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"There Are No Rules! Except These 108." The Multidirectional Flow of Influence Between Sportication, Subculture, and Violence on the History of Mixed Martial Arts

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Kinesiology

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“THERE ARE NO RULES! EXCEPT THESE 108.” THE
MULTIDIRECTIONAL FLOW OF INFLUENCE BETWEEN SPORTIZATION,
SUBCULTURE, AND VIOLENCE ON THE HISTORY OF MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

Monograph

By

Jared Walters

Graduate Program in Kinesiology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

The sport of mixed martial arts (MMA), found in 1993, has a very tenuous history. Three influencing factors, sport-related violence, the sportization process, and subculture, have interacted directly with events and individuals through the sport's history, resulting in these three multi-directional sources of influences having the greatest effect on the direction and development of the sport. MMA, initially promoted as a violent spectacle, became the target of political attacks. Such unprecedented levels and presentation of sporting violence had never before been seen. In reaction, the sportization process of MMA began and the subculture of the sport started to develop as a reaction to the political pressure. The top MMA organization, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), changed ownership in 2001, resulting in the legitimizing of violence, entrance into the global sports system, and increased diversity of the subculture. The interaction between violence, sportization, and subculture transformed MMA from a violent event with limited reach to a modern global spectacle.

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), Sportization,
Sport-related Violence, Subculture

Acknowledgments

For Bill Walters, the man who first showed me the VHS tapes of this strange and fascinating sport when I was just a child. And the man who drives me to be my best as an adult.

Thank you to Dr. Kevin Wamsley, for the tireless help and support that made this thesis possible.

And

Thank you to Bill and Lisa Walters, for the endless support and encouragement of my goals and dreams.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Using one's own body, through martial arts, to harm another individual is an endeavour as old as mankind itself. Combative activities used in athletic competition and for entertainment of the masses, in highly organized forms, can be traced back to ancient Greece and to the Roman Empire. Even pitting different forms of martial arts against one another for bragging rights, monetary gain, or simple curiosity was very prevalent throughout the twentieth century. However, on November 21, 1993, the world of North American martial arts and combative sports arguably experienced its most significant change.

In Denver, Colorado, the first Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) took place at the sold out McNichols Sports Arena, and was broadcast live over pay-per-view. The championship involved an eight-man tournament that had no weight classes, rounds, time limits, or judges; only biting, eye gouging, and groin strikes were discouraged, and the winner took home \$50,000. The first bout of the night was between Sumo wrestler Teli Tuli and kick boxer Gerard Gordeau. None of the organizers, athletes, or spectators in attendance knew what to expect when the fights began; nothing like this, to this size and scale, had been attempted before. Seconds into the first fight, Tuli charged towards the kick boxer, receiving several punches to the head that dropped him. Before Tuli had a chance to recover, Gordeau struck the wrestler with a roundhouse kick to the face, sending a tooth flying into the crowd and another two of Tuli's teeth left embedded into Gordeau's foot. This forced the referee to stop the fight only twenty-six seconds into the first round.¹ Twenty-six seconds was all it took to forever change the world of martial

arts and combative sports. However, over the next two decades, the sport that came to be known as Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) changed continually and evolved to reach the pinnacle of the combative sports world.

Mixed Martial Arts, also known as ultimate fighting, cage fighting, and no-holds-barred fighting at various times through its history, is a hybridized sport formed by a number of different fighting and martial arts styles, though the sport was initially intended to promote and showcase the Gracie form of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. As such, the first UFC event was presented as a “style vs. style” competition (one of which was Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu) welcoming practitioners of other martial arts. Since the first few UFC events, fighters incorporated various martial art disciplines into their own style out of necessity. This mixture and hybridization of fighting styles and martial arts became the sport of MMA.

Over the last two decades, MMA experienced significant rises and falls in terms of popularity, profitability, and legality. The presence of supporters and detractors of the sport often provide the driving force behind these factors. More specifically, tension between these two groups has ebbed and flowed based on how they viewed violence within the sport. As was the case in the early days of MMA, fans and competitors were attracted by the presentation of excessive violence in the fights.² Likewise, the detractors of the sport were repulsed by such violence, labeling it as human cockfighting.³ The UFC and other MMA organizations’ abilities to attract attention through the promotion and presentation of spectacle violence enabled the sport to flourish, but also led to its near destruction.

Despite much economic and legal turmoil, the sport of MMA eventually flourished into a popular worldwide activity. This was possible due to the process of MMA evolving from a violent spectacle aimed at selling pay-per-views into a modern global sport; this is known as sportization.⁴ The sportization process that MMA undertook brought the sport back from the brink and allowed it to become a multi-billion dollar industry.⁵ Furthermore, the subculture of the sport also linked to the sportization process. The reaction to the political pressures brought upon by violence in the sport and the hybridization of martial arts, first formed the subculture of MMA. The subculture played a pivotal role in the sportization of MMA, and was likewise greatly affected by the global sportization of the sport. The subculture further evolved as the sport entered the mainstream sporting world, adding diversity and inconsistency to the norms, rules and values.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the influence of violence, subculture, and the sportization process on the history of MMA. Through the development of a timeline of the history of MMA, I will show how the presentation of, and reaction to, violence and spectacle affected the development of the MMA and how violence and deviance changed and normalized during the sports history. Furthermore, I will outline the sportization process within MMA, and the direct effects it had on the direction the history of the sport. Lastly, I will examine the development of MMA's subculture, and how the subculture and individuals within it altered and directed the history of the sport. This thesis will demonstrate how these three elements were responsible in influencing the history of MMA, transforming it into the global spectacle that it is today.

Review of Literature

The majority of literature written about MMA or the UFC is non-academic. This primarily includes popular media sources focused on fighter biographies and instructional manuals on fighting techniques. As well, there are great inconsistencies in the academic material focused on MMA and the UFC. As I will show through this study, MMA has undergone numerous and significant changes over the last two decades. Consequently, commentaries and discourses on MMA are quickly rendered inaccurate and misrepresentative because significant changes have altered the sport since its inception. A primary example of this inaccuracy is the use of the term “no-holds-barred.” While no-holds-barred was commonly used to describe MMA in early years of the sport, many academic papers continued to use this term into the latter half of the first decade of the 2000s, well after it was commonly known as MMA.⁶ That is not to say that the term no-holds-barred is incorrect. It is a valid term, but must be applied to the correct time period. I will use no-holds-barred in this paper to describe the first decade of MMA, though other literature in MMA is not consistent with the use of this terminology. It is these inconsistencies in academic work as well as the consistent changes in the sport itself that lead to inaccuracies in MMA literature.

The sociocultural study of combative sports, not including MMA, is however a very popular and robust field. Most of the work studying combative sports has focused on boxing and professional wrestling; therefore, it is important and necessary to include works on these sports as part of this review. Moving further back than boxing and wrestling, the civilizing process of modern sport traced by Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning’s book *Quest for Excitement*⁷ is a useful point of departure. *Quest for*

Excitement is the quintessential work discussing sportization and creation of modern sport. Sportization occurred when rules and organizations, primarily focused on fairness and safety, developed for particular physical activities. Modern sport's developmental process came about as violence within sport came to be limited and controlled. Elias and Dunning describe this process as follows: "In the form of 'sport' moreover, game-contests came to embody a rule-set that ensured a balance between the possible attainment of high combat-tension and a reasonable protection against injury."⁸ Some modern sports developed through a careful balance between violent tension, excitement, and the need for player safety. MMA's development and sportization occurred in a similar manner to that outlined by Elias and Dunning. The idea and process of sportization is also seen and discussed in other studies, such as John Connolly and Paddy Dolan's paper "The civilizing and sportization of Gaelic football."⁹ Gaelic football has undergone a sportization process that includes rule standardization, social constraints, and controlling of violence. Connolly and Dolan argue, using Elias' civilizing process, that as a stable state monopoly of violence is achieved, it facilitates more extensive chains of social interdependence within its members.¹⁰ Applied to the field of Gaelic football, as the sport civilized, consistency was added to the rules and playing of the sport. As well, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) began to occupy as the central locus of control and regulation for Gaelic football; the organization served to, at once, control and monopolize violence. The GAA dictated rules for the sport and appropriate levels and types of violence to be employed by participants, an example of the direct regulation of excessive violence for purposes of competition and entertainment.

It comes as no surprise that the most publications dedicated to combative sports deals with boxing. John Sugden's *Boxing and Society* arguably provides the best examination of boxing culture.¹¹ As society has, using Elias' words, become civilized, the once popular blood sports have either disappeared or been forced underground. Boxing is one of the few blood sport activities that has survived, due to its sportization under the Marquess of Queensberry rules. Under these rules, many argue that boxing has become more rationalized and less focused on violence. However, Sugden argues that rule and equipment changes have made the sport more dangerous.¹² Sugden also examines specific subcultures within the greater culture of boxing, namely, specific gyms in Hartford Connecticut, Belfast Ireland, and Havana Cuba. Boxing subcultures developed out of common social experiences of violence or poverty, formed by systems of structural inequalities, which members rallied around to resist.¹³ That is not to say all geographical subcultures of boxing are the same but, rather, they share similar experiences. In a sport that has historically been centered in the working class, the importance of social resistance in the subculture is not surprising.¹⁴ However, the socioeconomic background of mixed martial artists and MMA subculture is not as simple, as the majority of fighters come from upper and middle-class families.¹⁵ Therefore, one cannot define the culture of MMA by strictly socioeconomic classifications.

As stated above, a major focus in the field of combative sport is professional wrestling, and the most comprehensive work on the modern sociocultural state of professional wrestling is the anthology, *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling*, edited by Nicholas Sammond.¹⁶ Professional wrestling acts as

a site for a progressive critique of the American conservative agenda; rather than accepting the moral norms, it rebels against the politically created content within our culture.¹⁷ At the core of professional wrestling are sex, violence, and acting. While not unique to professional wrestling, the sport is unable to portray sex and violence in the same manner as other media. Movies and television can circumvent the issue of sex and violence by presenting them in positive virtues; violence is good if it defeats evil. Professional wrestling is unable to present sex and violence in such a neat narrative.¹⁸ Thus, critics blame professional wrestling as both the cause and symptom of the breakdown of American social and cultural life. Hate and criticism of professional wrestling rests at the issue of moral legibility rather than the social, political, and economic problems within the sport and society. Interestingly, as professional wrestling garners more outcries and criticism for its corrupting entertainment influence, it gains more credibility with its core audiences that are disinterested in the usual avenues for social and political expression.¹⁹ Professional wrestling and MMA have shared similar experiences with moral outrage. However, the outrage was even greater with MMA since the violence was real as opposed to its more artificial forms in professional wrestling. Ultimately, MMA's presentation of violence resulted in its ban and criminalization, by measures of moral policing.²⁰

In his non-academic treatise focused on the early days of MMA, Clyde Gentry wrote the seminal work on the no-hold-barred days of MMA in *No holds barred evolution*.²¹ Along with many others, Gentry argued that no-holds-barred was the more accurate name for the event being produced by the UFC and replicated by many other organizations. Gentry argued that martial arts as a term was too difficult and complex to

define or limit to a singular event. As well, he felt MMA was much closer to traditional, illegal no-holds-barred street fights than any previously seen combative event. Through giving a detailed history of the early years of MMA, Gentry touches upon themes of violence, criminality, and the struggle to survive as a sport. Within the struggle to survive, the sport was forced to deal with both legal and cultural changes. The increasing legal pressure led to many rules changes, and a cultural paradigm shift in the martial arts world. The other primary historical account of MMA is Jonathan Snowden's *Total MMA*.²² Snowden's book was written several years after Gentry's and, thus, he provides a longer timeline. As well, Snowden provides a different focus in theme, on the sportization, mainstream growth of MMA, and the significance of early MMA specific teams and gyms on the development of the sport. In 2001, The Fertitta brothers along with now president Dana White bought the struggling UFC. A combination of rebranding and legal victories aided the UFC in regrowth. As the UFC changed, so too did the people participating in the sport. Central to the cultural development of MMA were the gyms that trained the fighters. Early gyms such as Frank Shamrock's "Lion's Den" were the first dedicated purely to MMA. While the gym environment was brutal and led to most members either quitting or being injured, it was the beginning of creating communities dedicated towards MMA. Both Gentry and Snowden provide critical historical accounts of MMA, as well as the beginnings of its thematic elements of violence, sportization, and culture.

Entering into the academic world of MMA literature, I will begin with David Mayeda's *Fighting for acceptance: Mixed Martial Artist and Violence in American Society*.²³ Mayeda touches upon many different subjects, from the lives of mixed martial

artist to the greater societal issues in the sport such as safety and attitudes toward gender. However, for the purpose of my study, the most important part of his work is the relation between traditional martial arts culture and MMA subculture. MMA is the amalgamation of many different fighting styles and, hence, not only does it incorporate the techniques of various martial arts but also the personal techniques of its members. This led to MMA becoming a very diverse subculture with no prototypical member.²⁴ As the sport grew, it became bigger than the feeder martial arts and, thus, these martial arts began to change. This rapid growth and absorption of other martial art cultures caused many to fear that, without clear structure and direction, the subculture could fail or become harmful. Mayeda's work draws a crucial link between traditional martial arts and the development of MMA subculture.

Stephen Swain's doctoral thesis, "MMAsculinites: Spectacular narratives of masculinity in mixed martial arts" is a pivotal work in the understanding of violence and expressions of masculinity in MMA.²⁵ Swain discusses the perceived concepts of masculinity and honour in the Roman gladiatorial imagery used by the UFC to create a masculine spectacle. Through presenting the fighters as modern gladiators, the UFC ascribes to them a certain type of hyper-masculinity and glory to appeal to advertisers and spectators. The UFC aims to create a perception of fighting as a honourable pursuit, where the athletes are motivated not by money, but by honour.²⁶ It should be noted that beginning at UFC 143 on February 4, 2012, the organization changed the pay-per-view opening sequence. Swain's argument focused on the old sequence showing a gladiator preparing for battle. This has changed to an opening sequence titled "evolution," which shows clips from previous famous fights initially being fought in a small gym, working

their way to the center of a large arena. The UFC now uses its own history in the open sequence rather than using a connection to ancient Rome.²⁷ Swain then discussed the presentation and embodiment of hegemonic masculinity by the UFC. Using numerous examples, Swain shows how the spectacular narrative of events outside the octagon was built on the performance of masculinity.²⁸ The fighters personify and perform various elements of the dominant concepts of masculinity, furthering the narrative and creating conflict between themselves. Through his examination of spectacle and the presentation of masculinity in MMA, Swain provides the groundwork for exploring the role of masculinity in the subculture of MMA.

Michael L. Naraine and Jess C. Dixon's article, "Frame-Changing" the game: Examining the media framing of the mixed martial arts discourse in Ontario" examines the media discourse surrounding the legalization of MMA in Ontario.²⁹ In 2009, MMA was legalized in Ontario, making it the third last region to legalize the sport in North America. The only two other areas were Connecticut, which legalized MMA in 2013, and New York State, where the sport is still criminalized.³⁰ Through their analysis of print media in Canada, Naraine and Dixon identified two primary media discourses related to the sanctioning of MMA. The primary discourse, used against sanctioning the sport, was the argument of negative legal and ethical ramifications. Conversely, the economic benefit was the primary discourse used by journalists in favour of sanctioning it. This article provides a sample into the mixed discourses produced by traditional media sources when reporting on MMA. As well, it provides insight and analysis into the legal struggles of the sport and how it continued to struggle to garner popular support.

Greg Downey's "Producing pain: Techniques and technologies in no-holds-barred

fighting” focuses primarily on two themes concerning the bodily side of MMA.³¹ Downey analyzes the change in bodily techniques within the combative sports world following the first few UFC events, and the role that the perception of pain has on the members and subculture of MMA. Many martial artists assumed that the bigger, fiercer, more muscular fighters would simply beat the smaller opponents but they discovered that traditional fighting styles adapted poorly to MMA. They learned that fighting in MMA was not what they thought it was. Throughout the next two decades, traditional bodily techniques proved to be a liability to fighters, who struggled when faced with innovative techniques. This ultimately led to the community of mixed martial artists approaching fighting in an analytical manner. The bodily techniques of fighting underwent a modernization process; fighters began to watch videos, cross-train, copy techniques, and experiment on each other’s bodies.³² As the techniques of fighting became techniques in the sport of MMA, Downey argues that pain became central to the subculture of MMA. Pain and the acceptance of pain acted as barriers for entry to the subculture of MMA. As well, pain became a tool for preparation; fighters needed to develop tolerance towards pain in order to compete. Therefore, pain acted to filter and enhance the individuals entering the subculture of MMA. As a result, pain and violence became central features within the community of MMA, and became necessary for the subculture to function.

Akihiko Hirose’s “Men who strike and men who submit: Hegemonic and marginalized masculinities in mixed martial arts” conflates the concepts of masculinity and bodily techniques.³³ Hirose argues that, initially, MMA did not possess a singular concept of masculinity due to the diverse athletic cultural backgrounds of its participants. Eventually MMA developed its own distinctive culture based around the

conceptualization of dominant masculinity. For the same reason that MMA initially failed to adopt a singular masculine identity, the diverse athletic background led the sport to create dominate and marginalized masculinities.³⁴ Hirose argues that the dominant form of masculinity is owned by the strikers, and the marginalized is owned by the grapplers. Grappling is less violent and, in a sport in which physical strength and physical domination of one's opponent is the fundamental goal, it is seen as less masculine. However, this argument is flawed. As Downey discusses, with the evolving and merging of bodily techniques in MMA, no fighter is simply a striker or grappler; all fighters have the knowledge and skill in both components of fighting. Thus, the masculinity of fighters is not as rigid and strict as Hirose argues; fighter masculinity exists somewhere in between the dominant and marginalized forms. However, this article is still important as it explores the specifics of cultural identification of how masculinity fits into the norms and standards created within the culture of MMA.

Lastly, Maarten van Bottenburg and Johan Heilbron's article, "De-sportization of fighting contests: The origins and dynamics of no holds barred events and the theory of sportization"³⁵ and Raúl Sánchez García and Dominic Malcolm's article "Decivilizing, civilizing or informalizing? The international development of Mixed Martial Arts"³⁶ argues opposite sides within the discussion of the sportization of MMA. Van Bottenburg and Heilbron argue that MMA not only acts to desportize fighting and combative sports, but all sports. The enhanced brutality and the promotion of violence by the media and MMA organization drive viewership, showing proof of desportization. Furthermore, Van Bottenburg and Heilbron use the creation and growth of MMA to argue against Elias' civilizing process. They argue that the persistence of violent sports such as MMA act

counter to the civilizing trend.³⁷ MMA limits the number of constraints and rules by which fighters must abide, increases the level of tension over other combative sports, and lacks an informal set of rules and code and, therefore, decivilizes the sport. The problem with this argument is that it takes a very static view of MMA. This article was written in 2006, yet the MMA it describes more resembles the sport a decade earlier. García and Malcolm approach MMA with a more contemporary outlook, thus arguing in favour of the sport's sportization process. García and Malcolm argue that the growth of MMA is indicative of an informalization process and the quest for excitement. The increased informalization in society and the continued drive for excitement through sports have driven the development of MMA into a sport. Informalization is not an equivalent to a decivilizing trend; rather it entails a wider variety of behaviours expressed in more flexible and controlled forms and can thus be seen as a complex form of civilizing process. The wider variety of combative techniques without an overall increase in the level of violence suggests that the rise of MMA is indicative of an informalizing trend. They argue that the increased importance of mimetic excitement and the search for an appropriate balance of tension form the first step in the sportization process.³⁸ García and Malcolm go on to discuss how the perception of violence has changed in MMA. Though the level of exposure to violence has decreased with the merging of bodily technique, the spectacularization of events has made them appear more violent. Increased regulation has decreased violence; therefore, promotions have had to increase the spectacle components of the sport.³⁹ While these two articles approach the sportization of MMA in very different manners, they both contribute significant knowledge to the subject. I am critical of Van Bottenburg and Heilbron's article because it focuses on a narrow timeframe and

does not examine the complex history of MMA. Although it fails to recognize to the informalization of MMA, its analysis of that particular timeframe is still beneficial to my historical analysis.

This study will connect the gaps between violence, sportization, and the subculture of MMA. The previous studies of MMA have either focused on the connections between sportization and popularity, or violence and culture. Previous work has not examined the role that violence and sportization have had on the development of MMA culture. As well, many of the previously written articles on MMA have made assumptions about the development of MMA. I will outline the full history of MMA as it relates to the sportization process and the development of MMA culture. This complete outline within an academic framework is lacking in previous MMA research.

Methodology

I will be using a holistic approach to examine the history of MMA, using specific events and individuals to show evidence for the macro level changes in the sport. Most of the previous research and writing on MMA has either focused on MMA in a broad, non-descriptive sense or has been highly focused on a specific event or individual within the sport. My goal is to bridge these approaches, using specific events and individuals to bring insight into the broad analysis of the sport.

My approach to studying the role and influence of violence in MMA will be accomplished through analyzing events as wanted and unwanted deviance. Michael Atkinson and Kevin Young discuss the concept of wanted and unwanted deviance within sporting subcultures in *Deviance and social control in sport*.⁴⁰ Wanted deviance

encompasses behaviours, thoughts, and actions that violate an accepted social or cultural standard, yet are controlled, predictable, and rationalized. As such, they are not seen as culturally or socially destructive, though not fully accepted. Unwanted deviant actions are not socially or culturally accepted and effectively break the emotional tension-balance of safety and risk.⁴¹ Therefore, depending on the given sporting subculture and specific actions, violence can be interpreted as either wanted or unwanted. It is the role of sport insiders to decipher rule violations and whether they break the principles of the subculture. The very nature of combative sports is to cause violence and this has long been socially accepted; yet MMA's use of violence led to the criminalization of the sport in most locations across North America. Consequently, lawmakers and the public interpreted MMA, as a sport, to display completely unwanted deviance. It is important to approach the study of violence as more of a spectrum than a rigid concept, when analyzing the events of MMA's history. Violence has always been part of the sport; yet, the way in which it is interpreted has changed significantly. Therefore, it is important to approach events as wanted or unwanted deviance, in order to determine their effects on the sportization process and cultural development of MMA.

My methodological approach to researching the sportization process of MMA will, in part, follow the outline and process Elias and Dunning set out in *Quest for Excitement*:

The framework of rules, including those providing for 'fairness', for equal chances to win for all contestants, become stricter... Supervision of the observance of the rules became more efficient; hence, penalties for offences against the rules became less escapable. In the form of 'sports', game-contest

came to embody a rule-set that ensured a balance between the possible attainment of high combat-tension and a reasonable protection from injury.⁴²

Elias and Dunning's framework for examining sportization is based around three primary factors: rule creation, rule enforcement, and tension balance of risk and safety. In my analysis of MMA's sportization process, I will examine data for the creation of rules within the sport, as well as with regard to forms of violence and deviance. This involves examining MMA from the no-holds-barred days, as it grew into modern MMA, and the rules that were implemented in this process. Furthermore, in my analysis I will also focus on the enforcement of these rules. Lastly, I will examine the "controlled decontrolling" of excitement in the tension balance of risk acceptance. The key to sportization is balancing the excitement obtained through displays of violence and the need for player safety. In order to show the factors within the process of sportization, Elias and Dunning use the example of fox hunting. Rules were developed and strictly enforced in fox hunting to ensure that the hunt was of good 'sport,' achieving an ideal balance of tension and battle excitement. As well, the killing of the fox was no longer the duty of the hunter but, rather, the duty of his hounds, removing himself from the actual violence of the hunt. Hunting fox, once for necessity, was later done for sport and entertainment. Using the factors of sportization, rule creation, rule enforcement, and tension balance, Elias and Dunning are able to demonstrate the sportization process.

Expanding on the methodology of sportization, Joseph Maguire further conceptualizes the idea of sportization in *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations*.⁴³ Maguire adds to Elias and Dunning's work by expanding the concept of sportization. Sportization is also defined by the multilayered flow of capital, personnel,

technology, and ideologies through society. As well, the sportization process involves the spread of a specific body culture into society more broadly as activities have to enter public perception and greater society as part of sportization.⁴⁴ Maguire argues beyond simple rules and tension balance, that sportization must involve an activity's entry into the public sphere. This entails a flow of capital, people, ideas, and sporting culture from such activities into the broader society. I use Elias and Dunning's concept with Maguire's concept as the methodological framework for data collection in relation to the sportization process of MMA.

The concept of sporting subcultures and cultures is highly contested due to difficulty of researchers in establishing a consistent definition. Belinda Wheaton argues that, although sporting subcultures have some shared values and experiences, they are not purely homogenous nor are their identities fixed. The study of subcultures must establish a more fluid and de-centred identity that can account for subcultural mobility. Core member and outsider identities are fluid and never fixed.⁴⁵ This creates the problem of simply identifying the subculture's boundaries and traits of membership identity. While this can create difficulty in analyzing the subculture of MMA, it is important in the fluid and changing subculture of the sport. Analyzing MMA as a singular and rigid cultural identity is not beneficial because the culture of the sport consistently changes. Therefore, I will analyze the culture of MMA as fluid and mobile.

Furthermore, in analyzing the change in the culture of MMA, I will use Peter Donnelly's approach in classifying sporting subcultures. Donnelly classifies sporting subcultures in three sections: Avocational, occupational, and deviant.⁴⁶ For the purpose of my study, I will be examining the subcultural change of MMA from deviant to

occupational. Deviance in this classification does not refer to violence but, rather, actions that are socially and legally forbidden. When violence becomes expected and normalized in the subculture and sport, it is no longer deviant. I will be using these classifications as a basis for the analysis of the MMA change from more informal illegal activities to a multiple billion-dollar industry. This will also involve examining the culture change during this process.

