasons (as opposed to the lower classes)? Do we make decisions based on emotions? Is this predominantly good or bad? Is there a conflict between our instincts and roles we occupy in society? How is combat sports connected to your sense of identity? I asked these questions and others to my participants and came up with patterns and themes that led to an over-arching theme which is identity. I explored these themes in my interviews and compared them with the available literature to better understand why people participate in combat sports. With an emphasis on the holistic

aspect of my research that demonstrates the importance of all these viewpoints as opposed to one or the other, with focus on self/identity through embodied emotional experience. Overall, the literature demonstrates that there are various social variables that influence the decision to participate in combat sports and I wanted to understand how they all relate to each other by exploring the role of embodied identity and emotion in the motivation to participate in combat sports.

There are many other motivations for participating and competing in combat sports which can be investigated more closely in future studies. This includes motivations due to the extroverted characteristic and emotional intelligence (largely due to the necessity of reading opponents' emotions and controlling one's own emotions during competition) fostered from participating in combat sports, as well as, the "sense of competence" one feels studying and training in combat sports (Kusnierz 2016, 74-75; Szabo and Urban 2014, 53). Also, interpersonal relationships can be explored further, such as duty and loyalty to your teammates to stay and help the development of the gym (Woolf et al. 2016, 446-447, 449). With that being said, I brought these ideas into my interviews to test these results and briefly investigate them. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in the discussion of relationships with other members of the combat sports community, researching racialized individuals experience training combat sports within White culture and their relationships with other members of the combat sports community would be interesting since most of my racialized participants did not emphasize the importance of relationships with training partners compared to my White participants. Lastly, in future studies it would be a good idea to do follow up interviews to see if the participants' answers to the same questions have changed, which can open up another valuable dimension and depth to the research. For example, after around a week, one of my participants told me "you know, now that I think about it, if you ask me the same questions again I would probably answer some of them differently". Here we see how perspectives change depending on the day, mood and so on, where follow-up interviews would come in handy to compare participant's original responses with their most recent responses and investigate what the comparisons communicate about their motivations for competing in combat sports.

Endnotes

ⁱ It would be interesting to do a longitudinal study on the same subject of motivations to fight, such as on the concept of family, to see if ideas do intensify with the same participants in different stages of their combat sports career, as opposed to comparing responses on the concept of family from different fighters at different levels.

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