My methodological framework for data collection will use the violent subculture theories to analyze the role of violence in MMA. The role of sportization will be investigated through the framework developed by Elias and Dunning's *Quest for Excitement*, and Maguire's work on sport globalization. Lastly, the analysis of MMA's subculture will follow the framework set by Wheaton and Donnelly's work on subcultural classification and identification.

The goal of this study is to examine through the events and individuals within the history of MMA, a reciprocal and multidimensional flow of influence between sport-related violence, the sportization process, and subculture. As MMA underwent its sportization process, the level and presentation of violence altered within the sport; as well the sportization process also influenced the creation and formation of the MMA subculture. However, the direction and strength of influence was neither linear nor consistent. The people and events that formed the subculture of MMA also influenced the direction and speed of the activity's sportization and violence presentation. This study will show that these three concepts of sportization, violence, and subculture continually affected and influenced one another and the history of the sport.

Methods

This study will be written in the form of a historical narrative, following the events and individuals in the history of MMA from its beginning to present day.⁴⁷ The historical narrative will consist of a timeline of the history of MMA, created in order to provide a history of the sport. The major events and individuals within the sport's history are the focus of this narrative. I selected the major events and individuals by what information was repeated in multiple sources. The events and individuals that were focused upon in multiple secondary source material were chosen, as the validity and importance of such information was greater. This was supplemented with sources and information that explain the influence of sportization, violence, and subculture on the development of MMA. During the first decade and well into the second, MMA received almost no traditional media coverage and very limited coverage by specialized media. This was due to MMA specific websites and magazines simply not existing in the early years of the sport. Therefore, I will rely on books and historical texts written about the early period of MMA, as source of data. There are a number of detailed books written about the history and people of early MMA; these works will act as primary sites for data collection. These works include: *no holds barred evolution*, *Total MMA*, *Fighting for acceptances*, and *Brawl: A behind-the-scenes look at mixed martial arts competition*.⁴⁸ I also will, when appropriate, supplement these works with information from other media sources. In the second decade of MMA, there are fewer complete works written about the history of MMA in the twenty first century, though MMA did start to receive more media coverage. Rapidly, MMA not only received more specific media coverage in the forms of websites and magazines, but also in traditional sporting media. The MMA specific

websites that I will use are the most popular and prominent MMA specific website including: Sherdog.com, mmamania.com, bloodyelbow.com, mmafighter.com, mmaweekly.com, and mmajunkie.com. While I do use some sources from traditional media, I rely mostly on MMA specific media due to the availability of information. Much more is written about and available in the MMA specific media sources than traditional media. Atkinson and Young describe the importance of “fanzines” or subcultural specific media sources as they act as the quintessence of subcultural communication and give an active voice to the consumer.⁴⁹ The use of these MMA specific media sources is important to provide narratives about experiences within the subculture and detailed knowledge of events within MMA’s history. Therefore, my sources of data for the second half of my time frame will be collected from both traditional and specific media sources. My data collected gathered information relative to three primary ideas: The change in violence, process of sportization, and the development of MMA subculture. I will focus on events and individuals that have led to the levels and presentation of violence being altered within the sport. As well, I collected all information relative to the sportization process of MMA, which will be seen in the actions of individuals, organizations and governments. Lastly, I collected data that shows how events and individuals affected the creation of a unique MMA subculture. Furthermore, I did not examine these concepts as a singular idea but, rather, the ways in which they work together to show the creation of MMA culture. My intent is to gather the information and interpret it within the context of the theoretical backgrounds of violence, sportization, and culture to enhance our understanding of MMA.

Delimitations

The time frame of this study will begin with the events that led to the first UFC event on November 12, 1993, and include all relevant material up to and including the early 2015. This time frame was chosen to ensure that I was able to cover all events of importance and significant. Furthermore, my study will focus on MMA in North America, although there will be some discussion of Japanese and Brazilian events and individuals. These references will be made when analyzing the sport in North America. This discussion was included to maintain the time frame of the study, as Japan and Brazil's history of MMA and no-hold-barred style fighting developed quite differently from that of North America. As well, accessing information from these countries and the language barriers of Japanese and Portuguese eliminates in-depth research of those cultures.

As noted above, the number and quality of sources available in the early years of MMA is limited, meaning there is a relatively small number of primary sources that can be used. This led me to use many secondary sources to gain a more complete and thorough data set.

Chapter Organization

Chapter two will examine the theoretical background of the major concepts of this paper. I will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of sport violence, the sportization process, and sporting cultures and subcultures, and their application towards this paper. Chapter three consists of an analysis of MMA from its beginnings until the UFC was purchased by casino executives Frank Fertitta and Lorenzo Fertitta who founded Zuffa as

the UFC's parent company.⁵⁰ The purchasing of the UFC marks the most significant change in MMA's history and, thus, will act as a breaking point. This period of time is commonly known as the "no-holds-barred days" and "pre-Zuffa days;" I will use the same terminology. Chapter four will examine the purchasing of the UFC by Zuffa, and all other events until UFC 129 on April 29, 2011; this period will be known as the "modern MMA days" and the "Zuffa days." Chapter five will offer some concluding statements and suggest further studies that could emanate from this work.

Endnotes

¹Clyde Gentry. *No Holds Barred Evolution: The History of the Ultimate Fighting Championships*. 1st ed. World Martial Arts INT, 2013. 706. The sources: *No holds barred evolution*, *Total MMA*, *Brawl*, *Fighting for Acceptance*, and *Memoirs of a Machine*, are all E-book. Therefore the associating citing number is an E-book location number and not a page number.

² Ibid, 987.

³Jonathan Snowden. *Total MMA: Inside Ultimate Fighting*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2008, 1549.

⁴Norbert Elias, and Eric Dunning. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford, OX, UK: B. Blackwell, 1986. (Pay-Per-View is a type of pay television service by which a subscriber of a television service provider can purchase events to view via private telecast. The broadcaster shows the event at the same time to everyone ordering it)

⁵Steve Borchardt. "How Much Is UFC Worth? Dana White 'whispers' \$3.5 Billion... or more." Mmamania.com. March 25, 2014.

⁶ Example are Maarten van Bottenburg & Johan Heilbron's "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests: The Origins and Dynamics of No Holds Barred Events and Theory of Sportization" and Greg Downey's "Producing pain: Techniques and technologies in no-holds-barred fighting"

⁷ Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*.

⁸ Ibid, 151.

⁹John Connolly, and Paddy Dolan. "The Civilizing and Sportization of Gaelic Football in Ireland: 1884-2009." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 23, no. 4 (2010): 570-98.

¹⁰ Connolly & Dolan, *Gaelic Football*, 3.

¹¹John Peter Sugden. *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996.

¹² Ibid, 178.

¹³ Ibid, 180.

¹⁴ Ibid, 190.

¹⁵David T. Mayeda, and David E. Ching. *Fighting for Acceptance: Mixed Martial Artists and Violence in American Society*. Lincoln, NE: IUniverse, 2008. 1936.

¹⁶ Sammond, Nicholas, ed. *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

¹⁷ Ibid, 309.

¹⁸ Ibid, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid, 16.

²⁰ Gentry, *No Holds Barred Evolution*, 2410.

²¹ Ibid, 2436.

²² Snowden, *total MMA*.

²³ Mayeda & Ching, *Fighting for acceptance*.

²⁴ Ibid, 2117.

²⁵ Stephen Swain. "MMAculinities: Spectacular narratives of masculinity in mixed martial arts (Doctoral Dissertation)." *The University of Western Ontario*, 2011.

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- ²⁶ Swain, *MMAsculinites*, 70.
- ²⁷ Chorongota. "Breaking News: 'Gladiator Man' Released from His Zuffa Contract Prior to UFC 143." MMAmania.com. January 30, 2012.
- ²⁸ The octagon is the name of the fighting surface and area that the UFC uses. The name and shape, octagon, is trademarked and can only be used by the UFC.
- ²⁹ Michael Naraine and Jess Dixon. "Frame-Changing" the Game: Examining the Media Framing of the Mixed Martial Arts Discourse in Ontario." *Communication & Sport*, 2, no. 2 (2014), 186-99.
- ³⁰ Mike Bohn. "Bills Pass Legalizing MMA in Canada and Connecticut, New York Now Last State Standing." MMAmania.com. June 6, 2013.
- ³¹ Greg Downey. "Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in No-Holds-Barred Fighting." *Social Studies of Science* 37, no. 2 (2007), 201-226.
- ³² Downey, *Producing pain*, 4.
- ³³ Akihiko Hirose and Kay Kei-ho Pih. "Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit: Hegemonic and Marginalized Masculinities in Mixed Martial Arts." *Men and Masculinities* 13, no. 2 (2010), 190-209.
- ³⁴ Hirose and Pih, *Men who strike and men who submit*, 9.
- ³⁵ M. Van Bottenburg, and J. Heilbron. "De-Sportization Of Fighting Contests: The Origins And Dynamics Of No Holds Barred Events And The Theory Of Sportization." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 41, no. 3 (2006), 259-82.
- ³⁶ Raul Sanchez Garcia, and Dominic Malcolm. "Decivilizing, Civilizing Or Informalizing? The International Development Of Mixed Martial Arts." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45, no. 1 (2010), 39-58.
- ³⁷ Van Bottenburg and Heilbron, *De-Sportization Of Fighting Contests*, 12.
- ³⁸ Garcia and Malcolm, *Decivilizing, Civilizing Or Informalizing*, 4.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 15.
- ⁴⁰ Michael Atkinson, and Kevin Young. *Deviance and Social Control in Sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 6.
- ⁴² Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*, 151.
- ⁴³ Joseph A. Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; 1999.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 68.
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- ⁴⁶ Peter Donnelly. "Sport Subcultures." *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews* 13 (1985), 3.
- ⁴⁷ William Kelleher Storey, and Towser Jones. *Writing History: A Guide for Canadian Students*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 85.
- ⁴⁸ Erich Kraus, and Bret Aita. *Brawl a Behind-the-scenes Look at Mixed Martial Arts Competition*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2002.
- ⁴⁹ Michael Atkinson, and Kevin Young. *Tribal Play: Subcultural Journeys through Sport*. Bingley, UK: Emerald JAI, 2008, 138.
- ⁵⁰ Snowden, *Total MMA*, 2804.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework for Understanding Violence, Sportization, Subculture, and Mixed Martial Arts.

Theory of Sportization

Although MMA is a relatively new sport, conceived in the mid-1990s, it must be understood within the broader context of the emergence of modern sport and its role in society. Allen Guttman examines the evolution of modern sport in *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. Guttman argues that play can be divided into two categories, spontaneous and organized. Guttman suggests that spontaneous play is as close to pure freedom we can ever achieve, unlike organized play, which is bound by rules in the formation of games.¹ To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs using only actions that are permitted by rules. The rules prohibit use of more efficient means in favour of less efficient, and the rules are accepted because they are part of the given activity.² Using the examples of leapfrog and basketball, Guttman further divides games into contest. While both leapfrog and basketball have rules and are games, only basketball is a contest due the nature of either winning or losing. Furthermore, contests are infinite in their variety. Activities such as basketball, chess, and war are all contests, yet only the former two qualify as playful contests.³ Lastly, Guttman divides playful contests in the forms of either intellectual or physical; these physical contests are defined as sport.⁴ Using Guttman's outline, we can begin to trace the history of sport formation. Play becomes games through organization, which becomes a contest through the crowning of a winner, which finally becomes a sport through physical exertion.

Guttman developed the seven characteristics of modern sports as a way of further demonstrating how sport transformed from primitive play into the activities that

we currently understand as modern sport. The first characteristic is secularism. There has continually been a removal of the religious influence of sport throughout history.

Sporting festivals of ancient Greece happened to honour various gods; modern sport is no longer associated with such ideals.⁵ Second is equality; modern sport is developed around ideas of equal opportunity to participate and equal conditions of competition. The most contradictory event in the ancient world to this characteristic was the Roman gladiatorial games, where armed men would fight and kill unarmed men and animals for the entertainment of the crowd. As well, medieval tournaments and jousts were limited to only nobility, forbidding most of population from participating.⁶ The third characteristic is specialization, essentially the same as professionalization. Specialization resulted from the modern emphasis on achievement and victory, which led to a desire to free athletes of financial concerns. Despite early focus on amateurism, athletes have always found ways to sponsor their careers through scholarships, grants, and normal salaries to free them to focus purely on sport performance.⁷ The fourth characteristic is rationalization, the creation of consistent and unified rules for the sport. Hunting, once a primitive activity became archery through rationalization. It is impossible to develop an equal and fair playing field using an animal as a target; instead one replaces the animal with a simple stationary target. Therefore, all people who participate have the same experience in competition. The rules and experience of hunting was simplified and constrained to create the sports of archery and target shooting.⁸ The fifth characteristic is bureaucratization. In the form of both domestic regulatory bodies, such as the National Football League and international bodies, such as Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), modern sports has been controlled by overseeing organizations. These organizations

became the ultimate authority in all matters pertaining to their sports.⁹ The sixth characteristic is quantification. The ancient Greeks did not accurately measure the results of their events; they did not care how far the winner threw or how fast they ran, just who threw the furthest or ran the fastest. Precise measurement and statistics of athletic outcomes is unique to modern sport where achievement is held in the highest regard.¹⁰ The final characteristic of modern sport is the tracking of records. Through quantification, records allow people to compete against one another in different times and spaces. The world record for the 100-meter sprint or most homeruns in a season are measurable records that anyone in current or future time can challenge.¹¹ Primitive and ancient forms of sport rarely had any of these characteristics; modern sport is unique in its adherence to all of them. In the past 150 years, sport has developed to include all of these characteristics consistently throughout the world. In the history of MMA, it is arguable that none of these seven characteristics were apparent in the first several UFC events; even in 1994 the sport lacked secularism.¹² Through this paper I will show how the sportization process of MMA led the sport to eventually adopt these seven characteristics that were not present in first several events.

After defining sport and outlining the process of modern sport creation, Guttmann outlines the beginning of the modern sport era as,

A ubiquitous and unique form of period of approximately 150 years, from the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries. Speaking historically, we can be reasonably precise about place as well as time. Modern sports were born in England and spread from their birthplace to the United States, to Western Europe and to the world beyond.¹³

As industrial capitalism grew within England, modern sport was born. The growth in wealth inequalities ushered in new forms and approaches towards leisure for the wealthy. Sports such as tennis and golf were expensive and required professional lessons, leading to a commercialization of these sports.¹⁴ Sporting clubs and associations became sites for the upper class to not only practice their sport, but also further spread a unified experience of their given sports. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the first sporting clubs for football, swimming, tennis, and athletics were founded in England; many more were founded shortly after throughout the world.¹⁵ Furthermore, English schools began to embrace the concepts of modern sport during the same time. The thought that sport can teach fair play, sportsmanship, and business acumen, spread through public schools with the help of the famous novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*.¹⁶

The second stage of modern sport is defined by commercialism and nationalism. As amateurism continually gave way to professionalism, the structure of professional sport was openly commercial. Corporations and millionaires flocked to sport ownership to take advantage of tax laws and to profit economically.¹⁷ As individuals and corporations were using sport to make money, nation states were also using sport to drive nationalism and international agendas. Sport became a stage to showcase political ideologies such as Nazism in the 1936 Olympics. Sport became a tool for nation states to control and influence their citizens.¹⁸ Guttmann describes the process of modern sport in a neo-Marxist sense; modern sport is defined through commercialization and nationalism. Rather than being simply the next stage of games and play, sport is a complex system centred on economic gains and political ideals.

In *Quest for Excitement*, similar to Guttman, Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning develop an interpretation of the creation and state of modern sport. Elias and Dunning quantify the manner in which leisure activities become sport through a sportization process. Beginning in England in the nineteenth century, some leisure activities that demanded bodily exertion began to take the form of sport. This process centered on gaining consistency in rules and controlling violence. The framework of rules, including those providing fairness and equal chances to win became more strict; they became more precise, more explicit, and more differentiated. Supervision of the rules became more efficient; therefore, penalties for offences against the rules became less escapable. In the form of sports, game-contests ensured a balance between the possible attainment of high combat-tension and a reasonable protection from injury.¹⁹ According to Elias and Dunning, the idea of game contest and the restraints on violence first developed in England due to a need for more firmly regulated, less violent, yet pleasurable, competitive physical activities.²⁰ Furthermore, Elias and Dunning acknowledge the role of industrialization in the sportization process; however, they do not designate the same level of influence as Guttman. Instead, Elias and Dunning credit the reduction of violence in sport with the civilizing process.

The civilizing process explores that manner in which modern western civilization developed. Elias argues that through the history of western civilization, man and society has slowly civilized into its modern form. While Elias' work in the civilizing process is quite varied, exploring topics from nobility in medieval Germany, to the etiquette of blowing one's nose, the notion of the civilizing process is particularly useful towards the explanation of modern sport.²¹ The civilizing process worked to restrain the use of

violence in daily life and no longer was fighting or killing acceptable in the civilized world. This drove violence and excitement towards the world of sport where it acted as a site for the enjoyable ‘controlled decontrolling’ of emotions.²² Furthermore, the civilizing process is marked by a narrowing of what is acceptable in public life. This creates a two-fold relationship between sport and the civilizing process. Modern sport began to develop as an outlet for excitement in a dull, civilized modern society. Sport, along with other activities replaced the lack of excitement in people’s lives.²³ As well, the civilizing process does not just apply to broader society; it can also apply to specific groups or cultures.²⁴ As such, the civilizing process explains the characteristics of modern sport. A single sport can also become civilized, not just as a symptom of societies civilizing but specifically in its own context. This process of civilizing sport is developed into what Elias and Dunning coined as the sportization process.

The sportization process also led Elias and Dunning to their own definition of modern sport:

Every sport is an organized group activity centered on a contest between at least two parties. It requires physical exertion of some kind. It is fought out according to known rules, if physical force is allowed at all, rules that define the permitted limits of violence. The rules determine the starting figuration of the players and its changing pattern as the contest proceeds... When the given form of sport fails to perform these functions adequately, the rules may be changed.²⁵

At the simplest level, sport is a physical activity, with rules, and the ability to change aspects of the sport if necessary. Furthermore, sport is also defined through an unstable tension-equilibrium that allows all competitors a chance to gain the upper hand. As a

sport matures, the periods of tension find a correct balance, neither too short nor long.²⁶ In terms of violence, the sportization process has increased restraint on the use of physical force and particularly upon killing. This altered the focus of pleasure from the thrill of inflicting violence to the pleasure experienced in seeing violence done.²⁷ This relocation from participation in, to viewing, violence also aided in balancing the tension-equilibrium. Through controlling violence, the organizer of the sport can better control the period of tension within the sport. Consequently, and in summary, Elias and Dunning define sport through the creation of rules, reduction of violence, and the balance of tension.

Sportization is the process of activities becoming sport through the creation of rules and the regulation of violence; systems of strict and enforced rules maintain fair play, balance risk and injury, and create enjoyable tension. Elias and Dunning argue this process was developed through the civilizing of western society. As demands for equality and reduced violence grew within society, the same demands happened within leisure activities. Elias and Dunning use the example of boxing to illustrate sportization. Though not totally without rules before sportization, the standards for conducting an unarmed fight were rather elastic; the use of kicks, other holds, rounds, time limits were very flexible. Bare-knuckle fighting began to assume the characteristics of a sport in England where it was first subjected to a tighter set of rules. The removal of kicks, the addition of gloves, and weight classes created greater equality in the competition and protected fighters against serious injury. This process of sportization that included increased safety and equality in the competitions allowed this form of fighting to take on the characteristics of a sport.²⁸

Joseph Maguire contributed to Elias and Dunning's work on sportization in *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations*. Building upon the work of *Quest for Excitement*, Maguire adds numerous components to the idea of sportization. Maguire goes beyond the notion of the civilizing of English leisure activities and approaches sportization from a global perspective. Sportization, he argues, involves the multilayered flow of sport, capital, personnel, technology, landscapes and ideologies.²⁹ However, that is not the entirety of sportization on the global scale; it is also a shift towards the competitive, rationalized, and gendered bodily efforts of achievement sport that involve changes at the personal, cultural, and social levels.³⁰ The increased focus on achievement sport through sportization characteristics of rationalization and increased consistency altered the experience of sport at the personal and subcultural levels. Maguire argues this created two interwoven dimensions of sportization. The first dimension involves the emergence of a specific body culture that centres on achievement sport, at both the elite and leisure levels. One of the main features of this dimension includes an emphasis on achievement striving, which is closely connected to and reinforced by a quest for excellence or the 'ultimate performance,' through a focus on rationalization and scientization.³¹ The sportization process that brought rationalization, specialization, and quantification has altered sport into centreing on the concept of achievement, attempting to find the ultimate performance.

The second dimension of the sportization process involves the spread of body cultures and sporting ideals into society more broadly as a widespread long-term process. The sportization of society involves both the use of the body in specific physical ways, but also the expression of a set of ethics that characterize an athlete. As sportization

processes gathered momentum, we have witnessed sport breaking out of its traditional school and subcultural boundaries.³² Ommo Grupe further adds that,

Sport as a cultural phenomenon reaches far beyond the traditional boundaries of sport itself, it is an expression of a new understanding of culture. This process has been called the ‘sportization of culture’ and it means that sport-related values, norms and models of behaviour have penetrated deeply into the cultural life courses.³³

Maguire and Grupe discuss the idea that as sport and sporting culture spread into society, it experienced a sportization process. Media, business, and politics all become affected by the sportization of leisure activities. Media companies spend billions of dollars and governments dedicate significant resources towards sport success. No longer is sport an autonomous cultural aspect; it is instead firmly imbedded in many aspects of society.

Maguire has expanded the ideas of Guttmann and Elias and Dunning through the conceptualization of sportization on global society. Maguire demonstrates how sportization goes beyond the alteration of the physical aspects of sports such as violence, equipment, and rules, and alters the very culture of sport. Sportization resulted in an increased focus on achievement that was driven through rationalization and the introduction of sport to society, more broadly.

Beyond the physical and cultural aspects, sportization also consists of the global spread of its medium. The global sport-media complex represents the transition in sport, where sporting events once highly localized affairs are now massive global media spectacles.³⁴ People are increasingly consuming global media-sport products; television, advertising, merchandising, and exclusivity right are all products being offered for

consumption. As a result, the global sport-media complex is made up of three groups: the sport organizations, media organizations, and trans or multinational corporations.³⁵

Maguire argues that the contemporary experience of sport is intertwined with global media concerns. In relation to MMA, the experience of the sport changes and becomes part of the global media complex as the UFC enters mainstream popularity. Usually sports have a largely dependent role in the global sport-media complex. Sport organization dependence on media has grown over time as the reliance on revenue from sponsorship has increased. However, in some cases, the sport organization is able to control and exert greater power over the media product than the media organization. Maguire uses the example of the NFL to demonstrate that the power of the organization in its negotiations with the media ensures that it has greater influence over the product it produces.³⁶ The actions of the UFC, by controlling its pay-per-view and television programming, align its history within the global sport-media complex closer to the example of the NFL. MMA, and specifically the UFC's experience within the global sport-media complex, represent the next dimension of the sportization of MMA.

Returning to the topic of MMA, the articles "De-sportization of fighting contests: The origins and dynamics of no holds barred events and the theory of sportization" by Van Bottomburg and Heilbron, and "Decivilizing, civilizing or informalizing? The international development of Mixed Martial Arts" by García and Malcolm oppose each other in the area of sportization. Van Bottomburg and Heilbron argue that MMA is indicative of a desportization process for combative sports and decivilizing of the broader society. García and Malcolm conversely argue that MMA follows in line with Elias and Dunning's *Quest for Excitement* and has indeed undergone a sportization process.

Van Bottomburg and Heilbron argue the creation of MMA is not only evidence of desportization, but also the brutalization of fighting contest. They argue that the creation of no-holds-barred fighting in the 1990s is part of a longer trend starting in the 1970s with the growth of kickboxing, full contact karate, Thai boxing, and other increasingly violent forms of fighting that represent the desportization of combative activities.³⁷

García and Malcolm counter this argument, stating that the series of developments undertaken by the sport illustrate oscillations in the search for an appropriate tension balance in the initial stages of a sportization process. They credit these oscillations to the actions of various competing actors, such as government regulation, MMA promotions, and media corporations.³⁸ Furthermore, the continual additions of more varying combative techniques without an increase in the level of harm to fighters, suggests that the development of MMA has coincided with heightened levels of self-control and sensitivity towards inflicting harm. García and Malcolm counter the notion that MMA is a brutalization of fighting contests by demonstrating that the level and presentation of violence within the sport is part of a long term oscillating trend.

Van Bottomburg and Heilbron argue that desportization in no-holds-barred events was manifested in four ways. First, no-holds-barred events reduced rules and restrictions in the pursuit of greater authenticity, unlike other forms of martial arts. Second, no-holds-barred deliberately maintained rule flexibility in order to adjust each fight to wants or needs. Third, traditional martial arts sought to achieve balance between tension and risk, while no-holds-barred was characterized by an increase in tension at the cost of increased risk. Lastly, unlike traditional martial arts, no-holds-barred events lack formal rules, informal codes, and focus on a sports ethic of fair play. Van Bottomburg and Heilbron

further argue that the organizers of no-holds-barred events intended to create a new kind of mimetic spectacle that would create tension that broke the accepted norms of violence. Van Bottomburg and Heilbron labeled this kind of spectacle ‘antinomian tension.’ By transgressing accepted norms, no-holds-barred events could create antinomian excitement that traversed beyond ordinary limits by showing dramatic knockouts and real violence.³⁹

García and Malcolm countered the arguments presented by Van Bottomburg and Heilbron, stating that the central problem of Van Bottomburg and Heilbron’s arguments is that they are predicated on an exaggerated portrayal of violence in the sport.⁴⁰ These exaggerated ideas are due to illusory elements of the spectacle that obscure the self-control of fighters. To the insider and those with martial arts experience, the events of MMA are not viewed as especially violent, while to the uninformed they are.⁴¹ Furthermore, Van Bottomburg and Heilbron approach MMA as a fixed entity, while as García and Malcolm have previously stated, MMA is fluid and characterized by oscillations. The aspects of the sport that the public disapproved were reformed to bring MMA in line with societal norms around combative sport.⁴² Van Bottomburg and Heilbron did not take into account the continually evolving nature of MMA through sportization. Lastly, Van Bottomburg and Heilbron argue that the violence in MMA was exceedingly high, while the promoters of MMA countered the increasing regulation by enhancing the spectacle of the event to make it appear more violent. García and Malcolm argue that spectators were attracted to the decontrolling appearance of MMA.⁴³

García and Malcolm demonstrate that MMA does indeed follow a sportization process, not only internally within the sport, but as well as a reflection on society. They demonstrate that the process of MMA sportization follows the tenets of Elias and

Dunning's *Quest for Excitement*; as well demonstrating that Van Bottomburg and Heilbron's notion of MMA's desportization is flawed. Given the evidence, García and Malcolm's approach is more analytically palatable.

Theory of Subculture

As my study is focused on the subculture of MMA, it is important to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the research on subcultures. Subcultural research is a very complex, yet inconsistent field of study. Through the nearly 90 years of research, there continues to be debate over the simple definition of subculture.

The classic definition of subculture is built on the root understanding of the term 'culture.' Traditionally culture represents how the peculiar and distinctive ways of life form groups in society.⁴⁴ This rationale of thought was first used by American theorists at the University of Chicago in the 1920s. They focused largely on the ways that youth reacted to their class position through group characteristics and micro-processes.⁴⁵ The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, England began to add to the debates on subculture studies in the 1970s. They developed a more robust stance on subcultural activities, by focusing on the way youth reactively and proactively resisted their social position and expressed displeasure. The CCCS was largely interested in how youth found ways to symbolically resist and escape from their marginalized positions. It was through leisure activities and subcultural styles that youth displayed their dissatisfaction with the social order.

This approach by CCCS became problematic; it over-emphasized the impact of social groups while ignoring issues of gender and race. As well it glamorized youth style and behaviour, despite the likelihood that many youth subculture members did not view

their style and behaviour in the same way the researchers did. This led to a revision of the concept of subculture in the 1990s; subcultures of this time were driven by the marketplace. Theorists began to see that the CCCS model overstated the extent to which subcultures are able or even attempt to resist the dominant culture. More recently, subcultures have been characterized by subtle forms of everyday resistance.⁴⁶ The continual change in research focus and understanding of subculture has also led to numerous definitions by social theorists. In 1947, Gordon defined subculture as,

A subdivision of a national culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations such as class, ethnic background, regional or rural or urban residence, and religious affiliation, but forming in their combination a functioning unity which has integrated impact on the participating individual.⁴⁷

Gordon's definition focuses on the physical and social division of people, rather than the underlining rationale for individuals to form subcultures. Hall and Jefferson in 1974, built upon the idea of subculture as "subsets, smaller, more localized and differentiated structures within the larger cultural class configuration... focused around certain activities, values certain uses of material artifacts, etc., which significantly differentiate them from wider culture."⁴⁸ Hall and Jefferson include with the population division, the actions and items that cause people to group together outside of the broader culture. Bullock and Stallybrass define subculture through the effects that the values, activities, and beliefs that characterize a given subculture have upon the members and their abilities to distinguish themselves from greater society.⁴⁹ Peter Donnelly notes that definitions of subculture tend to fall within two categories: 1) an emphasis on the population segment of subculture, such as race or class, and 2) an emphasis on the deviant or delinquent

aspects of subcultural behaviour.⁵⁰ The meaning of subculture is neither consistent nor unified.

Through analysis of varying social and historical perspectives on defining and analyzing subculture, Belinda Wheaton began to develop a 'sport post-subcultural' definition in "After Sport Culture: Rethinking Sport and Post-Subcultural Theory." Although sport subcultural groups have some shared values, participants' experiences are not all the same, nor are the identities of members fixed. This creates a need to define subculture in a more fluid and de-centred sense and, therefore, accounting for mobility and movement within the subculture. Furthermore, identity of members is never fixed or determinate; categorizing membership as 'core member' to 'outsider' fails to recognize the multiple ways in which differences are marked and measured and the ways identities continually are made and remade.⁵¹ It is important to recognize the limits of subcultural resistance and recognizing the fluidity of subcultural identity.

Using this more robust idea of subculture, Phil Cohen provides his own meaning of subcultures,

Subcultures are symbolic structures and must not be confused with the actual kids who are their bearers and supports, a perspective that could not be further away from the Chicago school research. The shift in emphasis is important to register. Subcultures at the CCCS are no longer social worlds to be described through their sociality.⁵²

Rejecting both the notions of subculture created in the Chicago School and at CCCS, Cohen states that we must understand subcultures as the social constructs of the members, and not the members themselves.

What I have presented here is an account of the variations in how subculture has been defined and broadly approached. From the empirically rich work of the Chicago School and the CCCS, to the post-subcultural concept of Wheaton and Cohen, subcultural understanding has been complex and inconsistent. Put simply, a subculture is a group of people with their own distinct norms, rules, and values that distinguishes them from the greater society, and from other subcultures in varying degrees. My approach to understanding and using subculture as a theoretical tool will coincide more closely with the fluid and decentralized notion put forward in post-subcultural analyses. The subculture of MMA for this study is comprised of the individuals who practice the sport at an elite level. They are the fighters who formerly fought or actively participate as mixed martial artists. The subculture is fluid, as fighters enter and leave the sport and, thus, the subculture for various reasons. The centres of the subculture are the MMA specific gyms where the subculture grew and the norms, rules, and values that dictate the subculture were determined; details will be discussed in chapter three. Members of the subculture are dedicated to the sport of MMA, rather than any other particular martial art. While the vast majority of mixed martial artists start in other combative sports or martial arts, their dedication to training and participating in MMA, which combines many martial arts, is central to acceptance within the subculture.

Now that I have established a general concept of subculture, I will further explore the specific uses and concepts within subcultural studies. To begin, I will examine the process of identity and membership into subcultures through the work of Donnelly and Young, in "The Construction and Confirmation of Identity in Sport Subcultures." They state that the act of becoming a member of a particular subculture is also the act of taking

on an appropriate subcultural identity. It is the combination of career and identity that forms the process of membership into a given subculture.⁵³ Donnelly and Young argue that identity construction begins with modeling of members of the subculture, deliberately adopting mannerism, attitudes, styles, speech, and behaviours of established members.⁵⁴ Following modeling, individuals begin the presocialization and socialization phases of identity construction. Presocialization refers to all of the information an individual acquires about a specific subculture prior to becoming a member and socialization is the active and ongoing stage where members undergo training in the characteristics of the subculture.⁵⁵ This finally leads to identity confirmation, by which an individual is confirmed by an established member of the subculture.⁵⁶

Donnelly and Young argue that identity construction and confirmation affect more than the given subculture; it also affects broader society. When the neophyte or outsider accepts that an individual is a member of a subculture, he/she begins to separate from others. Identity construction not only allows individuals to enter a subculture, but also acts to create separation from them and broader society.⁵⁷ According to Wheaton and Cohen, it is important to understand that subcultures are fluid and not fixed; therefore this separation is not definite or permanent, but instead acts upon members of the subculture to further create identities.

Donnelly provides three schemes of classifications of sporting subcultures. The first is avocational, which includes all recreational sport and leisure activities. The second is occupational, which includes all activities that have professional or elite roles. Occupational subcultures began to form through the sportization process of the early 1800s, when focus shifted to achievement and increased economic efficiency. The final

classification is deviant subcultures, which include illegal activities surrounding sport such as gambling and hustling.⁵⁸ Donnelly further divides the concept of deviant subcultures into deviant and semi-deviant. When certain behaviours are regarded by society as having favourable effects, they are labeled as legitimate. When behaviours are conceived by society as having adverse effects, they will likely be labeled as illegitimate or deviant. However, when behaviours classified as deviant are legitimized by their connection with other attitudes and behaviour, they are considered semi-deviant.⁵⁹ In relation to my own study, this classification system is important in marking the changes that the subculture of MMA experienced through its history. No-holds-barred fighting and MMA became illegal or unregulated in all 50 states in America, by the late 1990s and, consequently MMA was forced into the margins of a deviant subculture. It was not deviant due to violence in the sport, as violence is not inherently deviant if it coincides with that is expected and normalized in the sport, such as in hockey or football.⁶⁰ It was deviant because it exceeded societal norms, forcing legal repercussions to ban and criminalize the sport. Today, MMA would be considered an occupational subculture; the details and process of this transformation will be covered through the next two chapters.

Atkinson and Young develop the concept of wanted and unwanted deviance, similar to Donnelly's concept of semi-deviance in *Deviance and Social Control in Sport*. Wanted deviance is behaviours, thoughts, and actions that violate an accepted social or cultural standard, yet are controlled, predictable, and rationalized so, therefore, allowed. Players, leagues, and audiences want rule violations in sports; watching forms of deviance such as hockey fights can be meaningful and pleasurable for spectators. Unwanted deviant actions are not socially or culturally accepted and effectively break the

emotional tension-balance of safety and risk.⁶¹ The lines demarcating wanted and unwanted deviance in any sport are not universal. There is considerable tension regarding the use of wanted deviance by athletes in competition. Both forms of wanted and unwanted deviance create tension and excitement for spectators, making the decision to allow the existence of both types of deviance easy for sports authorities. Excessive violence and rule breaking is fine in as long as it creates profit; this changes and results in fines, suspensions, and bans when the actions cross the ambiguous line between wanted and unwanted deviance.⁶² Once again, this issue of traversing the line between wanted and unwanted deviance was a major concern in the no-holds-barred days of MMA. As MMA moved from a deviant subculture into a semi-deviant and occupational subculture, the actions and behaviours of fighters also shifted from unwanted to wanted deviance. Even though the actions and behaviours either altered very little or not at all, the social and cultural perception dictated the level of deviance.

Theory of Violence

The final theoretical focus of my paper is devoted to sport-related violence and sport spectacle. Similar to subculture, aggression and violence do not have a set and universally agreed upon definition. While not as contentious as subculture, it is important to set a definition. Lynn Jamieson and Thomas Orr define sport violence quite simply as “any behaviour that causes either physical or psychological injury related to either direct or indirect result of a sport experience.”⁶³ Similar to many other researchers of sport violence, Jamieson and Orr’s definition is flawed; they do not account for sport aggression or intent to cause harm, rather simply the action of harm. Flaws are found in many sport violence definitions and Young argues that the immediate problem in the

study of sport violence is defining the subject matter. Terms and phrases have been continually used interchangeably and often carelessly to describe the same thing, resulting in lack of consistency in the literature.⁶⁴ Young uses the definitions put forward by Coakley and Donnelly to describe aggression and violence. Aggression is “verbal or physical actions grounded in an intent to dominate, control, or do harm, to another person,” while violence is “the use of excessive physical force, which causes or has the potential to cause harm or destruction.”⁶⁵ Aggression is regarded as a broader concept focused on intent, while violence is typically used to refer to physical manifestations of aggression.

J.H. Kerr addresses the fine line that distinguishes actions as legitimate or illegitimate. Aggression is hostility or attacks on another person which are not allowed by society; in the sporting context,

Aggression is provoked in the sense that two opposing teams have willingly agreed to compete against each other. Aggression in team contact sports is intrinsic and sanctioned, provided the plays remain permissible within the boundaries of certain rules, which act as a kind of contract in the pursuit of aggression between consenting adults.⁶⁶

Furthermore, Kerr acknowledges that violence is most often used in a negative sense, describing physical force employed to cause harm or damage but also that violence can mean simple violent actions not intended to cause harm such as tackling. Violence can relate to both legal and illegal actions in a given sport, not just illegal actions that cause harm.⁶⁷

Working with these definitions, a general concept of sport-related violence and aggression begins to appear. Aggression is best understood as the intent to cause harm or excessive physical contact, while violence is the physical action of harm or excessive physical contact. As well, violence is not necessarily against the rules of the sport; it can be seen as both legal and illegal depending on the norms of the sport. Actions that cause harm, whether they are allowed or forbidden in the rules of the sport can both be viewed as sport-related violence. Approaching the concepts of violence and aggression in this broad manner is the best way to account for the varying and complex ways violence manifests in sport. Using this working definition, I will further examine the numerous ways researchers have theorized the presence of violence in sport.

To begin, I will first examine how levels and specific actions of violence that would be illegal and result in criminal charges in broader society are allowed and encouraged in the world of sport. This is due to the nature of sport existing as a total institution. Total institutions are groups that can be categorized as all-encompassing socializing agents. Each member is bound to follow a code of behaviour, socializing, and subject to constant monitoring and training by authority figures. Primary examples of total institutions are the military, religious groups, and psychiatric hospitals, which aim to socialize individuals to adopt the master status of soldier, convert, or patient upon entry.⁶⁸ Erving Goffman identifies five types of total institutions: 1) those established to care for the incapable and harmless (orphanages), 2) those that care for the incapable and vulnerable (psychiatric hospitals), 3) those that protect the community against intentional dangers (prisons), 4) those established to pursue work-like tasks and that justify themselves only on these instrumental grounds (military), and 5) those that are a retreat

from the world (monasteries).⁶⁹ Sport and sporting organizations fall within categories four and five. Learning and playing a role in a sport obviously relates to occupational identity and control. As well, it can be argued that sport allows for people to escape from the banality of modern life.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Atkinson and Young develop four ways in which sporting organizations reveal their power as total institutions. First, as total institutions, sports organizations create a culture underpinned by a historical tradition of masculinity and aggression. Second, discursive strategies are deployed within the sport in order to publicly frame violence as noncriminal and socially unthreatening. They actively work to downplay and control the presentation of violence as inconsequential, which enables them to use it at will. Third, legal intervention into the sport fails to challenge the authority of the league as primary definer of deviance. Because of historical precedent, violence within sporting organizations is not considered a legal issue. Lastly, the appearance of responsible stewardship by the sporting organization towards offending members serves to reduce public reaction and promote aspects of violence as understandable or wanted.⁷¹ The ability of contact sports organizations to act as total institutions excludes them from any legal or social responsibility. They can create and enforce their own sets of rules outside the law, as well as create rules that supersede the law and social norms. By defining what is allowed or deviant within their institutions, rather than what is legal or socially allowed by the standards of society, sporting organizations are free to use violence in any way they see fit. As well, when violence is used beyond what they justify as allowed, they are the ones who punish and control the victim and offender, essentially acting as the criminal justice system.

Michael Smith discusses the legality of sport violence in his classification of the four categories of sport violence. These categories explain how the public and the institution view and justify violence within sport. The first category is *Brutal body contact*, or physical acts that are found within the rules of a contact sport, such as tackles and body checks. These are consented to by athletes or at very least implied as normal behaviour. Second, *Borderline violent* acts that are prohibited by official rules but regularly occur, such as fighting in hockey. Third, *Quasi-criminal* acts are actions or behaviours that violate the rules, laws and informal norms of players, usually resulting in injury. They can stir public attention and cause outrage, but almost always are dealt in-house with suspensions and fines. An example is a ‘sucker’ punch or hit from behind. Lastly, *Criminal violence* includes behaviours and acts outside the boundaries of acceptability for both the sport and wider community that are treated by the criminal justice system. These actions that happen in a sport space, but outside the realm of play, usually result in permanent injury or death.⁷² What this classification system shows is the level of seriousness of a transgression for it to be a concern outside the total institution of sport. Only actions that result in very serious injury or death have a possibility to be governed by state laws or social norms. The vast majority of actions in sport are completely dictated and controlled by the over-seeing sporting organization. Therefore, when MMA received political criticism and legal restrictions, it demonstrated the significance of the action. It is very rare for governments or police to interfere with the actions of sporting organization; yet as I will demonstrate, MMA experienced unprecedented levels of legal control for a sport.

Young argues that gender is the principle way sport-related violence is striated. While sport-related violence is not purely a masculine issue, it does affect men's sport significantly more than women's sport.⁷³ It is argued that male violence within sport is driven by hegemonic masculinity. Athletes value the ability to dominate others physically and resolve problems through force. This dominant code of masculinity inserts itself into sports and sporting cultures in varying degrees; however in numerous sports it created what Raewyn Connell calls 'patriarchal dividends.' These patriarchal dividends create situations where males are willing to dominate others through force, and harm themselves in order to win and be considered part of the group.⁷⁴ This leads to the common expectation that men hurt each other in sport so frequently that injury due to force is taken for granted as part of sport. This adherence to the hyper-masculine ideals of modern sport creates a paradox for athletes. Violent sport behaviour and the acceptance of pain often result in rewards, in the form of salaries, public adorations, and athletic identity. However, these same acts result in both short and long term health complications and high morbidity rates.⁷⁵ The masculine ideas that drive sport violence produce benefits for the athletes who follow them, but as well lead to serious consequences. Until recently, MMA was a male-only sport, so masculinity did play an important role in the presentation and use of violence. However, the more recent development of women's MMA, which follows the same rules, at the same events, and entails similar aggression and violence to men's MMA, challenges the established notion of masculinity. Ideas of masculinity cannot simply be used to explain violence within the sport when women are increasingly watching and participating. Violence within MMA is much more complex adherence to masculine ideals, especially in the more recent history of the sport.

To explore further why player violence is pervasive in some sports, particular theoretical approaches are instructive. The *hostile and instrumental aggression approach* explains that actions aim to achieve an external or related goal, rather than solely the pursuit of personal injury. Instrumental aggression is rational and planned; in the desire to obtain a goal, the act is also legitimized. Hostile aggression is the use of violence with the goal of inflicting damage to another person. Unlike instrumental aggression, it is not thought to be rational or planned, instead reactive to the situation. This idea has been generally rejected by many researchers for being overly simplistic. The logic of this dichotomy can be completely reversed as instrumental aggression can be conducted out of anger, and hostile aggression can be planned, breaking the rules of this theory.⁷⁶ *Social learning theory*, established by Albert Bandura, rejects the notion of biologically- driven aggression, and instead focuses on the role of punishment and reward on modeling of behaviour. We learn to use aggression and violence in sport through observing the actions of others in the same sporting field. Violent behaviour is then used if it is determined by the individual that it will lead to a positive reaction; if violence can be defined as pleasurable, meaningful or rewarding, it will continue to exist in sport. Critics of social learning state that this approach underestimates individual's abilities to make choices. There is no guarantee that observing violence behaviour will lead to individuals modeling it.⁷⁷ The *sport ethic perspective* describes how elite athletes learn 'interpretive frames' and use them to show commitment to the group and sport. Athletes are taught to strive for distinction, accept no limits as players, and play through pain and injury as part of the sport ethic. While this idea may not affect all athletes in all aspects of their sporting careers since most athletes have had face issues of committing to the sport ethic at some

point. Furthermore, behaviours in relation to the sport ethic can be divided into positive and negative deviance. Positive deviance is an over adherence to the sport ethic, where the athlete is driven to dangerous behaviour, such as extreme weight loss. Negative deviance is a rejection of the sport ethic, such as disobeying a coach's instructions. This theory has been criticized due to its inability to explain violence at non-elite levels or by non-athletes such as coaches.⁷⁸ Lastly, the most prominently used theory is *violent subcultures*. It has been used to explain high rates of violence in certain social groups such as gangs or occupations. Divided into two streams, 'violent societal subcultures' and 'violent occupational subcultures,' it is the latter that drives the focus in sport-related research. Individuals develop unique value systems that guide their behaviours while in the setting of the subculture. In terms of violence, individuals learn to value and use violence if it is a norm or aspect of their subculture. It has been criticized for suggesting that behaviours are contained only within the subculture, while it is apparent that violent behaviours developed in subculture do not necessarily stay within them.

While no single theory for approaching sport violence is perfect or able to explain the variety and complexity of violence in sport, the use of many theories and concepts can allow researchers to examine sport violence more accurately. Furthermore, it is important to understand the role of sport violence beyond instrumental or hostile intent; we must all acknowledge the role that sport violence has on selling a given sport. This role is best examined in the concept of the spectacle. Violence is more than a tool for athletes; it is also used by sporting promoters and organizations to sell their products by presenting them as spectacle.

Theory of Spectacle

Spectacle is a very large and complex field of study; however, I will be focusing on spectacle in relation to sport-related violence. At its most basic level, a spectacle is something watched that draws crowds and the attention of individuals.⁷⁹ Beyond simply a grandiose event for entertainment, spectacles also “create representation and meaning in everyday life.”⁸⁰ Spectacles have symbolic meaning for the individuals who participate. Both the actor and audience form a dualistic role where the roles are linked to one another and necessary for the performance.⁸¹ Without both parties being present and taking an active role, it would no longer be spectacle. Spectacles are dynamic; they demand action and change from the actors. Spectacles entail not simply being present, but being an active part within the performance.

In terms of sport violence, spectacle often becomes mimetic; it resembles a warlike situation, yet remains safe for spectator and actor. The spectacle is significant for individuals as it elicits excitement through controlled violence and is structured with the understanding that it is not as perilous as ‘real’ violence.⁸² Both Jean-Paul Sartre and John Sugden relate this concept of controlling violence in the formation of a spectacle to the sportization of boxing. Sartre argues that the sportization or ‘sterilization’ as he refers to it, removed the urgency of the violence and led to a situation where there is rarely any real hatred and instead fighting is simply a job. The fight becomes a spectacle, which develops social values for those involved. Violence is equated to and represents strength, giving the presence of violence meaning and benefit for those spectating.⁸³ Sartre further argues that rather than violence being imaginary for spectators, they become the embodiment of violence. As spectators back one fighter, they effectively mimic and fight through the person they are supporting. As such, the spectator becomes part of the fight.⁸⁴

Sugden endorses a more empirical approach to the spectacle creation of boxing through sportization. Sugden argues that as the rationale for boxing changed from self-defense to prize fighting, so too did it become an increasingly violent spectacle. Prize fighting increasingly developed into a public spectacle and forum for gambling as it underwent a sportization process. As an increasing number of wealthy spectators funneled more money into the sport, fighters were forced to increase their limits of suffering and expected to fight longer and harder for both their purses and the wagers.⁸⁵ Sugden argues that after the introduction of the Marquess of Queensberry rules, boxing did not experience a reduced emphasis on violence as many believe but, rather, boxing became more dangerous with the inclusion of gloves, allowing fighters to punch harder and more frequently during a fight. The glove is designed to protect the hand of the puncher, allowing fighters to hit as hard as they can to the opponent's head without risk of breaking their hands, which was common in bareknuckle boxing times.⁸⁶ The sportization of boxing resulted in an increase in the spectacle of boxing; the spectators became an equal force in the spectacle relationship with the fighters. The spectators demanded more violence and the change in rules allowed for this increased demand.

Garcia and Malcolm approach MMA similarly to Sugden. They argue that boxing became more of a spectacle when undergoing sportization; MMA responded to pacifying pressures with a combination of violence-reducing rule changes and spectacularized violence. MMA received significant social and political pressure to alter the level of violence within the sport, resulting in significant changes to the rules throughout its history. MMA was forced to adopt new safety regulations such as gloves and limiting techniques to appease critics. To counteract this, promoters turned to cosmetically-

increased violence.⁸⁷ MMA was soon promoted as a grand spectacle in line with the ancient Roman gladiators. In reality, the level of violence was being reduced; the promotion of MMA was increasing focused on violence to drive fan appeal. This created the mimetic excitement to drive the formation of spectacle within MMA.

It is easy to identify that spectacle plays an important role in both the sportization process and formation of violence. For combative sports, especially MMA, spectacle allowed for economic prosperity, giving the activity the financial support and popular appeal it required to emerge as a modern sport. Additionally, as combative sports become pacified, spectacularized violence replaces the removed 'real' violence. The activities are presented as grand spectacles of masculinity and violence to appeal to the spectators.

Within an analysis of MMA, the connection between these three theoretical concepts of sportization, subculture, and violence is evident. As described by Elias and Dunning, the controlling and regulation of violence within a given sport and society at large led to a sportization process. At the same time, Sugden, Sartre, Garcia, and Malcolm have shown that violence is used to sell combative sports as spectacles. The relationship between sportization and violence is multidimensional; reducing violence allows an activity to become a sport, and conversely violence is used to sell the newly formed sport to the masses. It is not a unidirectional flow of influence between sportization and violence; it is a reciprocal flow allowing both concepts to interact and influence one another.

Violence is not necessarily deviant; it becomes deviant when the violent actions are no longer institutionally or socially permitted. The type and level of violence in the no-holds-barred days of the sport were viewed as so deviant and unwanted, that it

resulted in a political response to the social outcry. The response of MMA promoters removed the social deviant label altering the state of the subculture. Through limiting certain actions and changing certain perceptions of violence, the subculture of MMA transformed from deviant to occupational. It is the social perception of violence that controls the labeling of deviance within a sporting subculture.

What is created within the sport of MMA is a reciprocal and multidimensional flow of influence between violence, sportization, and subculture. Violence has an influence on both the sportization process and status of the subculture of MMA as explained above. However, sportization and subculture also affect levels and presentation of violence. As MMA became solidified as a sport and entered the global sport-media complex, and the subcultural structure and make-up evolved, violence became less central to MMA. As the flow of influence moves between forces, the progression of the sportization, subculture, and violence oscillates. As Garcia and Malcolm have discussed, the stages of sportization oscillate as the sport finds the correct tension balance; this also affects the presentation of violence in the development of subculture. As I will show in the next two chapters, the progression of these sources of influence was not consistent or linear. There were continual improvements and degradations. The progressions of these sources of influence were altered by the changes within the sport. Therefore the direction of influence and progression is neither consistent nor linear. This reciprocal flow of influence does not just apply to violence; the sportization process and development of the subculture of MMA also influenced another. Before the sportization process, no-hold-barred members came from various martial arts and tough-man competitions. This created a situation where there was not a defined subculture for the activity. Conversely,

as Downey discusses, when MMA members came together and began identifying as part of the subculture, they also began to approach the sport analytically.⁸⁸ As individuals identified themselves as mixed martial artists and members of the sport subculture, they drove the next stage of the sportization process.

Through this examination of the theoretical concepts, I have shown the history and issues within sportization, subculture, and sport-related violence, with the intent to demonstrate how these concepts influence one another and the history of MMA. By thoroughly exploring these sources of influence, it will give greater meaning to the individuals and events that shaped experiences within MMA. Sportization, subculture, and violence within MMA do not exist separately within vacuums; they are deeply intertwined forces that have driven the development of the sport over time.

Endnotes

¹ Allen Guttman. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 4.

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³ Ibid, 6.

⁴ Ibid, 9.

⁵ Ibid, 24.

⁶ Ibid 30.

⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁸ Ibid, 42.

⁹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰ Ibid, 48.

¹¹ Ibid, 52.

¹² Clyde Gentry. *No Holds Barred Evolution: The History of the Ultimate Fighting Championships*. 1st ed. World Martial Arts INT, 2013. Location, 1053: During UFC 3, during his first fight, Kimo Leopoldo walked out to the cage cover in religious tattoos and carrying a large wooden cross on his back.

¹³ Guttman, *From Ritual to Record*, 57.

¹⁴ Ibid, 59.

¹⁵ Ibid, 61.

¹⁶ Ibid, 60.

¹⁷ Ibid, 62.

¹⁸ Ibid, 63.

¹⁹ Norbert Elias, and Eric Dunning. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford, OX, UK: B. Blackwell, 1986, 151.

²⁰ Ibid, 8.

²¹ Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process*. New York: Urizen Books, 1978.

²² Elias and Dunning, *Quest for Excitement*, 31.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 9.

²⁵ Ibid, 155.

²⁶ Ibid, 156.

²⁷ Ibid, 162.

²⁸ Ibid, 6.

²⁹ Joseph A. Maguire. *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999, 6.

³⁰ Ibid, 65.

³¹ Ibid, 66.

³² Ibid, 68.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 145.

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- ⁴⁰ Garcia and Malcolm, *Decivilizing, Civilizing Or Informalizing*, 8.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 15.
- ⁴² Ibid, 14.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 15.
- ⁴⁴ Joseph Maguire, and Kevin Young. *Theory, Sport & Society*. Amsterdam: JAI, 2002, 376.
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- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 379.
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- ⁵⁰ Ibid, 5.
- ⁵¹ Belinda Wheaton. "After Sport Culture: Rethinking Sport and Post-Subcultural Theory." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 31, no. 3 (2007): 283-307, 13.
- ⁵² Ken Gelder. *Subcultures Cultural Histories and Social Practice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007, 89.
- ⁵³ Peter Donnelly, and Kevin Young. "The Construction and Confirmation of Identity in Sport Subcultures." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5 (1988), 2.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, 3.
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- ⁵⁸ Peter Donnelly. "Sport Subcultures." *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews* 13 (1985), 3.
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⁷⁰ Ibid, 171.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Young, *Sport, Violence and Society*, 19.

⁷³ Ibid, 171.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 163.

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⁷⁶ Ibid, 6.

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⁷⁹ John Sugden, and Alan Tomlinson. *Power Games: A Critical Sociology of Sport*. London: Routledge, 2002, 50.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 47.

⁸¹ Ben Carrington, and Ian McDonald. *Marxism, Cultural Studies and Sport*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, 243.

⁸² Atkinson and Young, *Deviance and social control*, 13.

⁸³ Sugden and Tomlinson, *Power game*, 90.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 91.

⁸⁵ John Peter Sugden. *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1996, 15.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 176.

⁸⁷ Garcia and Malcolm, *Decivilizing, Civilizing Or Informalizing*, 17.

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Chapter 3: The Early Years and The Dark Ages

Japan, Brazil, and the Gracies

Combative sports and martial arts are thousands of years old; however, the true beginnings of MMA can be traced back to 1878 in Japan. Though this thesis will not focus on the history of MMA in Japan or Brazil, it is impossible to show the beginning of North American MMA without acknowledging the role of Japan and Brazil in its manifestation. In 1878, Jigoro Kano began practicing Jujitsu under numerous different masters throughout Japan. Kano quickly realized much of what he was learning was not applicable to real fighting. He began to understand that every school he attended had benefits and flaws, which led him to believe that Jujitsu needed to be reconstructed for more practical purposes. He gathered all of the beneficial ideas and tactics from the various schools and added his own ideas, forming Kodokan Judo. Kano's Judo quickly grew in popularity due to its practical focus around throwing, groundwork, and striking; this led to a rift between the two practices. Kano's Judo students easily handled and defeated challenges by Jujitsu practitioners and by 1905, Jujitsu was dead and replaced by Judo.¹ Wanting to increase the spread and influence of Judo, Kano and many of his students went abroad to demonstrate the sport. One of the students sent to America to demonstrate for President Theodore Roosevelt was Mitsuyo Maeda. By 1915, Maeda had made his way south to Brazil, where he met politician Gastao Gracie. In exchange for helping Maeda secure a consulate post, Maeda taught Gracie's son, Carlos, martial arts. After several years, Carlos began to teach his brothers and friends the Jujitsu he learned from Maeda.² In reality, the martial art that Maeda taught Carlos was much more than traditional Judo or Jujitsu. Much like Kano's incorporation of the best aspects of Jujitsu,

Maeda borrowed aspects of Western Catch wrestling from his time in America and England.³ Initially, the fourth brother, Helio, was not allowed to take part in Carlos' classes; the family thought the sickly Helio was too weak and frail to participate. After years of watching, Helio was eventually allowed to practice and quickly realized that many of the techniques being taught used more energy than required, which was especially challenging for him. Helio began altering those techniques using a trial and error system that eventually gave birth to Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). BJJ focuses more on groundwork and submission than the popular throws of Judo.

As Gracie BJJ became more popular in Brazil, many people, especially those trained in boxing and capoeira (a native martial art) challenged the Gracies in a hope to discredit them. Helio became the fighter of the family, fighting in most of the challenges. As many of these challenges involved not only grappling but also striking, a local paper dubbed them 'vale tudo', Portuguese for "anything goes." The success and media attention of Helio's victories caught the attention of a local Japanese Judo school that looked to dethrone the Gracies. Masahiko Kimura, who was a champion Judo player, along with two other judo players, was asked to compete in Brazil and challenge Helio.⁴ After Helio defeated the first challenger, it was Kimura's turn. The accounts of the size difference between Helio and Kimura range drastically, with the Gracie account stating that Kimura weighed 220 pounds compared to Helio's 140 pounds. In reality, Kimura was probably much closer to 185 pounds and Helio closer to 175 pounds. Additionally, the Gracies claimed that if Kimura could not beat Helio in the first three minutes, it would be considered a moral victory.⁵ These types of exaggerations were all part of the Gracies' plan to sell their type of fighting. In the same vein that the UFC was invented to

showcase BJJ to the American market, the Gracies have always been about selling their martial art. Despite the discrepancies, we do know that nearly 20,000 people watched Helio and Kimura fight. Kimura simply tossed Helio around like a ragdoll for the first ten minutes, eventually pinning Helio underneath him. When Helio went to push Kimura off, Kimura trapped Helio's left arm in a shoulder lock. Unwilling to tap out, Carlos threw in the towel for his brother. This was the Gracies' first defeat and the shoulder lock to this day is known as a Kimura.⁶

Despite the loss, these fights had the desired effect as Gracie BJJ continued to grow in popularity. The Gracies continued to take challenges, which bolstered popularity, including the six-fight saga between Carlson Gracie and professional wrestler Waldemar Santana.⁷ These Vale Tudo fights were eventually shown on Brazilian television and received very high ratings. However, the televising of fights was eventually banned in Brazil, forcing Vale Tudo underground, which propped up BJJ, promoted as safer and more accessible as the top form of Brazilian combative sport.⁸ As BJJ grew in Brazil, Helio's son Rorion, tried to spread the sport into America in 1969. This first journey was a failure as Rorion was rendered homeless and had to panhandle for food to survive. Returning to Brazil, Rorion earned a law degree and learned English before returning to America in 1978. Over the next 15 years, Rorion taught people Gracie BJJ out of his garage; success did not come quickly for his small gym. America was flooded with karate and flashy martial arts dojos. The popularity of martial arts movies made operating these types of dojos easy and profitable. As fans and the martial arts community followed the popular martial arts, techniques like BJJ were left behind.⁹ BJJ was not flashy or

attention grabbing, so attracting new students to this subtle style of martial arts in a small garage was difficult for Rorion.¹⁰

Similar to his father in Brazil, Rorion started the Gracie Challenge in America. From 1982 to 1989, Gracie faced many other martial arts masters in challenges. In one case a \$100,000 wager was made with kickboxer Benny Urquidez. While these did little for his gym attendance, the challenges did create hype and excitement.¹¹ In 1989, Rorion received the press that he had been seeking. An article in *Playboy* magazine mentioned Gracie's gym and discussed the \$100,000 challenge. What was a one-time wager developed into a project on which the Gracie family based its finances. Following this article, the gym's attendance drastically increased, as did the number of challenges. One individual who was particularly interested as a result of the article was advertising executive Art Davie.¹²

Davie was looking to develop an advertising campaign marketed towards 18-34 year old males when he read the *Playboy* article about Rorion. Although the advertising campaign did not work out, Davie became friends and saw potential for money with Rorion. Davie helped Rorion promote his *Gracies in Action* videotapes that featured various Gracies throughout the years defeating martial arts masters. These types of videotapes became staples in the world of early no-holds-barred fighting, whether to promote a particular fighter or in passing a recording of an event between friends; these tapes were pivotal to the early growth of no-holds-barred fighting.¹³ Seeing the potential for more than strictly videotape sales, Davie began to think of expanding the Gracie Challenge to a tournament format where different fighting styles would challenge one another to determine fighting supremacy.¹⁴

The Ultimate Fighting Championship

There is essentially no difference between no-holds-barred fighting and MMA; they are the same entity, just existing at different periods of time. However, it is not appropriate to use them interchangeably. The no-holds-barred fighting of the mid 1990s is a very different activity than the modern sport of MMA. This change from no-holds-barred to MMA was not sudden. It was a slow gradual change defined by the creation of rules, change in media focus, and alterations to the approach by the subculture of the sport. I will use the term no-holds-barred fighting in reference to the less regulated and less rule-intensive version of fighting. MMA will refer to the more regulated and more rule-intensive version of fighting. Furthermore, the term MMA will be used to refer to the sport as a whole throughout history. Changes made to MMA will include the time period beginning in 1993. I will be using both terms during this chapter, and the use of either term throughout is not arbitrary. Their use is intentional in outlining the state of the sport during analysis or discussion.

Originally dubbed “War of the Worlds,” the first struggle was finding a way to get the event broadcast on television. After being rejected by every other pay-per-view production firm, Davie pitched the idea to Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG). At the time, SEG was looking for something new, as pay-per-view was dominated by wrestling, boxing, and pornography.¹⁵ The timing for something different happened to be perfect as both professional boxing and the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), which dominated pro wrestling in the early 1990s, went through major scandals. Mike Tyson, boxing’s biggest draw lost his championship belt and was in jail from 1992-1995.¹⁶ The WWF also suffered in the early 1990s with a large steroid abuse scandal that led to owner

Vince McMahon's trial.¹⁷ In 1993, at the time of the first UFC, the world of combative sports was open and hungry for an entity to fill the gap left behind with the sliding popularity of professional boxing and wrestling. With SEG and owner Bob Meyrowitz firmly behind Rorion and Davie, it was now time to plan the event. While the event was intended as a way to market Gracie BJJ to a large audience, Davie knew that more than just curiosity of the best fighting style was needed to sell the event. Davie knew that it needed to be a violent spectacle. A concrete pit with Greek statues and an electric fence with an alligator-infested moat were both pitched as possible fighting areas. Recognizing the danger and logistical trouble of those ideas, they eventually settled upon the now famous chain link octagon, which was practical for containing the fighters and allowing easy filming, while also stirring images of back alley fights.¹⁸

The group encountered more challenges when seeking fighters for UFC 1; recruiting eight fighters from different disciplines for an unheard of no-holds-barred tournament proved to be difficult. It was particularly difficult to find a top-ranked boxer that was willing to risk so much just to have a chance to win the grand prize of \$50,000.¹⁹ Eventually, Davie and Rorion were able to fill the roster and even get top ranked boxer Art Jimmerson, after promising him a \$20,000 appearance fee. After seeing the first two bloody and violent fights of the night, Jimmerson, who was only wearing one boxing glove, quickly tapped out during his fight with Royce Gracie before he could even attempt a submission.²⁰ Royce was chosen by Rorion to represent Gracie BJJ because he was not the obvious choice. Rickson Gracie was the champion of the family, but Rorion thought that Royce, who was smaller, would better display the strengths of BJJ as a martial art, rather than the abilities of a good fighter.²¹ Another notable entry was Zane

Frazier, who was chosen because Rorion saw him beat up Frank Dux, the inspiration for Jean Claude Van Damme's movie *Bloodsport*, at a local karate tournament. The tournament also featured a Pancrase fighter named Ken Shamrock whose importance in the world and subculture of MMA will be discussed below. Unable to get top-flight fighters with the small payout and high-risk format, mediocre kick boxers, karate fighters, Kung-Fu artists, Kenpo fighters, and a sumo wrestler filled out the rest of the roster.²²

For the fighters and the martial arts community, this was an opportunity to test one martial art against another. For the average fan in attendance or watching on pay-per-view, the appeal revolved around seeing blood and violence. Davie recognized this appeal and decided to focus on promoting the inherently violent appearance. Not wanting to break the illusion that the fights could possibly go to the death, Davie decided that the fight would not be stopped even if the minimal rules were broken. Only biting and eye gouging were prohibited, which would draw a \$1000 fine, paid to the victim.²³

Nevertheless, UFC 1 was marketed with the slogan, "there are no rules." The most basic definitions of a sport, put forward by Guttmann and Elias & Dunning, explicitly state that at the core of sport are rules. Indeed, the event was not seen as a sport by any involved or watching. No-holds-barred fighting can be defined in Guttmann's most basic form of sport, as a physical contest.²⁴ However, it fails to register a single characteristic of modern sport. Kimo demonstrated that there was a lack of secularism within the activity. Equality was absent with the lack of weight classes and rules pertaining to equipment use, such as gloves. Most fighters were not professionals, often working other jobs and not training their martial art full time, therefore, the competition lacked specialization. Rules were not consistent within or between organizations,

removing the rationalization of no-hold-barred fighting. The bureaucratization and sanctioning of fighting only appeared close to a decade after its inception. Lastly, with the removal of rounds that provided a measure of length of the fight as well as a lack of judges, quantification and recording of records were absent. Elias & Dunning state that sport is, “fought out according to known rules, if physical force is allowed at all, rules that define the permitted limits of violence.”²⁵ In other words, in order for an activity that contains violence to be recognized as a sport, it must have rules governing and controlling such violence. When examining no-holds-barred fighting, it is obvious that the attention-seeking slogan of “there are no rules” was designed as a promotional tool. However, it was also only partially true as there have always been some rules. They were often not enforced or poorly enforced during this time. It is quite apparent that with the focus of no-holds-barred fighting on excessive violence and lack of rules, it would not qualify as a sport. Furthermore, no-holds-barred fighting during this time is seen as uncivilized. It is uncivilized because it has yet to undergo a civilizing process. The civilizing of society or a subculture, is identified as part of the sportization process. With the focus of no-holds-barred fighting so heavy on violence, the activity is seen as uncivilized and therefore, not a sport. The civilizing of MMA as part of its sportization process will be detailed below. It was several years before the sportization process began to alter no-holds-barred fighting into mixed martial arts and, thus, a sport.

For Rorion, the UFC was an opportunity to show the world the superiority of Gracie BJJ and, for Davie and SEG. It was a chance to make significant profits from the violence-loving 18 to 34 year old male market. Although the initial pitch of the UFC was a style vs. style tournament, SEG and Davie quickly realized that it was of little interest

to the average fan. Violence was the main attractor and, after UFC 1, they redirected the focus of a style vs. style contest.²⁶

What the UFC did was not completely unprecedented. Going back to the 1960s, there have been famous events that would qualify today as MMA or no-holds-barred. Paul Smith, who will be further discussed in regards to his role in the sanctioning of MMA, recalls competing in no-holds-barred matches in the 1980s. These illegal fights, also known as ‘toughman’ contests, were often set up by wealthy businessmen in bars or warehouses and were mostly filled with barroom brawlers.²⁷ As well, the idea of testing one form of martial art against another had also been staged previously. The most famous of these was the fight between the professional Japanese wrestler, Antonio Inoki, and Muhammad Ali. The fight was originally supposed to be a fix, a match with a predetermined outcome, with Ali losing. However, Ali pulled out of the fix, not wanting to lose. The fight ended up consisting of Inoki lying on his back in the middle of the ring, kicking the legs of Ali for fifteen rounds.²⁸ The idea of a no-holds-barred tournament with martial artists from different disciplines was not unprecedented, but the scale and presentation of UFC 1 was previously unseen. Having eight fighters from different disciplines, with no rules or set time limit, all live on pay-per-view separated the UFC from the no-holds-barred fights being held in bars and empty warehouses.

As the fights began on November 12, 1993, most fans still accepted the preconceived notion of fighting. The man who was bigger, faster, stronger, and could best imitate Bruce Lee style strikes would win.²⁹ This was all part of the Gracie’s plan. Royce was the smallest man in the tournament and the only one besides Shamrock who knew submission techniques. As the fights started, most were bloody and violent matches, such

as the Tuli vs. Gordeau fight detailed in the first chapter. However, Royce's and Shamrock's fights left the audience confused. Not understanding the concept and use of submissions, the audience was left bored and angered. The audience was actually booed Shamrock after his first victory because his fight was viewed as boring, despite the fact that he had broken his opponent's ankle.³⁰ Similarly, when Gracie and Shamrock fought in the semi-final, it was an excellent display of grappling, yet neither the audience nor the referee understood what was happening. Shamrock tapped out due to a rear naked choke, but the referee never saw it, leaving Shamrock to admit his defeat.³¹ In the final match of the night, the untouched Royce fought Gordeau, who had a broken hand, broken foot, and two of Tuli's teeth embedded in his foot. The submission fighting left Gracie healthy, while the violent and bloody striking left Gordeau very injured. Once again, Gracie took his opponent down easily and submitted him, but not before Gordeau bit Gracie's ear in a last act of defiance.³² The event was everything that the organizers wanted. Rorion and the Gracies were able to show the effectiveness of Gracie BJJ. Easily dominating the tournament, the Gracies could now say that they had the most effective martial art. The show also sold 86,000 pay-per-views despite television-based advertising, a success for Davie and SEG.³³

UFC 1 had two major effects: it was a shock to the martial arts community and Davie and SEG changed the UFC's marketing strategy. Following the decisive victory of Gracie and BJJ, the martial arts community was angry and defensive. An article in *Black Belt* magazine, which was one of the top martial art magazines in the early and mid-1990s, stated that any karate, kung fu, or taekwondo master could easily dismantle Gracie with their respective arts traditional technique.³⁴ Gracie had shown overnight that the

flashy and exotic martial arts simply did not work. The established system of martial arts training, one that grew out of the karate and kung fu movie fads, was being challenged. It was going to cost the traditional martial arts community significant profit. Karate practitioners also complained that there were too many rules, stating that they were trained in groining strikes and not allowing them was a disadvantage. In response to these criticisms, Davie changed the rules for UFC 2, allowing testicle strikes and removing the 5 minute rounds as no fight in the first UFC lasted that long.³⁵ Additionally, Davie was flooded with 246 applications for the next event. Davie now had the ability to turn down people who he thought were not good enough or seemed too incredible to be real, such as the individuals claiming to have “death touches.” Davie also increased the tournament size to 16 fighters; the first round was not televised.³⁶ Despite the changes and addressing the complaints, the traditional martial arts community was still not happy, as Royce once again submitted his way to victory in UFC 2. The style vs. style debate and competition was very important to the fighters and martial arts community. However, it was less so to the average fan. Davie’s market research showed that only 27% of the audiences were martial artists.³⁷ SEG and Davie recognized this fact and changed the focus of their event promotions accordingly, to address the fans’ demand for more interesting characters and greater violence. The dual role of audience and performer began to appear in no-holds-barred fighting. The audience demanded more violence and entertaining characters, sparking further changes within the event. With the performers increasing the degree and presentation of violence and the audience consuming it, the actors and audience began to fill their roles within a spectacle.³⁸ The approach of creating a violence-based spectacle

by SEG and other promoters drove the marketing and general direction of no-holds-barred fighting for many years.

SEG and Davie wanted to ensure that UFC was different from the many kickboxing and karate tournaments, which was a major factor that led to a unique marketing strategy. By stating that “there are no rules” or “two men enter, one man leaves,” it was different from the highly structured martial arts of the time. As well, SEG felt that it was able to reach a larger audience by selling the blood, guts, and fear aspect, rather than a challenge featuring various martial arts disciplines. Campbell McLaren, the man who came up with the “there are no rules” slogan also stated in a press release that “each match will run till there is a designated winner – by means of knockout, surrender, doctor’s intervention, or death.”³⁹ The press embraced the death angle and began to vilify McLaren and the UFC. However, in the short term, the attention the UFC received for this statement helped, as the UFC’s pay-per-view had a 50% buy-rate increase.⁴⁰ There was no history to draw from; this was something completely new at this level and scale and, therefore, the UFC had very few other options for marketing. MMA great Monte Cox understood the rationale of SEG, “It’s easy to jump on SEG and say they did a lot of wrong things, SEG was faced with a product, nobody knew what it was. They opted to go for the sensationalism... and it worked. They got up to 500000 pay-per-view buys.”⁴¹ Using a similar logic, Davie’s fighter selection for the first several events focused more on fighters with large personalities than fighting ability. Davie felt that in order to bring the UFC to the next level, it needed the type of performers seen in professional wrestling. Davie wanted marketable stars that could sell the sport to the masses, such as Kimo Leopoldo and Tank Abbott.⁴² For his first fight in the UFC, Kimo walked to the octagon

carrying a large wooden cross on his back, before dropping to his knees and praying in front of the stunned audience. Tank Abbott was the personification of a stereotypical bar fighter, with a potbelly, shaved head, and goatee, calling himself the anti-martial artist. Besides minimal training in boxing, Abbott's fighting experience was all in the streets.⁴³ Abbott was loud, crass, and a hit with the fans. His unique charisma and his violent fighting style made him the perfect draw for Davie and SEG.⁴⁴ During these early years, the motivation for each group within no-holds-barred fighting and the UFC was drastically different. SEG and Davie were completely focused on profit and increasing market size by any means necessary. This reckless marketing strategy eventually caused significant harm to the sport and organizations for years to come. The fighters, themselves, who cared little of the organizations' motivation, were more interested in proving their disciplines' worth, as well as their own. Furthermore, the majority of fans were interested in exciting and violent fights, as opposed to determining which fighting style was the most effective. In this way, the three actors within the spectacle of the early UFC each had different motivations. However, over the next twenty years, these motivations continually changed for all actors involved.

Ken Shamrock was the only man who was able to match Royce Gracie's grappling at UFC 1. Growing up, in and out of jail and the foster system, Shamrock was fighting in tough man contests at the age of 19. To keep Ken out of trouble, his adopted father, Bob Shamrock, recommended professional wrestling. Shortly after beginning his career in North Carolina, Shamrock was recommended to try out for the shoot-style wrestling of the Universal Wrestling Federation (UWF) in Japan. Shoot wrestling consists of matches that are not predetermined, as the winner and course of the match are

not planned in advance. At the tryout, Shamrock was put through a grueling test that he eventually put his own students through.⁴⁵ At the UWF, Shamrock learned submissions and grappling from Minoru Suzuki and Masakatsu Funaki. Eventually, Suzuki and Funaki broke away from the UWF to form an organization that followed traditional professional wrestling rules but without any fixed matches; they named it Pancrase. Shamrock eventually became the King of Pancrase, the title given to the top fighter at a given event.⁴⁶

Following Shamrock's loss to Gracie at UFC 1, he realized that he needed training partners in America. Along with support from his father, Ken opened up the Lion's Den submission fighting school.⁴⁷ At the Lion's Den, Shamrock trained young fighters in submissions, in order to network and develop training partners. He also hoped to develop talented fighters for Pancrase. If a member of the gym was able to last a year, Shamrock sent them to Japan to fight for Pancrase. The Japanese audience greatly admired American fighters.⁴⁸ However, very few who ever trained at the gym lasted that long. Taking what he learned at his UWF tryout, Shamrock put prospective members through similar experiences. The tryouts were a grueling, daylong event of sparring, running, and various other exercises. Shamrock stated that the goal of the tryout was not to determine fighting ability, as he was capable of teaching those skills over time, but "to test their heart, their soul, and their capacity for pain."⁴⁹ Only one of every twenty men who tried out lasted through the day.⁵⁰ The Lion's Den did not get easier after the tryout. Shamrock set up his gym in an old warehouse without any running water, and mats were laid out on a concrete floor. During practice, fighters choked each other to unconsciousness regularly. It was a physically and mentality violent place.⁵¹ Brutality and

overtraining were the corner stones of Shamrock's philosophy. Furthermore, Shamrock took complete control of the fighters' lives, members of the gym all live in the same house, paid for by Shamrock. Shamrock paid for the fighters' room and board, but controlled the scheduling of their lives, from when to eat and when to workout, to when they were permitted to have fun.⁵² This approach to training did secure short-term achievements, as many of his fighters were successful in Pancrase and the UFC. However, for the individual fighters, it was short-lived. Following Shamrock's aggressive and violent training, most fighters had short careers either due to burnout or injury.⁵³ Eventually, the Lion's Den came to an end in the late 1990s, when Shamrock was fired from Pancrase and joined the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), leaving behind the Lion's Den. As well, the sport of MMA was entering a period known as the "dark ages," which put a financial strain on gyms and fighters. The dark ages will be further discussed below. However, the Lion's Den was pivotal in the creation of MMA as a sport. It was the first gym to train fighters as mixed martial artists, rather than one specific discipline. Shamrock created the prototypical MMA gym. While MMA gyms of today are not nearly as harsh, this was the beginning of martial art gyms dedicated towards MMA. Furthermore, Shamrock created an enclave of individuals who were purely focused on MMA. These fighters trained full-time and lived together in a space dedicated for the singular purpose of fighting. Although the Lion's Den was extreme and harmful to the participants, it was nevertheless the beginning of the MMA subculture.

UFC 2 experienced the first in a long series of political backlashes that continues to haunt no-holds-barred fighting, MMA, and the UFC to this day. The mayor of Denver pulled the UFC's permit for the use of an 8,000-seat auditorium, forcing the UFC to

move to the deceptively named 3000-seat Mammoth Arena. As a result, a motel across the street was turned into dressing rooms. Alternate fighter Fred Ettish stated that the motel was full of prostitutes and drug dealers, and most of the doors to the rooms did not lock or even close.⁵⁴ The use of this motel by the UFC at its second events demonstrates that the UFC and sport of no-holds-barred fighting was already beginning to enter the world of criminality and deviance as a reaction to political pressure.

As previously discussed, Davie decided to drop the idea of style vs. style competition for UFC 3, instead promoting the event as a ‘reality fighting contest’ with a professional wrestling spin.⁵⁵ The professional wrestling strategy was very apparent as SEG marketed the event as Gracie vs. Shamrock, the champion vs. the challenger. However, due to the random draw nature of the event, the two men were on opposite sides of the bracket. Both men had grueling fights. Gracie suffered from hypoglycemia before the semi-final match, leading to a temporary loss of vision, ultimately forcing his corner to throw in the towel before the fight started.⁵⁶ Equally, Shamrock was so exhausted from his semi-final match that he refused to fight in the final. This led to alternate fighter Steven Jennum replacing Shamrock and winning the championship, having only fought once that night.⁵⁷ As well, the aforementioned Kimo appeared at UFC 3, as well as 600-pound sumo wrestler, Manny Yarbrough. Furthermore, during the pay-per-view introduction, the “laws of the octagon” stated that there were no rounds, no time limit, and no way out.⁵⁸ Similar to McLaren’s press release, statements like these were beneficial in the short term, but eventually hurt the organization and the sport in the future. However, a benefit to fighter safety and step towards sportization was created at UFC 3. Referee “Big” John McCarthy was now allowed to stop fights using his own

discretion. Previously, only fighters or a fighter's corner were able to stop a fight.⁵⁹

Although the referee's power to stop a fight was present in most other forms of combative sport, this was the first step towards athlete safety, a central element of sportization.⁶⁰

Political Resistance Against MMA

Seeing the success of the UFC, many other individuals attempted to latch onto the budding no-holds-barred fighting scene. Most of these other events were small, illegal, and surrounded with criminality. Jeremy Horn and John Lober recall experiences of the world of early deviant no-holds-barred fighting, from both the perspectives of fighter and promoter. Horn recalls being asked by a promoter to fight in a no-holds-barred event. He was told that it was a trial for something larger. When Horn arrived at the venue, he found out that it was simply a warehouse with twenty-by-twenty feet judo mats laid out. Old couches surrounded the outside of the ring for spectators. The ring was also surrounded by six men with kicking shields, large padded shields to practice kicking, forming a wall on the outside of the mats if the fighters were getting too close. Horn was paid nothing for his victory and there was not a larger event. The promoter had lied about it being a trial.⁶¹ On the other side of this relationship, Lober held events called West Coast No-holds-barred Fighting Championship in a vacant bar in Compton, California. At the time, no-holds-barred fighting was illegal in California. However, Lober stated that he was simply filming a movie and not staging illegal fights, so the event, filled with fight fans and female porn stars, organized to play up the sex and violence angle, was allowed to continue.⁶²

These non-UFC no-holds-barred promotions were not always as small as described by Lober and Horn. However, they were often met with political pressures or criminal elements, as in the case of the International Fighting Championship (IFC) and Extreme Fighting (EF). Owner of EF, Donald Zuckerman, and organizer, John Perretti, decided to hold EF 2 on a Quebec Native reserve to avoid dealing with the American court system. The Mohawk Council was in full support of EF. However, the Quebec media picked up the story and focused heavily on the violence of no-holds-barred fighting. No-holds-barred fighting had previously taken place on Quebec Native reserves, though not to this scale, and not by an American organization. EF was met with pressure from the Quebec government and the UFC. Immigration officials refused entry to many fighters, producers, cameramen, directors, and other support staff. Furthermore, the police threatened to arrest the Canadian crew that Zuckerman hired to replace those who were refused at the border, and they soon quit. The UFC also paid fighters who were slated to appear at EF 2, not to fight, and attempted to rent the same venue for the same night.⁶³ The troubles continued as the Quebec government banned Bell Canada from carrying the signal for the pay-per-view portion of the event, forcing Zuckerman to hire an AT&T link up truck from the United States to drive 200 miles to cover the venue. In addition, the provincial police, who had no authority on the reserve, attempted to stop people from entering, which eventually did influence fighter Orlando Weit into returning to the Netherlands instead of fighting.⁶⁴ Still, the event was successful, though police raided the hotel at which the fighters were staying that night, arresting eight in total. Hearing the news, Perretti returned to Quebec and turned himself in with the arrested fighters. Zuckerman worked out a plea-agreement in which none of the fighters were

charged and all Zuckerman had to do was sign a letter of apology. Quebec politicians wanted to make a loud statement in not allowing no-holds-barred fighting in their province. This became a common theme in the political struggles of the sport.⁶⁵

Similar to EF, the IFC held its first event in Ukraine to avoid the mounting political pressure in the United States. The International Professional Kickboxing League in Ukraine contacted Buddy Albin, who formerly worked for the UFC (and was eventually determined to be a con man) asking him to run an MMA event. Albin brought along his friend, Andy Anderson, and his acquaintance, Howard Petschler. Albin was able to convince Petschler to help him by stating that he owned the international rights to the UFC, which he did not, and would be able to bring UFC superstars Tank Abbott and Oleg Taktarov, which he also could not.⁶⁶ When Petschler arrived in Ukraine, he was not met by customs agents but, rather, mafia members who allowed him to pass right through. Petschler and the fighters stayed in the old Ukrainian Olympic Training Centre that had been converted into a hotel, which was surrounded by high concrete walls and armed guards. Petschler and the fighters were escorted around by armed bodyguards, for fear of being kidnapped by rival mafias. Three days before the event, Buddy was contacted by SEG and was told to change the name of the event or they would be sued. Albin's scam was unraveling and he was forced to change the "Ultimate" to "International." This forced the IFC to paint over the fighting surface canvas, as it was already printed with "ultimate fighting championship." The fights went as planned, with minimal disturbance. In fact, Anderson was told that the event went so well that they were not allowed to leave the next day. Some of the fighters had their passports confiscated and the mafia attempted to force them to stay and fight again.⁶⁷ As Anderson

and various fighters bribed their way past the armed guards to escape the country, Petschler stayed behind to finish the editing of the video recordings.⁶⁸ The selling of tapes was a major source of income in the early days of no-holds-barred fighting, so leaving without them would have been a major loss. Lawyers for the mafia seized the tapes in the middle of Petschler's editing; fortunately he kept backup copies in his hotel room. Knowing the mafia-controlled customs agents were looking for the videotapes, Petschler dropped them off at a Federal Express (FedEx) courier outlet before leaving the country. The mafia informed customs agents that Petschler was attempting to smuggle out footage of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster site. The tapes were being held at the Kiev FedEx location and not being shipped, so Petschler decided to return to Kiev with the support of a rival mafia to provide transportation and security. After Petschler was able to retrieve the tapes from the FedEx store, he escaped Kiev by hiding in a concealed compartment in an overnight train to Odessa. In Odessa, Petschler met a Moldavian army General who agreed to take the tapes to Romania and ship them back to the United States. Petschler eventually made it back to United States with the tapes and continued organizing events with the IFC.⁶⁹

This unusual series of events that seem more like a Hollywood action movie than a fledgling sport enterprise, illustrate the level of criminality in the world of MMA at the time. The political pressures that forced events out of the United States and the con men like Albin who were major players in the MMA scene forced the sport to extreme levels of deviance and criminality in the mid-1990s. Albin also stole all of the pre-sale ticket revenue of IFC 2 in Mississippi, leading to many fighters receiving half of the agreed upon pay. Albin has also been accused of fixing the match between Oleg Taktarov vs.

Anthony Macias at UFC 6.⁷⁰ The illegal actions and associations with criminal elements labeled the individuals of no-holds-barred fighting as part of a deviant sporting subculture; no longer were fighters considered semi-deviant.⁷¹ No-holds-barred fighting had transgressed beyond social norms to the extent that it was entering criminal and deviant behaviour. The political pressure that sought to eliminate fighting and the response of promoters to attempt to escape such pressure led to increased deviant behaviours.

As the IFC and EF were underwent their own respective struggles, so too was the UFC. The main cause of the legal problems was Senator John McCain, the most vocal and powerful critic of the no-holds-barred fighting and the UFC. Prior to UFC 6, McCain wrote letters to all of the state governors asking them to ban the sport. As well, McCain appeared on television attacking the sport's lack of referees, rules, and high death rate, none of which was accurate.⁷² McCain had ulterior motives. He was a former boxer himself and large supporter of boxing. As well, his wife was the heir to the company in charge of distribution for Budweiser/Anheuser-Busch, which was one of boxing's largest sponsors.⁷³ No-holds-barred fighting was directly cutting into boxing's pay-per-view revenue and market share of combative sports. No-holds-barred fighting was threatening boxing's hold as top form of combative sport.⁷⁴ Boxing had also conditioned the public into accepting a singular idea of safe fighting. Boxing had established the standard tension equilibrium for combative sport. Society was used to longer fights, shorter rounds, no kicking, no ground fighting, and standing eight-counts for knockouts. MMA did not follow this format and, thus, broke the understood tension equilibrium of North American combative sports. American society was conditioned into thinking that only

techniques that were accepted in boxing were safe. Society had no concept of ground fighting. The idea of hitting someone on the ground was seen as extremely brutal because it was not allowed in boxing and, therefore, it must be dangerous. However, physiological evidence contrarily indicated that a striker is capable of producing much more power from a standing punch than from the grounded position.⁷⁵ Many critics called for the fights to take place in boxing rings instead of the cage, again thinking this was somehow safer, even though it created situations wherein fighters fell out of the ring during ground fighting. Many MMA organizations do fight in boxing rings, especially in Japan. However, extra referees on the outside of the ring and stoppages during the fight are required to ensure that fighters do not fall through or underneath the ropes. As well, society was and still is conditioned into thinking that gloves are safer than bare knuckles. Gloves are designed to allow a striker to punch harder and more often without the risk of breaking one's hand or wrist. They provide little protection to the head of the individual being punched. In the first several UFC events, broken hands were common and knockouts were rare without gloves. The number of knockouts drastically increased when gloves were introduced to MMA.⁷⁶ There have only been two deaths in regulated MMA bouts, the first in 2007 and the second in 2010 and zero deaths in North American no-holds-barred fighting.⁷⁷ Boxing has a long history of deaths in the ring and McCain himself was in attendance a boxing match where a fighter was killed.⁷⁸ There is great inherent danger in MMA. However, despite arguments from both boxing and MMA supporters, the level of danger and risk in both sports are most likely very similar.⁷⁹

Despite the flaws in McCain's arguments and lack of knowledge of the sport, he was very successful in obstructing, and forcing changes to, the sport. At UFC 6, the

promoters succumbed to pressure and fighters were mandated to wear gloves.⁸⁰ From that point forward, the political pressure and UFC's reaction to such pressure of continual rule changes only increased. SEG was in a Puerto Rican court the day of UFC 8, fighting to allow the event to proceed that night. The UFC was able to carry on and run UFC 8 in Bayamón, Puerto Rico. However, MMA was banned from the territory shortly after.⁸¹ MMA was banned in a country that to this day allows cock fighting - "human cock fighting" as critics liked to call MMA was forbidden.⁸² For the next UFC event in Detroit, the city cited a law from 1869 that banned prizefighting and thus no-holds-barred fighting. The UFC once again went to court. The court ruled that head butts and closed fist strikes were forbidden. The UFC told the fighters that using such strikes only resulted in a \$50 fine and gave permission to fight as usual.⁸³ However this ruling did have an effect. Superstar Ken Shamrock almost pulled out of the event, not wanting to test the law. The EF Quebec incident happened just a week prior with eight fighters arrested so Shamrock, who spent much of his adolescence in and out of prison, was rightfully worried. His fight with wrestling superstar Dan Severn was dubbed the "great dance" as neither fighter made a move for the first 15 minutes of the fight. The next event experienced a 25% decrease in pay-per-view buy rate.⁸⁴

UFC 7 was held in Buffalo, New York. It was the last major MMA event to take place in New York State. Three months after UFC 7, on December 6, 1995 McCain debated the grossly ill-prepared Meyrowitz and Ken Shamrock about MMA on Larry King Live. By this time, no-holds-barred fighting was banned in 36 states and, without a regulatory body, it was an easy target for politicians.⁸⁵ Without sanctioning like boxing had with state athletic and boxing commissions, MMA did not have any political

protection. This lack of regulation drove the sport into the dark ages, as it increasingly became more difficult to hold events without the protection of commissions. New York State, and specifically New York City became a battleground in the failing fight for legalization of MMA in the mid-1990s. Zuckerman of EF was struggling to garner attention for his event that he was planning for Brooklyn, New York. This led to Zuckerman deciding to protest himself. During a press conference in front of city hall with State Senator Roy Goodman, Zuckerman paid people to protest against EF and no-holds-barred fighting. Zuckerman thought that this was a good way to build controversy and attention for his event. However, it received far more attention than he imagined. Governor George Pataki, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and Senator Goodman worked together to pull the permit for the event venue. Zuckerman sued and won to get the permit reinstated but, due to the automatic appeals system, the final ruling was going to happen after the event. Zuckerman was forced to move the entire event to North Carolina in thirty-six hours.⁸⁶

On October 30, Governor Pataki signed into law a ruling that placed “combative sports” under control of the New York State Athletic Commission. SEG thought it had won and that the lobbying by James Featherstonhaugh was effective. SEG announced plans to hold an event in Niagara Falls. Zuckerman announced an event for Manhattan to take place a month after the UFC’s Niagara Falls show. Zuckerman had no intention of actually holding an event and simply wanted free publicity. Zuckerman’s stunt drew the wrath and anger of state and city officials. UFC officials knew they could not march into Manhattan and hold an event at Madison Square Garden. The UFC needed to work its way into the city by starting in up-state New York. Zuckerman did not think like this and

thus increased the speed and degree of the government reaction towards MMA.⁸⁷ A few days before the Niagara Falls event, the *New York Times* contacted Meyrowitz, asking for his opinion about the new set of rules the commission released. The commission sent the *New York Times* the new rulebook for MMA, but did not send one to the UFC.

Meyrowitz had to ask for the *Times* copy. The new rules required fighters to wear head gear (protective helmets), prohibited kicks above the shoulders, the 30 foot octagon now had to be 40 feet wide, and Meyrowitz was told the rules could still be further altered at any time. This was a blatant attempt by the commission and the government to hinder and stop no-holds-barred fighting and the UFC until the law that legalized “combative sport” could be repealed. SEG attempted to sue the state. However, with just days before the event, the UFC followed EF example and decided to move the event from New York to Alabama in less than twenty-four hours.⁸⁸

No-holds-barred fighting organizations had failed to secure their activity as a total institution. A total institution allows the organization to publicly frame violence within its activity as noncriminal and socially unthreatening. No-holds-barred fighting failed to display itself in this manner, choosing a marketing strategy celebrating extreme violence. Furthermore, organizations like the UFC had failed to maintain control associated notions of deviance related to the sport. Promotions were no longer defining what was deviant within their events and the government was altering and changing the rules to limit and control what was allowed. As well, the IFC and EF examples demonstrated the inability of no-holds-barred fighting organizations to remove criminality and social deviance from within their practices. Lastly, MMA promotions failed to demonstrate that they were responsible stewards of deviance within their organizations. By emphasizing the

excessive violence of the sport, they failed to promote aspects the violence in no-holds-barred fighting as positive or wanted.⁸⁹ No-holds-barred fighting failed to establish violence in a positive manner and failed to maintain control of how violence was employed within the activity. No-holds-barred fighting lost its claim as a total institution, unlike every other North American contact sport. This furthered the public opinion that no-holds-barred fighting was deviant. As well, it further delayed the sportization process.

The Dark Ages

In 1997, McCain was appointed chair of the Senate commerce committee, the governing body that oversees the cable television industry. This gave McCain significantly more power in his crusade against MMA and MMA on television. Furthermore, the president of the National Cable Television Association sent out warnings to all cable providers that supporting the UFC and MMA would limit the cable industry's influence in Washington. Dropping the UFC and MMA was a small sacrifice to the cable industry if it allowed them to continue with the larger draws of professional wrestling and pornography, two of the biggest revenue streams on pay-per-view.⁹⁰ While MMA arrived at the perfect time with scandals affecting the popularity of professional boxing and wrestling, it also arrived in a time of crackdown on violence and lewd programming. Nicholas Sammond referred to this as the political protection of children. It was an attempt to protect the morals of American youth from the perceived harm of television.⁹¹ Pay-per-view companies were under increasing pressure to reduce the violence and sex on their programming and MMA was simply the easiest facet to remove in order to appease critics like McCain.⁹²

The UFC and other promoters had shown that banning the sport from a given state did not stop it from being broadcasted there. Both the UFC and EF had shown they were capable of moving the location of a show while still broadcasting the event on pay-per-view and, therefore, attacking the ability to broadcast the fights over pay-per-view was the most effective way of stopping no-holds-barred fighting.⁹³ The first major cable company to drop all MMA was TCI, stating it was to protect children from violence. The company still aired professional wrestling, boxing, and violent movies. Shortly after, Time Warner, Request, Cablevision, Viewer's Choice, and numerous smaller providers followed suit, dropping all MMA events from their rosters. SEG attempted to react, making six-ounce gloves mandatory, prohibited head butts and groins strikes. However, it was not enough to change the cable companies' decisions. There was no longer any ability to broadcast MMA to the entire nation. This drastically affected organizations' abilities to exist. Many organizations closed, and many fighters either left North America to fight in Japan where MMA was significantly more popular and profitable, or moved to professional wrestling organizations.⁹⁴ Despite additions of the sportization process, the adding of safety equipment and removing dangerous strikes, the sport was not adapting. It was entering a downward oscillation of popularity due to the initial marketing strategy that over-promoted violence. The presence and presentation of violence in the sport of MMA resulted in severe and unprecedented levels of government interference. No longer were particular actions within the sport being seen as quasi-criminal or criminal but, rather, the entire sport now qualified as such in the majority of the North America. Part of this government influence was driven by ignorance of officials. Many lawmakers knew little of the sport and simply reacted to headlines and posters. However, this ignorance is

a direct result of the harmful marketing strategies of the UFC and other organizations. MMA promotions proudly proclaimed how violent, bloody, and dangerous the sport was and eventually lawmakers began to agree. This strategy helped launch the sport and gain popularity in the short term. However, it doomed the sport in the future. For six years the sport suffered, while its promoters attempted to rebuild and evolve away from the mid-1990s MMA reputation. The sport was entering into a time period that is commonly referred to as the dark ages. The dark ages lasted between 1997 and 2002 and are defined by a drastic decrease in popularity, profit, and legality, but also by the greatest degree of subcultural growth and sportization.

No-holds-barred fighting was reeling in the late 1990s. The continued political pressure drove it to a state of absolute deviance. It was either illegal or at best unregulated in every state in America. Furthermore, being removed from pay-per-view combined with very limited locations to hold events removed any monetary attraction from the sport. Before the dark ages, no-holds-barred fighting was very popular with amateur wrestlers. There was no opportunity to make a living wage in amateur wrestling, even at the elite and Olympic level. No-holds-barred fighting finally provided wrestlers an opportunity to use their skills and talent to make a living.⁹⁵ However, as the sport entered the dark ages, the ability for fighters to make money was no longer available. Event prizes were dwindling and contracts were being broken, as fight promotions were simply unable to pay fighters.⁹⁶ Most of the stars of the UFC and other top promotions left for professional wrestling in the case of Dan Severn, Ken Shamrock, and Tank Abbott, or left to fight in Japan where the sport was very popular and without government interference.

A promotion based in Japan called Pride, which started on October 11, 1997 became the largest MMA promotion in the world for several years. Broadcasted on mainstream Japanese television, Pride was able to pay its fighters hundreds of thousands of dollars, allowing it to take in the best talent from around the world. Pride had a different philosophy than the UFC. Fighters' win-loss records did not matter, only providing entertainment was important. Furthermore, Pride focused very heavily on creating unique and spectacular productions for every event. While the UFC attempted to create spectacle through violence, Pride created spectacle with high production value and professionally-conceived fighter introductions. Violence was not the focus of Pride; entertainment through loud, colourful, unique, and elaborate productions was its focus.⁹⁷

In North America, the individuals who decided to stay with the sport either willingly or were forced to make drastic changes. The two most drastic changes during the dark ages were an increased focus on promoting MMA as a sport, rather than violence spectacle, and formations of individuals into the subculture of MMA. While many fighters worked in different capacities to keep the sport alive during this time, I will focus on and provide examples of those who drove sportization and subculture building.

The no-holds-barred fighting organizations and the individual fighters strove to appear more like a sport, and less like a violent spectacle. A mixture of the continual political pressure that forced reactions in the form of rule additions, changes, a civilizing spurt, and the fighters themselves approaching the sport differently drove sportization. A central tenant to sportization advanced by Guttmann, Elias, Dunning, and Maguire to different degrees, is the necessity for rules, particularly focused on safety. MMA promotions attempted to appease governments and athletic commissions by continually

adding new rules and limiting the types of strikes. During this time, head stomps, kicks to a downed opponent, groin strikes, hair pulling, and punches to the back of the head were all removed from the sport.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the UFC added a second weight class. Fighters below 200 pounds were lightweights and above 200 pounds were heavyweights. As well, the UFC continued to remove the number of fights per fighter in a night by limiting the tournament to four men, and increasing the number of single matches; eventually they removed the tournament entirely.⁹⁹ However, it was not consistent throughout the sport. Smaller organizations changed their rules pertaining to the types of strikes that were allowed on an event-by-event basis, sometimes even notifying fighters minutes before a bout.¹⁰⁰ The core of Elias and Dunning's interpretation of the sportization process states there must be strict and explicit rule creation focused on providing fairness, equal opportunity to win, and controlling of violence. The rule changes during this time period follow the aspects of sportization. Strict rules that resulted in disqualification were created for fighter safety, such as the limiting of strikes mentioned above. Furthermore, the change in focus during the dark ages can be seen as a symptom of a civilizing process within MMA. The pleasure being derived from the spectacle violence in the early days was changing towards experiencing sporting excitement in the dark ages. For both fans and fighters, the attracting elements of MMA during the dark ages were more civilized than before. The pleasure of MMA for both parties was no longer unadulterated violence, rather sporting competition. Elias and Dunning use the example of fox hunt in *Quest for Excitement*, to demonstrate the affect of a civilizing process in transforming an activity into a sport. The focus of fox hunting shifted from deriving pleasure in the personal experience of killing of the fox, to the

pursuit and viewing of the killing by the dogs. The civilizing process in this leisure activity is underpinned by the restraint upon the use of physical force. The experience of doing violence is replaced with the experience of seeing violence done.¹⁰¹ This idea is comparable to the transition seen in MMA during the dark ages. The focus and means of pleasure shifted from the experiencing and viewing of excessive violence towards experiencing and viewing sporting competition. This shift in how enjoyment is created within the sport further indicates that MMA underwent a civilizing process as part of the greater sportization process.

Despite efforts to contain the violence and alter the public appearance of MMA, the UFC and other promotions failed to convince lawmakers, commissions, and cable companies that no-hold-barred fighting was safe. The UFC continued to struggle through the dark ages. The limited location venues and lack of pay-per-view, obstructed opportunities for national growth. The survival of the sport turned towards individuals such as Pat Miletich, Paul Smith, and Randy Couture who aided in furthering the sportization process, and created a unique sporting subculture.

As many fighters abandoned North American no-hold-barred fighting, some decided to stay with the sport and began to form gyms dedicated towards the training of MMA. Similar to Ken Shamrock and his Lion's Den gym, these gyms that formed during the dark ages were specifically focused on MMA, rather than a specific form of martial art. These gyms began to blur the lines between various forms of martial arts, giving fighters knowledge in many fighting styles. Furthermore, they began to focus on cardiovascular conditioning and fighting strategy; this approach towards training was rare in the early days.¹⁰² This became known as cross training, learning and training in

multiple martial arts at the same time. This separated MMA from the traditional martial arts, as fighters no longer identified themselves as boxers, wrestlers, judo players, etc. but rather as mixed martial artist.¹⁰³ This was a massive step in the progression of the MMA subculture, as these gyms that focused on cross training became the centres of the MMA subculture. Being a fighter in one of these gyms created a distinction not only from the general public, but also other martial artist, creating the boundaries to form their subculture. Using Wheaton's post sport subculture theory, one can see how MMA subculture was forming in these locations. Norms, rules, and values of MMA began to form through the individuals that brought their traditional martial arts to these subcultural centres. For example, amateur wrestlers pride themselves in toughness and physically-challenging practices, while the traditional martial arts such as karate and ju-jitsu endorse formal rituals such as bowing and belt advancement. Just as aspects of those combative sports became fixtures in MMA fighting, they also became fixtures in the MMA subculture.¹⁰⁴ Donnelly and Young state that becoming a member of a particular subculture entails the combination of career and identity. For mixed martial artists, their career was defined through the act of fighting, while their identity was being formed through the characteristics of the various martial arts. Within these gyms, identities based off lifestyle, mannerisms, and attitudes were forming through the elements that fighters brought with them from their previous martial arts subcultures.¹⁰⁵ Wheaton also discusses the importance of recognizing the fluidity of subcultures. MMA's subculture during the dark ages was quite fluid. Fighters often left MMA or changed their roles in the subculture either due to injury or financial concerns. Ken Shamrock, creator of the first

MMA gym, left the sport for professional wrestling when profits from MMA began to shrink.¹⁰⁶

Wheaton states that often resistance is over emphasized in subcultural studies. While it is arguable that the growth of the MMA subculture was due to the corresponding political oppression, there are other factors that better explain the growth than a united call to resist. Some fighters may have viewed themselves as resisters against political injustice, such as the cases of John Lober, who enjoyed running illegal shows and Paul Smith.¹⁰⁷ Smith spent much of the dark ages fighting the California government to allow MMA fights, such as finding loopholes in the regulation and holding events on school properties.¹⁰⁸ Eventually Smith was able to achieve MMA sanctioning in California when he argued against critic Al Ducheny. Ducheny argued that the rear naked choke was very dangerous and aimed at banning the technique. Smith pointed out that if the technique was banned it would hurt Los Angeles and San Francisco's chances at the 2012 Olympics bid, as that technique was part of Judo.¹⁰⁹ While resistance might have influenced people like Lober and Smith, maturation of the sport was more likely a cause of subcultural growth. Excessive violence and character fighters such as Tank Abbott were no longer the focus on the sport. Sportization and economic desperation drove those aspects away, leaving only people dedicated to training MMA.

Pat Miletich was a championship winning fighter, winning titles in the UFC and dominating local promotions in the mid-west. Centered in the Quad-cities, a metropolitan area that actually consists of five cities in northwest Illinois and Southeastern Iowa, Miletich is best remembered for the Miletich Fighting System (MFS).¹¹⁰ MFS was a gym that gathered the best fighters in the mid-west and trained them to fight in either the local

Quad City Ultimate scene or UFC. MFS harboured the prototypical dark ages gyms. It brought together Miletich's gym and Jeremy Horn's gym to form one group that provided the best resources for their fighters. MFS was the best known and most successful of these dark ages gyms that were so pivotal in advancing the sportization of MMA.¹¹¹ The subculture of MMA during this time and as a result of these gyms began to focus on MMA as an achievement sport. Through the sportization characteristics of rationalization and increased consistency within MMA, the experience of the sport altered at the personal and subcultural levels.¹¹² The dark ages gyms introduced such sporting elements as cross training, video watching, conditioning, and experimentation of technique to MMA.¹¹³ The multi-directional flow of influence between subculture and sportization is apparent in this relationship. The sportization process brought upon by rationalization and increased consistency to MMA subculture, resulted in increased sporting elements being developed within the subculture.

Smith fought for sanctioning, Miletich created subcultural centres, and Randy Couture attempted to show the sport as something different then the preconceived notion of a 'deadly blood sport'. Couture, who was an elite-level Greco-Roman wrestler before moving into MMA, was used by the UFC as a poster boy for the increasingly sport-oriented promotion. Couture helped promote MMA as a sport. The UFC found it easier to negotiate the political and social terrain with an educated, well-spoken, and legitimate athlete as the face of the organization.¹¹⁴ He began to help the UFC slowly change its image towards a legitimate sport. However, like many fighters before, Couture left the UFC due to a lack of income.¹¹⁵

The subculture of MMA began to shift towards a body culture focused on achievement sport during this time. The focus of fighters changed from the violence-heavy attitude of fighters like Tank Abbott and the technique validation of the Gracies, to a quest for excellence or the ‘ultimate performance.’¹¹⁶ This shift to an increased focus on achievement is evidence of a sportization process altering the subculture of fighters. Conversely, the subculture affected the sportization process through the actions of individuals like Miletich. The changes to the sport during the dark ages demonstrate the reciprocal and multidimensional flow of influences between violence, subculture, and sportization within MMA.

As the sport and promotions were maturing, so too was the small, yet dedicated fan base. The fans that stayed with the sport during the dark ages were also beginning to see it as a sport, and not a violence spectacle.¹¹⁷ The fan base found ways around the government control of the sport through the use of the Internet. The traditional form of media sharing in the early days of no-holds-barred fighting was trading videotapes of fights. Videotapes were either sold or bootlegged and passed between people during this time, increasing and spreading the popularity of the sport. This is why Petschler was willing to risk so much by returning to Kiev to obtain the IFC videotapes. In the late 1990s, with very little video of MMA circulating due to the pay-per-view bans, fans went to the Internet to share experiences and discuss MMA.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, because MMA was ignored by traditional sports media sources until quite recently, websites and blogs became the many sources of media for MMA.¹¹⁹ Fighters themselves used this growth of the online MMA community to find gyms. Gyms were also able to recruit new fighters

all through these online media sources.¹²⁰ The Internet was influential in the growth of MMA subculture and its sportization process.

Criminalized and suffering great financial strain, the dark ages of MMA were the lowest point in the sport's history. It was the point where no-holds-barred fighting became mixed martial arts. On May 15, 1998, at UFC 17, commentator Jeff Blatnick first used the term "mixed martial arts." Blatnick felt that "no-holds-barred" held too much negative connotation and was detrimental to the future of the sport.¹²¹ The sport was still seen as violent and deviant by the public and government. However, significant changes were made during this time with rules focused on safety and less marketing focused on violence. As political and social pressure drove these changes away from deviance and violence, MMA was subsequently undergoing a sportization process. Rules and regularity were increasingly present in MMA events. Furthermore, the individuals who stayed with the sport during this time changed the focus of their occupation, as they no longer saw themselves as the deviant bar fighters but, rather, athletes. This began to change the subculture of MMA from deviant to occupational. Although not for many years was their occupation legal in a majority of regions in North America, the subculture became occupational. As well, the transition from deviant to occupational directly influenced sportization process, as fighters began cross training and approaching fighting as a sport rather than spectacle. As the sportization and reduction in violence drove the transition of the subculture of MMA, the subculture also drove the sportization process.

The next step for MMA promotions and fighters was to gain regulation and sanctioning within North America, with the first opportunities for sanctioning coming from New Jersey and Nevada. Promoters and fighters wanted MMA to be recognized as a

sport. However, they understood that, without formal regulation or a governing body, it would be very difficult to garner such status. SEG formed the short-lived Mixed Martial Arts Council (MMAC) in an attempt to fill the role of a MMA governing body. The goal was to establish rules and procedures to protect MMA from critics.¹²² MMAC was short-lived because official sanctioning in the state of New Jersey was quickly approaching. The IFC was the first organization to run an officially sanctioned event in America. New Jersey State Athletic Control Board Chairman Larry Hazzard, met with IFC's Paul Smith and quickly came to an agreement that Hazzard would sanction MMA if Smith held his next event in New Jersey. Hazzard was a fan and supporter of MMA. Unlike many of the traditional boxing oriented commissions, Hazzard understood the sport and was able to see past the harmful early marketing and recognize the advancements in safety precautions. Shortly after the IFC held a successful event in New Jersey, the UFC held its first sanctioned event with equal success.¹²³

Through the dark ages, SEG continued to feel that pay-per-view was the key to success, and the key to pay-per-view was sanctioning. If MMA could gain sanctioning, it would create opportunities for pay-per-view broadcasting. This led to heavy lobbying by the UFC in the top athletic commission in the country, Nevada. The current part owner of the UFC, Lorenzo Fertitta was a commissioner of the Nevada State Athletic Commission in 1999. Similar to Hazard, Fertitta was a fan of MMA and began practicing ju-jitsu after SEG visited the Nevada commission. However, the accounts of what transpired at the Nevada State Athletic Commission differ between SEG and Fertitta. SEG president's Meyrowitz claimed that he was going to win sanctioning for the sport with a 3-2 vote in favour. Shortly before the vote he was told that this was his only chance at a vote and if it

failed it would doom the company's chances in the future and sanctioning elsewhere. Meyrowitz feared that Commissioner Fertitta had changed his opinion at the last monument, accusing Fertitta of opposing sanctioning in order to lower the price of the UFC so that he could purchase the struggling company at a later date.¹²⁴ Fertitta simply claimed that there was never a vote planned to sanction MMA and it was only on the agenda for discussion. Despite the discrepancies in accounts, MMA was not sanctioned in Nevada while the UFC was under the ownership of SEG. It waited until Fertitta and his brother Frank were owners.

The UFC was struggling financially. It was unable to hold events in large venues, often times unable to provide merchandise to sell at events. The sanction of New Jersey slowly brought back attention and MMA was beginning to be viewed as a sport, rather than a violence spectacle. However, after years of fighting to sustain the sport during the financially tough dark ages, SEG lacked the funds to properly promote and rebuild the sport. The UFC was soon sold to Zuffa, an entertainment company owned by the Fertitta brothers. Dana White became president.

In conclusion, the first eight years of MMA, which can be broken down into the early days and dark ages, demonstrate the influence of violence, subculture, and sportization on the growth of the sport. Due to the unprecedented nature of no-holds-barred fighting, the choice was made to heavily promote the violence of the event. In the short term, this drew attention and led to early success but ultimately led to trouble impediments for the sport. By over promoting violence and allowing excessive violence to happen, MMA lost its sporting right as a total institution. It was no longer in charge of the violence within its own sport. Furthermore, in attempts to escape the political

pressures that sought to remove the violence, MMA was driven into the world of criminality and deviance. EF Quebec, IFC Ukraine, and numerous other illegal and dangerous events occurred because organizers attempted to circumvent the law, which only led to increasing levels of deviance. Only when the sport entered into the dark ages did the focus and level of violence within the sport begin to change. As the sport evolved through the early days and dark ages, the role of violence transformed from the central focus of the sport to a practical tool of fighters.

The success of grapplers like Gracie and the failures of kung fu and karate martial artists in MMA destroyed the preconceived ideas of fighting and combative sports. The traditional martial arts that grew in popularity as a result of martial arts movies were proven to be ineffective against other less flashy styles. As the sport progressed, fighters realized that any singular discipline was less effective compared to the skills of multiple disciplines. This drove the creation of the first community centered around MMA, the Lion's Den, as well as driving the cross training seen in the gyms of dark ages MMA. The dark ages also experienced the reduction of violent spectacle, less focus on violence, changes in fighters and fans, and a maturation of the sport that aided in the creation of MMA subculture. The gyms such as the Miletich Fighting System allowed fighters to bring aspects of their traditional combative sport's cultures to form aspects of the new MMA subculture. MMA became the bastardized version of all martial arts, combining aspects of other martial arts that were practical in competition and beneficial in subculture building.¹²⁵

In the early days of no-holds-barred fighting, there was a considerable lack of rule consistency, as well as concerns about safety. Furthermore, no-holds-barred fighting

lacked many characteristics that would qualify it as a sport under Guttman or Elias and Dunning's classifications. No-holds-barred fighting was not a sport. Only during the dark ages did it begin to transform into MMA and, thus, a sport. Due to political pressures that shrunk venue location availability and removed pay-per-view, MMA was forced to make changes in order to gain legitimacy as a sport. Promoters felt a need to civilize MMA in order to change it into a sport, allowing it to return to larger markets and pay-per-view. Furthermore, the subculture of MMA was approaching it as a sport as cross training, coaching, and strategy planning all became part of its regular practices. It was the reaction of MMA promotions and the efforts of fighters that began MMA's transition into a modern sport.

In the next chapter, discussion will centre on how the sport of MMA was forever changed through the purchasing of the UFC by Zuffa. This action led to a shift in marketing and promoting strategies that created a reality television show called *The Ultimate Fighter*. This television show caused the single greatest change to the sport of MMA. *The Ultimate Fighter* and the preceding events caused by the show produced a shift in the dynamic of the sport's spectacle, subcultural growth and evolution, and the next stage of MMA's sportization.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁴ Ibid, 420.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 431.
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- ¹⁷ Scott Beekman. *Ringside: A History of Professional Wrestling in America*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2006, 131.
- ¹⁸ Snowden, *Total MMA*, 462.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 492.
- ²⁰ Gentry, *No Holds Barred Evolution*, 732. (Tapping out, is a signal of submission in combative sports where a competitor taps their opponent or the ground with their hand to signal they submit and accept defeat.)
- ²¹ Snowden, *Total MMA*, 462.
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- ²⁵ Norbert Elias, and Eric Dunning. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford, OX, UK: B. Blackwell, 1986, 155.
- ²⁶ Kraus & Aita, *Brawl*, 604.
- ²⁷ Gentry, *No Holds Barred Evolution*, 156.
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- ²⁹ Kraus & Aita, *Brawl*, 291.
- ³⁰ Snowden, *Total MMA*, 590.
- ³¹ Ibid, 605. (Note: the rear naked choke is a technique where a fighter, from behind, wraps his arm around the neck of his opponent so that his elbow is underneath the chin. The choker squeezes his arms causing his bicep and forearm to compress the carotid artery, disrupting the flow of blood to the opponent's brain. This causes the person being choked to lose consciousness if the choke is held long enough.)

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- ³³ Snowden, *Total MMA*, 620.
- ³⁴ Gentry, *No Holds Barred Evolution*, 830.
- ³⁵ Snowden, *Total MMA*, 666.
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- ⁵² Ibid, 1064.
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- ⁵⁴ Gentry, *No Holds Barred Evolution*, 871.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, 987.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 1077.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid, 1093.
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Chapter 4: The Zuffa Era

The Beginning of Zuffa

On January 9th, 2001, MMA and the UFC entered the Zuffa era. Boxercise instructor and mixed martial artist manager, Dana White, heard rumors that Bob Meyrowitz was looking to sell the UFC. White contacted his friend Lorenzo Fertitta to see if he was interested in purchasing the struggling company.¹ Recalling the events of the UFC's visit to the Nevada State Athletic Commission in 1999, Meyrowitz claimed that Fertitta purposely sabotaged the sanctioning of MMA in order to lower the price of the company. While this claim cannot be confirmed, Fertitta did eventually purchase the UFC while the company was on the brink of closure, for \$2 million.² Meyrowitz was not initially looking to sell the UFC, rather, he wanted investors. However, Fertitta refused to invest and would only consider buying 100% of the company. Lorenzo, along with his brother Frank, purchased the UFC and created the corporation, Zuffa to run and operate the UFC. The Fertitta brothers named Dana White the president of the UFC, who became the preeminent and controversial face of the organization.³

During the Zuffa era, both the sportization process and the subculture of MMA truly evolved. The dark ages experienced the basic elements of the sportization of MMA. The Zuffa era ushered in the next stage in this process. MMA and specifically the UFC became a mega sport entity like the National Football League or Major League Baseball during this time as a direct result of the actions of Zuffa. As well, the subculture that grew during the dark ages invoked drastic changes to its structure and identity. The MMA subculture was no longer viewed as a niche or fringe as it was during the dark ages. Rather, it was accepted as a mainstream sporting subculture such as football or baseball.

Before MMA achieved these changes, the UFC had to make drastic changes to seemingly every aspect of the organization, starting with the presentation of the events, and organization of the sport. At a meeting between MMA promoters and the state of New Jersey in February 2001, the final rules to govern MMA were determined. They are known as the “Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts.” The rules created nine weight classes, banned the wearing of shoes or the gi (a white robe tied together with a stomach-high belt that is seen in traditional martial arts such as karate or BJJ), and banned the use of knees to exert blows on the ground. The new rules were relatively unchanged from the SEG days, but were now official and universal to the sport, making MMA something that could be regulated.⁴ The actual rules were not important. It was the appearance of formal regulation and oversight from a governing body that altered people’s perceptions of the sport. The rules that the majority of MMA promotions used during the dark ages were more or less the same as the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts. The differentiation was the formalization of such rules. The administrators of Zuffa quickly realized that SEG had faltered in the production quality of UFC events. Due to the financial strain of the nearly five years of operation during the dark ages, SEG failed to increase the production value of UFC events and advertising. One SEG issue was the lack of any merchandise for sale at its events. Zuffa quickly fixed this problem for the first event by providing colour programs and multiple styles of shirts for sale. Zuffa also addressed the lack of videotapes and DVDs in the public. Still without pay-per-view, selling hard copies of videotapes was important to increase the popularity of the sport. Smaller promotions and foreign events could not maintain the supply for the demand of fight tapes, and SEG essentially ignored the tape and DVD market. Zuffa also recognized that SEG had

ignored the entertainment aspects of the UFC events. They attempted to create scaled-down professional wrestling environments by adding lights and laser shows to the production of the events.⁵ Zuffa was focused on following the model of a major professional sports league production. Therefore, extravagance was important in making a strong first impression of the new UFC. This approach was very expensive. Zuffa's second show, UFC 32, cost the company \$2.4 million in losses, more than what the company was originally purchased for.⁶

The cost of changing the UFC was continually increasing as Zuffa and White decided that a total overhaul of the company's public relations and advertising strategy was needed. Zuffa's public relations coordinator stated, "Sports do have rules, and we can't have it just be a barroom brawl like it used to be... We try to give the hardcore fans as few rules as possible, but then again we have to have the rules for it to be recognized as the sport that it is."⁷ Zuffa, like SEG, was struggling to find a balance in the promotion of violence and promotion as a sport, attempting to appease fans and regulators at the same time. Ultimately, Zuffa recognized the need for regulation above all else. The universal sanctioning of MMA became a focus of the UFC early in the Zuffa era, and is still a focus today. By 2007, twenty-three states had sanctioned MMA. Today, all states but New York sanction MMA.⁸ This drive for sanctioning led to the implementation of an aggressive public relations campaign to educate athletic commissions and cable companies about the new UFC. The UFC brought its fighters to cable companies to sign autographs and talk about the sport, attempting to show that the fighters were not back-alley violent criminals, as they were once perceived.⁹ The early years of SEG's ownership of the UFC were defined through hyper-violent marketing and the use of

violence as an attraction for the sport. Marketing shifted away from violence. Zuffa furthered this trend, relying on higher production values and pyrotechnics to aid in entertainment and attracting fans. Furthermore, the violence in MMA was beginning to shift during this time from unwanted deviance to wanted deviance. The techniques of MMA were not changing, as the actions were still the same. However, violence within the cage was being viewed differently. Zuffa was able to slowly change the public's perception of violence within the sport of MMA. Violence was being seen as wanted, but not the main attractor to the sport. Violence was essentially becoming normalized within MMA during the first several years of the Zuffa era. The UFC and other MMA promotions were regaining the ability to control violence within their organization through the sanctioning of MMA. As the sport was becoming regularly sanctioned, MMA organizations were gaining political protection over the use of violence within their sport. These organizations became the primary definers of deviance within their sport. This was made possible through the legal support of state and athletic commissions. Essentially, the legalization and sanctioning of MMA gave the control of a total institution to MMA organizations. Organizations like the UFC were able to frame and present violence in a positive manner, and define levels of deviance within the sport, made possible by gaining the political support and protection of athletic commissions.¹⁰ This resulted in violence, and the reaction to violence, no longer being a major issue and obstacle within the sport.

The public relations campaign was successful. MMA was sanctioned in Nevada and was back on pay-per-view by July 2001. The next step for Zuffa was an aggressive new advertising campaign aimed at bringing back the fans who had left the sport during the dark ages. The focus of the campaign was to advertise in mainstream media sources,

in an attempt to garner attention for UFC 33, on September 28, 2001 in Las Vegas.¹¹ The UFC bought ad space in major magazines like *FHM*, *Maxim*, *Playboy*, *USA Today*, and *Sport Illustrated*. Furthermore, Zuffa brought on the popular Carmen Elektra to be the spokesperson of the UFC. The UFC 33 press conference attracted the attendance of major Hollywood press sources. The mixture of mainstream marketing and the celebrity influence of Carmen Elektra brought the UFC the attention it was seeking. The new UFC was ready for its coming-out party. It attracted massive media attention and it was again live on pay-per-view. Unfortunately for the organizers, the event was a massive failure. The events took place two weeks after the September 11th terrorist attack, which shook the nation. Furthermore, Vitor Belfort, who was fighting in the main event, cut his hand, forcing him to pull out. As well, the Bernard Hopkins vs. Félix Trinidad boxing match was taking place the night after, leading to many pay-per-view fans purchasing that fight instead of the UFC event. Lastly, the fights of the UFC 33 were very boring, with all the main card bouts going to decision. This led to the event extending beyond the pay-per-view time slot and the main event being cut off from pay-per-view buyers halfway through. Fans demanded refunds and, once again, Zuffa's third event lost money.¹² UFC 33 was supposed to be the rebound event for the company and a stage to demonstrate that the new UFC was a mainstream sports organization. Instead, it was one of the most disastrous nights in UFC history. UFC 34, which included excellent fights, was damaged by the events of UFC 33, as it received only half as many pay-per-view buys.¹³ However, UFC 34 was shown on most major American cable companies. Despite the failure of UFC 33, the company was able to continue with its plan.¹⁴

UFC 40 was the marque show Zuffa was looking for since it gained ownership. Despite increasing popularity with the new marketing strategy, the UFC was rapidly losing money. Ken Shamrock had returned to the UFC from the WWE, and was slated to fight Tito Ortiz. This bout was marketed as the new generation, Ortiz, vs. the old generation, as well as a legitimate hate-filled grudge match. Shamrock was the most recognizable fighter in the early days of no-holds-barred fighting, and Ortiz was becoming the new face of the UFC. Ortiz was a fighter with personality and physical talent.¹⁵ Most importantly, this fight had a drama-filled storyline to garner attention. Ortiz and Shamrock genuinely disliked each other. On May 3, 1999, Lion's Den fighter and Shamrock student Guy Mezger fought Tito Ortiz for the second time. Ortiz survived many submission attempts by Mezger before forcing referee John McCarthy to stop the fights due to several strikes to the head of the stunned Mezger. After winning the fight, Ortiz flipped two middle fingers to Shamrock and the rest of Mezger corner before putting on a shirt that read, "Gay Mezger is My Bitch!"¹⁶ This caused pandemonium as both corners and security flooded the cage. Shamrock was angry with the disrespectful Ortiz. However, Ortiz was known as much for his trash talking as he was for his fighting. This natural animosity between the two fighters and Ortiz's trash talking ability began a shift in the style of UFC promotion. The UFC had focused heavily on sportsmanship and respect in the past as a mechanism to change the violent and criminal perceived notion of the sport. However, Shamrock and Ortiz brought drama and theatrics to the promotion of the fight.¹⁷ With so many storylines, the event was a success, selling over 13,000 tickets and 150,000 pay-per-views. Ortiz easily won the fight, punishing the older and slower Shamrock for three rounds. The UFC had a new superstar in Ortiz, and promoters finally

thought they had captured enough attention to finally cement themselves as mainstream and successful. However, they learned that the UFC's popularity was driven through superstars, drama, and staging the fights fans wanted to see. The fight that fans wanted was Ortiz vs. Chuck Liddell. They had to wait nearly two years for that fight.

The UFC was forced to reduce the pyrotechnics and production levels of their events in order to save money. However, the UFC was still promoting WWE-style feuds and creating drama outside the cage. White and UFC did not like this comparison to the WWE and stated that the drama and feuds were not planned or arranged, and were simply organic.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this style of promotion with the correct fighters was the only way the UFC was able to sell enough pay-per-views to be profitable. This was most apparent in what the UFC dubbed the "biggest fight in in UFC history" and the "biggest grudge match in MMA history," when finally Ortiz and Liddell agreed to fight.¹⁹ Liddell and Ortiz were former training partners and friends, but it did not stop the drama, trash talking, and insults thrown between the two fighters. Liddell called Ortiz a coward and not a real fighter for avoiding the fight. Ortiz stated, "I'm going in there to try to hurt him. I'm going to show him no respect and I'm going to go in there and try to take his head off."²⁰ Liddell won the fight controversially. Liddell poked Ortiz in the eye with his thumb during a punch, causing Ortiz to stumble back, allowing Liddell to swarm him and finish the fight. Despite the controversy, the fight was a success for the UFC. It was the first event to sell over 100,000 pay-per-views since Shamrock and Ortiz fought.²¹ However, once again the UFC was struggling selling cards that didn't feature excessive drama and storylines. The cards that lacked Ortiz and Liddell simply did not sell well.

The UFC was struggling to sell MMA based purely on its merits as a sport. Zuffa lost \$44 million and quietly sought to sell the UFC.²²

The spectacle of the UFC shifted from one based around the viewing of violence, to the creation of storylines and drama. The most successful events were not the most violent or bloody. Rather successful events depended upon the ability of the UFC to create a storyline that seemed real. The Liddell vs. Ortiz and Shamrock vs. Ortiz fights had natural storylines and intrigue beyond the events inside the cage. Professional wrestling at the time expertly bridged the gap between sport and melodrama, creating neat and clean storylines and meaningful attachments towards the events of the matches to engage the audience. Professional wrestling created simple, yet effective, narratives often explicitly stating one individual is ‘good,’ while the other is ‘bad.’ These simple and effective storylines had long been the reason for the success of professional wrestling.²³ The UFC, while outwardly discouraging the comparison between WWE and itself, further used the strategy of developing narratives with the creation of *The Ultimate Fighter*. Furthermore, the appearance of animosity between fighters created an atmosphere of expected violence. If the two fighters dislike one another, than greater levels of violence are to be expected. This media approach works to legitimize the violence within the MMA bouts as the expectation of violence is increased, while being normalized at the same time.²⁴ The combination of creating storylines and legitimizing violence allows the same level of violence to remain within the sport, without an overt focus. The levels of violence within the Zuffa era of MMA are very similar to the early days and dark ages, yet how violence was presented and appeared within the sport was drastically different. This legitimizing and normalizing of violence, removed the deviance

from the actions inside the cage. Atkinson and Young's concept of wanted and unwanted deviance, states that wanted deviance is "behaviours, thoughts, and actions that violate an accepted social or cultural standard, yet are controlled, predictable, and rationalized so, therefore, allowed."²⁵ Violence in MMA was beginning to move beyond this definition in the Zuffa era, as violence within the sport was no longer in violation of social or cultural standards. Hence, the violence in MMA was no longer deviant and was legitimized.

The Ultimate Fighter

The UFC needed exposure and the television network Spike TV, needed something new to attract the young male audience. The UFC and Spike TV quickly agreed to work together, but agreeing on what the partnership would be was more difficult. Spike TV was adamant about a reality show combined with MMA. The success of shows like *Survivor* and *The Real World* proved that reality television was viable. Eventually the UFC agreed, and brought in *Survivor* executive producer, Craig Piligian. Although Spike TV proposed this idea and partnership, the network was still apprehensive about the damaged brand of the UFC. Consequently, the UFC was forced to fund the entire first season, as Spike was concerned that it would not be able to attract any sponsors.²⁶ This was Zuffa's last strategy to build the UFC. They were already on the verge of selling the business before creating the show. This show was called *The Ultimate Fighter*, and it needed to be successful. *The Ultimate Fighter* designated sixteen up-and-coming mixed martial artists together in the same house, divided them into two teams coached by Couture and Liddell, and featured fights between contestants with the winner of the finale being signed to a UFC contract. The fighters all lived together in a house purposely removed of distractions. No books, television, phones, Internet, or any access

to the outside world were allowed. Contestants only travelled between the house and gym, all part of the plan to cause conflict and drama between them.²⁷ The UFC established essentially the same situation that Ken Shamrock created with his Lion's Den gym, as discussed in Chapter Three. From the first episode, the UFC delivered the drama it was hoping for as Chris Leben urinated on Jason Thacker's bed. Fights, pranks, drinking, and lewd behaviour were seen on every episode. Furthermore, the sixteen men were living in a house designed for four people. this caused the septic system to break and raw sewage to flood the house. Many fighters became sick, only adding to the tension within the house.²⁸ The house became a perfect mixture for entertainment. The purposeful lack of distractions, the selection of fighters like Leben, situations such as the septic system, and near weekly demand to fight caused the drama and attention that the UFC desired.

The show was a success from the very beginning, scoring high rating, especially in the 18-49 year old male demographic. Leading the popularity were fighters Chris Leben and Josh Koscheck.²⁹ The two fighters came to blows during a night out, four weeks into the filming of the show. After heavy drinking by all of the housemates, and many insults being exchanged, mostly towards the most hated man in the house, Leben. Bobby Southworth called Leben "a fatherless bastard," as his father left him when he was young. An angry and inconsolable Leben eventually passed out on the front lawn and was awoken by Koschuck spraying him with a hose. Leben broke windows and doors trying to find Koschuck. This drew Dana White's attention, who then decided that the two men would fight and the loser would leave the house. The UFC was building drama and tension all season and this grudge match between Leben and Koschuck was the payoff; it

was the highest rated episode until the finale. Koschuck won the fight and Leben left the show, but with ratings down and the unequivocal star gone, he was quickly brought back.³⁰ Leben was not the only person who became a star. Dana White increasingly placed himself in front of the camera and quickly became the UFC's Vince McMahon. Although White claims it was not by design, his personality and vulgar language quickly rendered him as entertaining as the fighters.³¹ White became, and is still today, the face and ultimate authority of the UFC and MMA due to the success of *The Ultimate Fighter*.

The Ultimate Fighter finale is still to this day voted by fans as one of the greatest MMA bouts of all-time.³² The fight between Stephan Bonnar and Forrest Griffin, both relatively unknown contestants, was not a great technical fight. Rather it was a classic brawl in which both fighters threw strikes with reckless abandonment for fifteen minutes. The fight was bloody and violent and the audience determined that it was pure entertainment. Rarely in North American MMA before the Bonnar vs. Griffin fight did fighters "throw strategy out the window in order to entertain fans with out-of-control offense."³³ The great MMA fights prior to *The Ultimate Fighter* had largely focused on technique, and opposing a particular combative style over the opponent's style. This fight altered the idea of success in the sport. A memorable loss was more beneficial for a fighter's career than winning a boring bout. Bonnar's loss in *The Ultimate Fighter* finale turned out to be a turning point for a successful career.³⁴ This had long been the norm in Japanese MMA, which was far more successful and profitable over the past decade. This was the next evolution of the subcultural focus of MMA. No-holds-barred fighting, which originally focused on violence or proving of technique, shifted towards a focus on cross training during the dark ages, was once again shifting towards the promotion of drama

and entertainment. The spectacle focus of MMA shifted from the celebration of violence in the early days, to forced drama, narrative storylines outside the cage, and reckless entertainment within. Violence was normalized and audiences desired deviance in the sport. As a result, the UFC found a new way of creating attention and spectacle, by focusing on creating storylines and entertainment. The career of Griffin also demonstrates the changing focus of MMA due to *The Ultimate Fighter*. Griffin eventually won the middleweight title, but never gained the title of UFC superstar. Griffin was quiet and reserved and did not present the personality or outside-the-cage theatrics that fighters such as Ortiz, Liddell, or Couture possessed. Beyond actions within the cage, the personality and character a fighter could create became more important to the sport.³⁵

Post-Ultimate Fighter

The Ultimate Fighter had propelled the UFC into the mainstream-sporting world. The combination of drama and antics seen through the series and the entertaining finale drastically altered the sport. The demographic of the fan base was changed and increased. No longer was MMA attracting only a share of the 18-49 year old male; it was attracting both men and women of all ages. The drama-driven reality show combined with the athletics of MMA was creating a more diverse fan base.³⁶ *The Ultimate Fighter* also gave the public its first insight into the lives and personalities of fighters. The Tank Abbott's of MMA were still the established idea of a prototypical fighter: violent, physically unfit, criminal. The show presented a different version. Audiences saw the physical skills, emotional struggles, and sportsmanship of the fighters. Furthermore, the public began to see the strategy and sporting components of MMA. MMA was presented as a structured sport, not a barbaric blood sport.³⁷ While *The Ultimate Fighter* succeed in portraying

MMA as a sport, and dispelled some negative stereotypes, it also reinforced many more. With the focus on drama, storylines, and fighters like Leben, the show also portrayed the athletes themselves in a negative manner.³⁸ Guy Mezger related the effect of *The Ultimate Fighter* to another reality show, *Jackass*:

There's a part of us that can't help but laugh at *Jackass*, but you wouldn't want to invite any of those guys to your house... that's kind of what *The Ultimate Fighter* did, is it brought a tremendous amount of focus on it, but it didn't really portray the guys for the most part as that great of guys, or that bright of guys.³⁹

Mezger summarizes the positive and negative effect *The Ultimate Fighter* had on the world of MMA. While it brought massive attention to the sport, it was at a cost to the fighters. Nevertheless, this attention not only created new fans, but also new fighters as gyms were flooded with new people wanting to try MMA. The traditional entrance into the subculture of MMA required an individual to transition to the sport from a previous combative sport. Usually only individuals with history as 'insiders' within another combative sport possessed the tools to become part of the MMA subculture.⁴⁰ *The Ultimate Fighter* changed this approach, as individuals who were attracted to the show did not possess any experience in combative sports but began to train in MMA gyms. The world and subculture of MMA was becoming much more open and seemingly friendly towards outsiders. The subcultural norms were beginning to change. The once isolated and niche subculture was becoming open to the public. As the sport increasingly became more mainstream and recognizable, the members entering the subculture also began to reflect that.

The gamble of *The Ultimate Fighter* was successful. The UFC garnered significant attention from the show and firmly planted itself within the mainstream-sporting world. The choices by the producers brought mainstream attention to the sport, as well as aiding in altering some of the perceived notions surrounding it. However, it also reaffirmed many negative stereotypes and ushered in an era that changed the marketing focus of the sport. Drama, narratives, storylines, and entertainment over skill became increasingly necessary to maintain and increase its popularity.

In the post *Ultimate Fighter* world, the sport of MMA drastically changed. *The Ultimate Fighter* created an entirely new fan base that drove money and individuals into the sport. The first pay-per-view event after *The Ultimate Fighter* had a buy rate of 228,000. The people who watched the series on television were now paying to watch the live events. It was the perfect tool for promoting both the pay-per-view events and the next generation of MMA fighters.⁴¹ This new generation of fighters who were the contestants on *The Ultimate Fighter* was disrupting the status quo within MMA. These fighters who were just as, if not more, popular than the established stars of the sport due to the exposure of the show, were also willing to fight for a fraction of the pay.⁴² Ortiz, who was upset about the shift in attention towards *The Ultimate Fighter* generation stated,

They just want to be in the UFC, and that takes away from a lot of the bigger fighters who've been in here for a long time. You know, this is our living. It's not a hobby... this is our career. This is what we do for a living, to make money, and guys come in and pretty much fight for free. I mean, fight for \$1,500? Are you kidding me... you can watch *The Ultimate Fighter* and each and every one of

those guys says, 'I'll do anything the UFC tells me to do.'... These guys are just cronies it seems like, man, they're just programmed by the UFC.⁴³

Ortiz recognized early that new generation of fighters was drastically different from the previous generation. The UFC, which controlled *The Ultimate Fighter*, dictated the narrative surrounding their show. They were able to present to the sport as Zuffa intended, rather than how it had previously been. Furthermore, the MMA gyms that began to grow during the dark ages were flooded by new people wanting to join the sport. This increase in gym memberships brought a large amount of money to the often-struggling gyms.⁴⁴ Young people, especially males, were also beginning to abandon the traditional sports for alternative ones such as MMA, both in terms of viewership and participation.⁴⁵ This included gaining ground on rival combative sport, boxing, as it had failed to replace Mike Tyson with a fellow star to lead the sport. MMA was much more successful in attracting young and new fans than boxing was in the late 1990s. Furthermore, MMA was also more successful at garnering media attention than boxing. Sport journalists consistently stated that boxing was a dying sport and asked boxers questions about MMA during boxing press conferences.⁴⁶ MMA was becoming a mainstream combative sport, arguably the most prominent combative sport in the United States. This shift in attention and participation further changed the dynamic and make-up of the MMA. It was increasingly being seen as a more mainstream sport, than a fringe activity on the margins.

The second season of *The Ultimate Fighter* failed to live up to the expectations of the first season. Focus shifted more towards the actual fighting and was less on the drama and storylines within the fighter's house. Furthermore, coaches Rich Franklin and Matt

Hughes held no animosity towards one another and did not have an upcoming fight. The lack of tension and drama hurt the show's popularity and ratings, leading to White's choice for coaches in season three.⁴⁷ White signed on Ken Shamrock and Tito Ortiz as the coaches, in addition to a fight between them at the end of the season. White told the coaches that he did not want any trouble between the two men, but everyone knew that the UFC was banking on the hatred and tension between the coaches to sell the season and upcoming pay-per-view.⁴⁸ The first episode of the season drew better ratings with young males than the NBA and the PGA Masters. The fighters took cues from the coaches and developed their own feuds and pranks, including urinating on a fighter's headgear. The drama-filled season was a great success for the UFC. The live finale drew 2.8 million viewers and the subsequent pay-per-view between Shamrock and Ortiz sold 775,000 pay-per-views buys. However, the fight was stopped prematurely by the referee, only one minute in the first round. Like many times before in the UFC, important fights failed to live up to expectations. The UFC learned from its mistakes, and organized a second rematch between Shamrock and Ortiz live and free on Spike TV shortly after the failed pay-per-view fight. Shamrock vs. Ortiz III broke UFC television rating records with 5.7 million viewers and set the stage for the highly anticipated rematch between Ortiz and Liddell.

The Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts and the widespread sanctioning of the sport was the final legal hurdle in the sportization of MMA. Under Elias and Dunning's classification of a sport, MMA had undergone every step of the sportization process. MMA formed strict and explicit rules, violence was controlled, how pleasure was derived was changed, and it created an equal balance of tension. However, further steps within

Maguire's global sportization were necessary. As MMA, and specifically the UFC, entered the mainstream-sporting world, it was also entering the global sport-media complex. MMA was fairly localized during the first decade of the sport, centred within North America in California, New Jersey, Quebec, the Quad-cities, and a few other local regions. Generally, fighters rarely left their local regions, and events were rarely broadcast outside of the immediate area, if at all. After *The Ultimate Fighter* boom, this rapidly changed, as MMA was broadcast on national and global levels. As the UFC became a global entity, its media product did so as well. The UFC and, thus, MMA became part of the global sport-media complex, representing the next stage of MMA's sportization. MMA transitioned from violent spectacle into a sport during the dark ages. Following *The Ultimate Fighter*, it transitioned once again from a niche and localized sport into a mainstream and global media product. Furthermore, the UFC was able to maintain control over its two most prominent media products, pay-per-view and *The Ultimate Fighter*, giving the UFC greater influence over the product it was producing.

Chuck Liddell knocked out Ortiz during their highly anticipated rematch, firmly planting himself as the top fighter in the UFC in terms of talent and popularity. Liddell not only became the new face of the new UFC, and the fighter used by the UFC for media appearances and television interviews. He emerged as a genuine superstar who exceeded the boundaries of the sport. Liddell was a classic brawler in every sense, relying almost purely on punches during fights. Sporting a Mohawk haircut, goatee, and tattoo on the side of his head, Liddell physically looked the role of a mixed martial artist. However, he was a soft-spoken college graduate, and was used by White and UFC as the media face

for the organization with his aggressive look and ability to communicate.⁴⁹ White credited Liddell with the popularity boom in the mid-2000s:

Chuck Liddell was the guy who really carried this thing on his back for the early years when we were getting this thing off the ground. We had some guys who were big stars, but Chuck was really the man. Chuck was the guy with that look and everything else. When people saw him, you knew that was the ‘Ultimate Fighting’ guy.⁵⁰

Liddell represented the culmination of the sportization process of the dark ages, and the sportization of *The Ultimate Fighter*. Liddell was a skilled and respectful fighter, yet also looked dramatic and entertaining. Liddell was the first transitional star of MMA in North America. He became recognizable outside the MMA subculture a genuine sports star.

2006 and 2007 were banner years of success for the UFC in terms of profit and popularity. The UFC was continuing to put on increasingly successful shows and garnering mainstream media attention. The UFC was featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and the focus of articles in prominent newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*. With this degree of focus, the UFC began to rewrite the narrative of MMA.⁵¹ Zuffa and White claimed that SEG ran from sanctioning and working with athletic commissions, and often took credit for advancements that happened well before they took ownership of the UFC. This was repeated in the many articles and columns written about the UFC during 2006-2007, either lying about the history of the sport or purposely ignoring the efforts of the individuals who came before them. However, as shown in this thesis, SEG, IFC, Meyrowitz, Paul Smith, and many other individuals and organizations worked hard through the dark ages to gain sanctioning. Furthermore, the ability for

referees to stop the fight, gloves, weight-classes, limited strikes, and many other rules were all in place before Zuffa. The MMA rules and safety standards during SEG and Zuffa's ownership tenure were practically the same.⁵² Zuffa propagated the myth of the old UFC, an organization that had no rules and full of outlaw brawlers. No longer did headlines read of human cockfighting when discussing MMA. Now the UFC was dubbed the fastest growing sport in the world, ensuring that people thought it was purely due to the efforts of Zuffa. Due to the success of *The Ultimate Fighter* and Zuffa rewriting the history of MMA, the UFC became the identity of the sport. The UFC was by far the most popular and only recognizable organization in the world besides Pride, following *The Ultimate Fighter*. The UFC's popularity and ability to write its own history allowed Zuffa to portray itself as the representative of the sport.

UFC 100 on July 11th, 2009, illustrated the changes the sport had been undergoing in the last several years. The event, designed to celebrate the UFC's centennial pay-per-view featured two title bouts, a fight between the recent *The Ultimate Fighters* coaches, two future hall-of-fame inductees, and an early bout by future champion and pound-for-pound leader, Jon Jones. The two title fights that night included Canadian George St. Pierre who defended his welterweight championship and former WWE star Brock Lesnar who unified the heavyweight title.⁵³ St. Pierre easily defeated challenger Thiago Alves, and was his usual humble and pious self in victory, while Lesnar was the complete opposite, demonstrating why he had a successful WWE career. Lesnar's post-fight antics included: taunting the defeated Frank Mir, claiming he was headed out to drink Coors Light because UFC's largest sponsor, Bud Light would not pay him any money, providing details of his post-fight sex plans with his wife, and flipping off the crowd and

television cameras.⁵⁴ The juxtaposition of St. Pierre and Lesnar demonstrated the balance in modern MMA between the characteristics of traditional martial artists and flamboyant, WWE- style characters. Both St. Pierre and Lesnar were MMA stars and undeniable attractions. However, the means in which they attracted fans were very different, yet interdependent.⁵⁵ The two fighters created balance within the sport. St. Pierre represented the serious sporting nature of MMA, continuing the efforts of individuals in the dark ages such as Miletich. Lesnar represented the spectacle and stylized nature of MMA, continuing the precedent created during *The Ultimate Fighter*. These two fighters began to represent the balance being created in MMA, simultaneously becoming a legitimate sport and a spectacle. This was not only in terms of promotion, but also the sportization process and state of the subculture. Within the sportization and subculture of MMA, both the need for sporting legitimacy and spectacle developed to popularize the sport. *The Ultimate Fighter* and post *Ultimate Fighter* boom affected the direction of sportization and state of the subculture. As the sport continued to grow in the mainstream sporting consciousness, the UFC found ways to maintain this position through creating a balance, “in the personalities and character seen in the sport... St. Pierre and Lesnar are tied to one another as the opposing sides of the same coin.”⁵⁶ This balance in characters maintained the sport’s popularity as well affecting the sportization process and state of the subculture. Previously in the history of MMA, the subculture was more uniform, as it was very localized and less diverse. MMA subculture was centred on a few regional hot spots, such as the Miletich Fighting System and the Lion’s Den. This resulted in the norms, rules, and values being expressed at these gyms having greater influence on the MMA population as a whole. Furthermore, *The Ultimate Fighter* changed the typical

entrance of members into the subculture. As previously stated, the MMA subculture developed in the dark ages through fighters bringing various elements of their previously combative sports culture to MMA. Without new members bringing other norms, rules, and values from other combative sports, and the centres of the subculture becoming less localized, the uniformity of the subculture was being reduced.⁵⁷ St. Pierre and Lesnar, therefore both became representative of the subculture, despite portraying different values and identities.

MMA continued to grow in popularity following UFC 100. On August 14, 2010, MMA was made legal in Ontario by the provincial legislation, creating an opportunity for the UFC to hold an event in the province. White had long called Ontario the “mecca of MMA,” as a tool for lobbying the government to change the law surrounding combative sports.⁵⁸ With MMA finally legal, the UFC and White lived up to the language they were using by holding a sold out 55,000 seat event at the Rogers Centre in Toronto for UFC 129, the largest MMA event in North America by 22,000 seats.⁵⁹ While the UFC has yet to hold another event to the size of UFC 129, its popularity remains high. From the arrival of the first *Ultimate Fighter* to present day, two major changes occurred in the sport that affected the growth of MMA and also affected the sportization process and the subculture. The first change centred around the continual international expansion of the sport, focused heavily on the purchasing of other MMA promotions. Second, the increasing diversity within the subcultural make-up of MMA, especially the rise and inclusion of women in the once hyper-masculine sport, led to *Business Insider* naming a female fighter, Ronda Rousey, as the most dominant athlete alive.⁶⁰

The International Expansion of MMA

From 1993 to 2006, the goal of UFC and other MMA promotions was to maintain existence through the fight for sanctioning and pay-per-view rights. In the post *Ultimate Fighter* MMA world, sanctioning, pay-per-view, and profit were no longer concerns for the UFC. The new goal for the organization was market dominance over the sport of MMA. The UFC was the most recognizable name in MMA; however, there were many other competitive organizations in North America and around the world that challenged the UFC's dominance. Starting in 2006, Zuffa began to purchase many of the other top MMA promotions with the intention of running them separately from the UFC. The first organization was the World Extreme Cagefighting (WEC). The WEC, which focused on the lighter weight-classes, was operated separately until 2010, when it was folded into the UFC.⁶¹ In almost the same manner, fight promotion Strikeforce was brought by Zuffa in 2011 with the promise of running it independently from the UFC. Once again, in 2013 Strikeforce was shut down and the fighters on the roster were folded into the UFC.⁶² The most important of the Zuffa acquisitions was the Japanese organization Pride. Founded in 1997, Pride quickly became the top fight promotion in Japan. As MMA suffered financial and legal troubles in the United States, Pride flourished in Japan and became the biggest MMA promotion in the world. From 1997 until the *Ultimate Fighter* boom, Pride was the top MMA organization. Coincidentally, it began to falter when the UFC grew in success.⁶³ The failures of Pride were not purely due to the influence of the UFC. Pride was hit with many scandals during the resurgence of the UFC. Pride president Naoto Morishita committed suicide in 2003, supposedly due to a failed extra-marital affair. However, the yakuza had long been suspected to have connection to Pride, and many believed Morishita's death was an assassination by the yakuza. Following Morishita's

death, Pride was hemorrhaging money and lost its television deal. Furthermore, the company had no assets or money to sustain itself during this down period. SEG was able to sustain the UFC during the dark ages by using the profit it gained during its early boom. Pride should have been able to do the same. The lack of savings and assets led many to believe that organized crime was simply draining the profit from the company.⁶⁴ With Pride struggling to stay afloat, Zuffa purchased the organization in 2007. Pride held many of the top fighters in the world in its roster. This led many to believe and hope for a “superbowl” style event where the top Pride and UFC fighters would match up once a year. However, Pride only ran one event after being purchased, and was consolidated into the UFC in late 2007.⁶⁵ A marketing consultant for Zuffa used the analogy of NFL and football to explain the actions of Zuffa, “Football is the NFL... the ultimate goal is you don’t say MMA, you say UFC.”⁶⁶ Through the purchasing of rival organizations, the UFC was becoming the sole identity of MMA.

Zuffa’s strategy for market dominance was part of the larger plan of global expansion and consequently the globalization of modern MMA. Since the post *Ultimate Fighter* boom, Zuffa has focused on international expansion. One aspect, as discussed above, was the purchasing of other MMA organizations. Another focus was the increase in international events. A priority for the company was to hold events regularly in Canada, through Europe, Asia, and South America, and the company was successful in doing so. To aid with international expansion, Zuffa sold off ten percent of the UFC to Flash Entertainment, a shell company for the Abu Dhabi royal family. This brought legitimacy to the plans of international expansion and aided in traversing the international market.⁶⁷ The UFC opened its first international office in Toronto, before MMA was

legal in Ontario, and eventually it established offices around the world.⁶⁸ The UFC held events in Europe and returned to Brazil for its first event in thirteen years.⁶⁹ Zuffa also operated country-specific versions of *The Ultimate Fighter* in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and South America.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in 2015, the UFC will hold 23 out of its 45 total events outside of the United States.⁷¹ Lorenzo Fertitta stated during the purchasing of Pride, “This is really going to change the face of MMA. Literally creating a sport that could be as big around the world as soccer.”⁷² In 2012, White further supported his massive claim by stating that due to the international presence of the UFC, the organization was bigger than the NFL and on par with soccer.⁷³ While statements like these are unfounded, the increased and rapid focus on globalizing UFC and, thus, MMA, drastically affected the sportization and subculture of MMA. The global growth of UFC demonstrates the further sportization of MMA through the global multilayered flow of sport, personnel, and information seen during this time. The purchasing of rival organizations and rapid global expansion following the success of *The Ultimate Fighter* further demonstrate the process that the UFC undertook in entering the global sport-media complex. By obtaining near complete control of elite MMA, and spreading the media product of the UFC around the globe, the UFC gained control of the global media of MMA. This advanced the sportization of MMA by spreading the media product of the sport in a singular form to the global market.⁷⁴ This global sportization process resulted in MMA being treated as a sport by sporting media. The UFC was shown on television on Fox Sport One in the United States, and formerly on Sportsnet, recently on TSN in Canada.⁷⁵ Other MMA organizations were also receiving traditional sports media coverage as NBC sports carried formerly Strikeforce and recently the World Series of

Fighting.⁷⁶ Internationally, MMA has grown in popularity in many areas where it was non-existent a few years earlier. Markets in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East that had little to no connection to MMA, now provide the sport with money, fans, and new fighters.⁷⁷ Without MMA's further sportization by entering the global sport-media complex, the sport would not have received traditional sporting media coverage, or been able to enter new and foreign markets. Both of these actions add legitimation to the sport. MMA's connection with traditional media and foreign markets acts to further remove MMA from the violence-based spectacle of the early years and dark ages. The contemporary experience of MMA became intertwined with the global media concern. The experience of the sport changed, as it became part of the global media-sport complex. As discussed above, the use of violence, subcultural make-up, and the presentation of the sport all changed as a result of this complex. These elements, which in part make up the experience of MMA, were affected as the sport became mainstream.

Changes to the Subculture of MMA

As MMA rapidly grew in popularity after *The Ultimate Fighter*, the subculture underwent many changes. As mentioned before, the number of MMA specific gyms exponentially grew as fighters and non-fighters attempted to profit from the popularity boom. The traditional karate gyms and "mcdjo" switched focus towards providing classes in MMA, once again following the money as they had before with the martial arts movie trend.⁷⁸ With significantly more individuals teaching and learning MMA, the norms, rules, and values being instilled at these new gyms were more varying and less in line with traditional martial arts. Fighter Mike Onzuka expressed concern that these gyms fail to incorporate formalities and structure and failed to stress the importance of

discipline and the traditional roots of martial arts.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Randy Couture also expressed concern the some gyms that developed due to the rapid growth in popularity may not promote nonviolence from the traditional martial arts perspective. However, Couture was more optimistic, stating that the majority of athletes he knew taught MMA with the traditional martial arts rules and values.⁸⁰ The growth in MMA has resulted in greater diversity in the type of people entering the subculture. No longer is the MMA subculture composed of individuals who started combative sports careers elsewhere before entering MMA. More recently, many individuals within the subculture have only combative sports experience in MMA. The subculture, which was defined through the individuals of various combative sports coming together to train in one combined form, now exists separately from the combative sports that form the elements of MMA.

In the early days and dark ages of MMA, mixed martial artists traditionally came from violent, working-class upbringings, often driving many early fighters towards combative sports and MMA. Many fighters expressed a need to protect themselves or participated for the simple enjoyment of violence. The ability to earn money and pursue a career out of fighting drew more individuals from a violent and working-class background towards MMA.⁸¹ Following the post *Ultimate Fighter* boom, this story became less common for mixed martial artists. Increasingly, MMA became a sport for the upper and middle classes. As it became more popular, the gyms were able to charge more money for memberships. Furthermore, as the talent and abilities of mixed martial artist improved, constant and formal training was required. The street fighters who found an ability to make a living in MMA were simply not skilled enough anymore to sign with MMA promotions. Sociologists Corey M. Abramson & Darren Modzelewski explore the

rise of middle-class individuals participating and joining the MMA subculture in “Caged Morality: Moral Worlds, Subculture, and Stratification Among Middle-Class Cage-Fighters.” Abramson and Modzelewski conclude that middle-class individuals are drawn to MMA because of the visceral rewards received for hard work and belonging to a community. Furthermore, MMA allows them to disassociate from typical ideals of middle-class morality and habitus. Fighters felt that the status created within the gyms and supported by fellow members better reflect who they “really are.”⁸² The increased cost of MMA and social draw of its subculture has drastically altered the socioeconomic structure of MMA subculture.

Women in MMA

The issue of women’s participation in MMA is worthy and in need of significant research, much more than I provide here. For the purposes of this thesis, I will provide a very brief history of women’s MMA and brief insight into its impact on the subculture of MMA. Although there were some no-holds-barred fighting opportunities for women in the early days of MMA, such as Tuff-N-Uff, which staged amateur MMA events for women, the majority of women participated in MMA in the early days as ring girls or sexualized spectacle athletes.⁸³ John Lober recalls paying two strippers to fight in one of his semi-legal no-holds-barred events. The fight consisted of the smaller woman getting her nose broken before the referee stopped the fight. The women with the broken nose then took off her shirt and began kissing her opponent, all while dripping blood.⁸⁴ Women had a very minimal athletic role in MMA during the first fifteen years of the sport and were seen as accessories in the hyper masculine world of early MMA. Following the first *Ultimate Fighter*, MMA’s popularity did not only spike with men, but

also women. The effect of this was noticeable starting in the late 2000s. California and Nevada were the first states to sanction professional women's MMA and Strikeforce was the first major organization to hold female fights. However, the rules between men and women's MMA were not the same during this time, as events in California arbitrarily switched between three and five-minute rounds, while Nevada events only used two-minute rounds for female fights.⁸⁵ After pressure from female fighters, Strikeforce and state athletic commissions agreed to allow female to fight the full 5-minute rounds.⁸⁶ Differential treatment was common in women's MMA from the late 2000s to the early 2010s. In 2011, when asked "when are we going to see women in the UFC?" by a TMZ reporter, Dana White replied with "never."⁸⁷ Dana White's "never" only lasted two years as women, and specifically Ronda Rousey entered the UFC and MMA mainstream attention in 2013.

When Zuffa purchased and eventually shutdown Strikeforce in 2013, it consolidated the roster, including women into the UFC. The first woman signed into the UFC was Rousey, an undefeated mixed martial artist and Olympic bronze medalist in Judo. She was also awarded the women's UFC bantamweight title before actually fighting in the UFC.⁸⁸ White credits Rousey as the individual who convinced him to create female categories in the UFC, stating that her talent and style was enough to convince the public to watch women's MMA.⁸⁹ Women's MMA, like men's has continued to grow, with two weight classes in the UFC and the Zuffa-owned promotion Invicta, which only organizes female bouts. Rousey has become the face of modern MMA, and one of the most recognizable female athletes in the world. What was once an activity where women were only present to create sexualized spectacles is now a sport

dominated by a single woman. Once again, the increased popularity of women within MMA and a woman as the face of the sport is directly due the post *Ultimate Fighter* boom. As a result, the gyms and centres of MMA subculture that were once purely male are increasingly more diverse in terms of gender. Females became a larger part of the subculture in terms of both number of individuals and importance. While misogyny and sexism are at times still issues with the culture of MMA, especially from fans, the rapid and increasing female participation within the sport has altered the hyper-masculine nature of the MMA subculture.

In conclusion, the purchase of the UFC by Zuffa had drastic effects on the spectacle of MMA, the sportization process, and the subculture. The changes to these three elements from the previous decade of the sport all began with the first season of *The Ultimate Fighter*. *The Ultimate Fighter* changed how the UFC created spectacle and attention for the sport. No longer was violence the only tool to create entertainment and attention for MMA, as forced production of drama, more in line with professional wrestling, become a central entertaining tool. Through sanctioning and actions of MMA promotions, violence became legitimized and normalized within the sport. Spectacle in MMA evolved during this time away from the promotion of violence to promotion of seemingly scripted drama. *The Ultimate Fighter* and attention created through the shift in focus toward drama vaulted MMA into the mainstream. MMA was now a mainstream sport, a further step in the sportization process. Using this newfound popularity, the UFC implemented market strategies to create and sustain the singular identity of MMA. Creating a new historical narrative, purchasing competitor organizations, and international expansion, the UFC and its manifestation as MMA, furthered the

sportization process. Lastly, this rapid growth in popularity after *The Ultimate Fighter*, and development through further sportization shifted the MMA from a fringe and niche subculture to a large, diverse, global, and mainstream subculture. The rapid growth of individuals and MMA gyms, along with the growing diversity and shifts within the demographic of MMA participants has resulted in a drastically different subcultural makeup of modern MMA, from that of the early and dark ages. The elements of violence, sportization, and subculture, which were so heavily intertwined during the first several years of MMA, all continued to play major roles in shaping the sport in the Zuffa era. However, since the change in ownership, the singular event of *The Ultimate Fighter* acted as a catalyst that drove the three elements to drastically change the sport of MMA.

Endnotes

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- ⁴ Ibid, 2946. There are 108 rules in the unified rules of MMA pertaining to equipment, judging, fouls, and the deciding of the winner. This is what the title of the thesis refers to.
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Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This thesis has demonstrated the multi-directional flow of influence between violence, sportization, and subculture on the development of MMA. By outlining the history of MMA, from Jigoro Kano's invention of Judo, to the ongoing advancements of women's MMA and international expansion of the sport, I have shown how the influencing factors of violence, sportization, and subculture have interacted directly with events and individuals through the sport's history.

No-holds-barred fighting, which would eventually become MMA, began as a violence-centric spectacle designed to attract young males through hyper-violent advertising and presentation. As a result, the motivations of the three parties involved were drastically different. The organizers used violence to market the new product in order to make as much profit as possible. The fighters fought to validate their techniques and martial arts, and the fans came simply to view violence. The minimal rules and the rationale for the no-holds-barred events demonstrate that MMA during the early years was not a sport. The sportization process that transformed no-holds-barred fighting into MMA - a sport - began to happen as the political response to the levels of violence interfered with the activity. The mounting political pressure caused MMA organizations to lose the powers normally associated with being a total institution. MMA organizations were no longer in control of defining acceptable violence or deviance. As a reaction, many MMA organizations turned towards deviance and criminality in order to escape the political powers which limited their actions, as seen in the case examples of Extreme Fighting Quebec and the International Fighting Championship Ukraine. Furthermore, the

sportization process of MMA encouraged the individuals within the subculture of MMA to alter their approach to the sport.

The first UFC event showed the martial arts world that the perceived ideas of what was practical in fighting were false. The traditional martial arts that grew in popularity following the martial arts movie trend were shown to be ineffective against less flashy styles. This caused a shift in the world of combative sports and martial arts. Fighters learned that many styles were ineffective, and knowledge of multiple martial arts was more effective than only one. As a result, gyms and training centres developed to teach fighters multiple styles, mixing martial arts to create an effective repertoire. These gyms that attracted individuals from various combative sports became the subcultural centres of MMA. These localized centres began to create the norms, rules, and values of the MMA subculture by taking elements from the various martial arts that created the sport.

Political pressures that sought to eliminate the sport due to the hyper violent presentation created the dark ages of MMA. As a result of the sport being on the brink of destruction, MMA organizations and individuals worked to control the perception of violence and present MMA as a legitimate sport. MMA underwent rapid rule creation and structuring during this time in order to appear more sport-like. Furthermore, MMA underwent a civilizing spurt during this time, which altered how pleasure was derived. Experiencing excessive violence was replaced with experiencing sporting competition. Similarly, the subculture began to approach and treat MMA as a sport, increasing the amount of cross training and adding tools such as cardiovascular training and strategy planning. During the dark ages, violence was reduced, the sportization process began to

advance, and subcultural centres were established, greatly developing the sport. The actions during the dark ages eventually enabled MMA to gain sanctioning and enter the next era of its existence.

During the early years and dark ages, violence, sportization, and subculture all interacted and affected the development of the sport. The use of violence for marketing and the perception of excessive violence by the public and government within no-holds-barred fighting directly initiated the sportization process. No-holds-barred organizations and fighters attempted to present the activity as a sport in order to counter the effects of years of negative publicity due to the strategy of marketing violence. The reaction of political powers and the public towards the levels of violence within MMA acted as the catalyst for sportization. The civilizing process of society is marked by a narrowing of what is acceptable in public life.¹ No-holds-barred fighting in the early days of MMA broke the rules of acceptability with displays of violence, as it fell outside of the acceptable standards of public life. As a result, MMA needed to undergo a sportization process to survive and form rules governing physical force and limiting the use of violence.² As no-holds-barred fighting broke the standards of acceptability in terms of the use of violence, a sportization process began to control and civilize the activity. Furthermore, the government reacted to the excessive levels of violence by limiting the ability of fighters and organizations to make money in no-holds-barred fighting. Governments criminalized no-holds-barred fighting in many regions and forced cable companies to stop selling pay-per-view in an attempt to limit the sport. MMA failed to garner the power of a total institution, by failing to maintain control and definition of violence and deviance within the sport. MMA organizations failed to reveal their power

as a total institution in all four manners outlined by Atkinson and Young. MMA lacked the historical tradition that would have given the sport precedent for the levels and presentation of violence seen at the time. As well, MMA organizations failed to frame violence positively and secure the role of the primary definer of deviance, ultimately resulting in a failure to appear as responsible stewards of the sport.³ It was the appearance of excessive violence and unwillingness to submit to authority by MMA organizations that forced the reaction of various levels of government to attempt to shut down the sport.

Many fighters left the sport as a result of these actions and the individuals who stayed began to form the subcultural centres. The gyms that developed during the dark ages formed due to the political pressures that limited the scope of the sport. Some who stayed with the sport did so as a matter of resistance, while many more simply saw the sporting elements of MMA. These individuals came together as a reaction to the criminalization and political pressure caused by violence in the sport, but with the goal of furthering MMA sportization. The individuals who remained part of the MMA subculture during the dark ages began to change how the sport was approached. The dark ages resulted in financial troubles for all fighters, as the lack of pay-per-view and opportunities to make large earnings resulted in many leaving the sport. The members who stayed with MMA began to train and compete as if it was a sport, furthering the sportization process within the subculture. By removing the individuals from the subculture who were participating in MMA simply for monetary gains or the enjoyment of violence, the majority of people left were interested and focused on turning MMA into a sport. The people that took part in no-holds-barred fighting were most accurately classified as part of a deviant subculture.⁴ The criminal histories of many fighters, the criminalization of

MMA, and the incidence of criminality and deviance such as IFC Ukraine and EF Quebec, demonstrate the deviant state of the subculture. As many fighters left the sport, and the ones who remained focused on the sportization of MMA, the subculture began to transition towards an occupational subculture. Furthermore, this sportization process resulted in a reduction and controlling of violence within MMA. As discussed by Elias and Dunning in *Quest for Excitement*, the sportization process which turns activities into sports, results in a balance between combat-tension and protection from injury.⁵ The activity becomes firmly regulated, less violent, and focused on competitive physical activity. All of these changes occurred in the history of MMA.⁶ The sportization process that came about as a reaction to the excessive violence within MMA ultimately worked to control and normalize violence. The major events and actions in the history of the early years and dark ages of MMA, affected the presentation and controlling of violence, the sportization, and development of the subculture.

After years of facing legal and financial struggles, the UFC was sold to Zuffa. The switch in ownership of the UFC was a pivotal and critical moment not only in UFC history, but MMA history. The UFC has always been the preeminent MMA organization in North America, and following *The Ultimate Fighter* boom, it has become the entity most associated with sport around the world. As a result, the UFC became the authority and trendsetter of the sport. Its history and actions became the most prominent representation of MMA. Zuffa was quickly able to gain sanctioning for MMA and began to change the style of marketing and fight promotion. These two actions led to more focus on creating storylines as points of interest to sell the sport, as well as violence and deviance becoming legitimized and desired. The role of violence was changed in the

Zuffa era. As it became normalized, it was no longer the primary attractor or motivator within the sport.

Even with sanctioning, pay-per-view, and new ownership, the UFC was struggling to maintain popularity and attention. The reality television show, *The Ultimate Fighter*, was the catalyst to fix the problems of the UFC. The success of *The Ultimate Fighter* and post *Ultimate Fighter* boom period resulted in many changes to the sport. *The Ultimate Fighter* drew its success from the creation of drama and storylines through the series, capped with an exceedingly entertaining and attention-grabbing finale. The focus of the UFC, and followed by many other MMA organizations, shifted towards creating storylines to sell events, and selecting fighters that would provide the most entertainment. The athletic requirement and sporting talents of mixed martial artists have continually increased over time. However, the ability to create entertainment that transcends the athletic actions of a fighter are a necessity to become star in the sport. *The Ultimate Fighter* brought about many changes to both the sportization process and the subculture of MMA. The UFC selling its product globally and in the mainstream sporting world, as a result of the global sport-media complex, denotes the next and final phase of sportization for MMA. Furthermore, the UFC's purchasing of rival organizations and international expansion, were possible through the organization entering the global sport-media complex. As a result of the success of *The Ultimate Fighter*, the subculture of MMA experienced numerous changes. The once niche and exclusive subculture was flooded with individuals who became interested in the sport due to the popularity of *The Ultimate Fighter*. This resulted in the subculture experiencing alteration to the method of entrance, increased diversity of its members, and less uniformity of norms, rules and

values. The modern MMA that we see today was created through the actions of legitimizing violence, mainstream sporting attention, and the subcultural changes.

The success of the Zuffa era and changes to the sport of MMA during this time can be traced back to the first season of *The Ultimate Fighter*. The increased popularity of the sport and success in selling the product of the UFC following the post *The Ultimate Fighter* boom, allowed the UFC and MMA to enter the global sport-media complex. The entrance of MMA into this global media system represents the further sportization of MMA. MMA transitioned from small, localized events to large, global spectacles as a result of *The Ultimate Fighter*, leading towards increased consumption of its global sport-media product.⁷ By the time of the first season of *The Ultimate Fighter*, MMA was firmly embodying the elements of a sport defined by both Guttman and Elias & Dunning's classification. MMA had also undergone the sportization process outlined by Elias and Dunning. Rules, regulations, controlling of violence, and alterations of how pleasure was derived were already experienced in MMA by that time.⁸

The Ultimate Fighter boom caused both the member make-up and status of the subculture to greatly alter. The increased popularity of MMA following *The Ultimate Fighter* resulted in greater diversity within the subculture. People without any experience in combative sports, people of higher socioeconomic backgrounds, and women began to participate in MMA and became central participants within the subculture. Again, as a result of *The Ultimate Fighter* boom, the subculture transformed from a small, niche, and deviant subculture towards a large, mainstream and occupational one. *The Ultimate Fighter* and MMA entrance into the global sport-media complex allowed for greater exposure of the sport and, thus, the subculture was altered and expanded.

The sanctioning of MMA, and the new marketing and promotion strategies of the UFC following the purchase of the company by Zuffa, began to normalize and legitimize violence within MMA. The sanctioning of MMA provided political protection for the sport, allowing MMA organizations to define and dictate violence and deviance. Furthermore, the change in focus, from presenting violence to presenting sport and drama, began to add legitimacy to the violence within MMA. The use of storylines in the promotion of events and the sporting legitimacy of MMA worked together to normalize violence within the sport. The language and promotional tools used did not diminish the violence of the sport; rather, they characterized it as either part of the sport or a necessity within the created storyline.⁹ The levels and events of violence did not change in MMA. Instead the presentation and acceptance of violence was altered. The Zuffa era of MMA was most responsible for the legitimatization of the sport. During this time, violence became legitimized, the subculture became larger and mainstream, and the sport entered the global media complex. All of these elements added to the sport's legitimatization.

Through the history of MMA, events and individuals have acted as catalysts to cause the development of the sport in particular directions. These events and individuals were further influenced by the factors of violence and spectacle, sportization, and subculture, which affected the development of the sport. The most important events that shaped the sport's history are: UFC 1, John McCain's political pressure, the dark ages, Zuffa, *The Ultimate Fighter*, etc. people's reaction to violence, the sportization process, and actions of the subculture. As the sport of MMA transitioned from a violent spectacle, full of criminals and far removed from any form of sport, to a mega sporting entity on the global level.

Recommended Future Research

As alluded to in Chapter One, the sport of MMA is understudied. Almost every aspect, whether history, sociology, psychology, sport management, coaching, or physiology, needs more dedicated research. However, through the course of research and writing this thesis, I have identified several related areas for further research. The first, as mentioned in Chapter Four, is women in MMA. The participation of women in MMA is not only a growing field, but seemingly counterintuitive to sociocultural understandings of sport. MMA is a very violent and aggressive sport, traits most often limited to male sports and the study of masculinity. As such, the emergence of women in MMA has begun to challenge many assumptions about masculinity and violence in sport.¹⁰

Masculinity, sport, and violence are often assumed to be naturally linked and synonymous with one another. Seeing women compete at elite levels, under the same rules and same level of aggression as men, creates an interesting challenge to masculine ideas of sport. This is the reason I chose to not discuss masculinity in relation to violence within MMA, as the recent history of women in MMA creates a complex situation in need of dedicated study. I believe a study into effects of women in MMA on masculinity or the greater sociological effects of women in the sport is needed, especially from a feminist perspective. However, before that, a general history of women in MMA must be written. Popular material and biographies written about women in MMA are almost non-existent, with the only exception being Ronda Rousey.

The second area of future research is exploring a topic and methodological approach similar to this thesis, but focused on Japan or Brazil. I have shown the importance of both Brazil and Japan on the history of MMA. However, my focus has

primarily been on North America. The history of MMA in both those countries is quite unique and important to better understand the world history of the sport. Using a topic similar to mine, to explore violence, sportization, or subculture, both Brazil and Japan would produce different results. For example, Japan's history of MMA is almost the reverse of that in North America. MMA started very successfully and with great popularity in Japan, but began to falter as MMA in North America boomed.¹¹ We already know the understanding of violence within the sport was very different than in North America, and evidence shows that the experience of the Japanese MMA subculture and the sportization process was very different as well.¹² The personal issue I have within this future research is that I can neither read nor speak Portuguese or Japanese. Therefore, these studies must fall to someone who is fluent in those languages.

The third area for future research is examining more in-depth certain individuals who greatly contributed to the history of MMA. Individuals and groups such as Ken Shamrock and the Lion's Den, Pat Miletich and the Miletich Fighting System, the Gracies, Dana White all greatly influenced the history of the sport. While many have written autobiographies or have biographies written about them, studying these individuals and their actions with a specific focus on a sociocultural issues would be valuable to increasing the knowledge about MMA. An in-depth analysis of Ken Shamrock's Lion Den could provide useful information about the subculture of MMA and early history of the sport. As the Lion's Den was pivotal in spreading the sport and the creation of MMA gyms, a focused analysis would provide a useful tool in the study of MMA.

The last area of future research is exploring the connection between MMA, professional boxing, and professional wrestling in the 1990s and 2000s. MMA was only able to garner minimal initial success due to a brief window in 1993-1994 where both boxing and professional wrestling were suffering from scandals. Furthermore, as the big three North American combative sports, the comparison between them is fairly constant.¹³ I have already demonstrated in this thesis the influence that both boxing and professional wrestling had on MMA. Therefore, further exploration into the connection between two or three of these sports would be useful. There are numerous directions one could adopt in exploring the connection between these three sports, allowing for the academic focus or methodological approach to be very open.

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Curriculum Vita- Jared Walters

Education

Western University, MA. Faculty of Kinesiology, 2015
London, Ontario.
Supervised by Dr. Kevin B. Wamsley

University of Toronto, BPHE, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, 2013
Toronto, Ontario.

Teaching Experience

Western University: KIN2292: Critical Thinking and Ethics in Kinesiology (2013)
Duties involved evaluating presentations, marking papers, as well I was responsible for final mark calculations.

Western University: KIN2032: Research Design in Human Movement Science (2014-2015)
Duties involved marking assignments and labs, as well as running labs and teaching the material necessary for students to successfully complete the assignments.

Presentations and Awards

Paper: "Social learning within the subculture of Mixed Martial Arts, and its effects on the control of violence in fighters."
Supervision under Dr. Michael Atkinson.
Presented paper at Bertha Rosenstadt National Undergraduate Research Conference at the University of Toronto. April 2012

Paper: "Comparative analysis of the causes and control of violence and aggression in the sports of Mixed Martial Arts and Ice Hockey."
Supervision under Dr. Michael Atkinson.
Presented paper at Bertha Rosenstadt National Undergraduate Research Conference at the University of Toronto. April 2013

Paper: Analysis of the Portrayal of Professional Hockey Violence in the Toronto Star.
Supervision under Dr. Peter Donnelly.
Presented paper at Bertha Rosenstadt National Undergraduate Research Conference at the University of Toronto. April 2013

Won award for best presentation in the area of physical culture at the Bertha Rosenstadt

National Undergraduate Research Conference. April 2013.

Paper: Co-presented with Dr. Macintosh Ross: “‘These people are deserving of nothing but contempt’: Using Dunning and Connell to Explain the Anti-Irish Traveler Discourse Surrounding Heavyweight Boxer Tyson Fury.”

Presented at the 3rd Annual Tri-University Conference for the Trans/Disciplinary Study of Sport. March 2014.

Paper: “The south, television, and death at 200mph. An examination into the influence of southern masculinity, honour, and technological changes on violence and safety in 1980s NASCAR.”

Supervised by Dr. Kevin B. Wamsley

Presented this paper at annual North American Society of Sport History (NASSH) Conference. May 2015.