Violent Bodies? An Ethnographic Examination of a Mixed Martial Arts Club

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Abstract

There are growing concerns over the effects of mixed martial arts (MMA) on the levels of violence in society and the dangers of participating in combat sports. MMA is a full contact combat sport that uses striking and grappling techniques in a continuous fighting form. The sport first emerged in North America in 1993 as a No-holds-barred spectacle, under the name the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), which continues to remain the largest MMA organisation. Media representation of the sport are split into two camps. On the one hand MMA is presented as a brutal and barbaric display of violence, where thugs beat one another senseless, and is presumed to cause a surge in street violence and societal decay. Conversely, it is presented as an art form, tool for self-defense, discipline, fitness and bully-proofing children. To date there has been no significant research focusing on everyday MMA participation in Australia. The research aims to understand the experiences of people who practice MMA and how they negotiate violence within training, thus establishing a nuanced understanding of the people who practice MMA, than what is understood in the predominant debate surrounding MMA. This thesis is based on a four and a half year ethnography as a participant training in an ordinary MMA gym in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. The data collected consists of fieldnotes and 13 life history interviews with the core group from Praelia MMA (pseudonym). Furthermore, the research reveals through the embodied nature of MMA, how hegemonic relations form through everyday practices and rituals. Understanding violence requires an analysis of both broad social and structural processes and the minute and mundane interactions of everyday people. Opposed to understanding MMA participants' as possessing violent attributes or psychologically attracted to violence, I draw on the theoretical approaches of Pierre Bourdieu, Randall Collins, Raewyn Connell and Norbert Elias, to argue that in the moment of the here and now, participants use forms of cultural capital (resources) in interactions to make them feel energised through group solidarity. With increasing social insecurity disproportionately effecting working-class, and lower middle-class populations, MMA becomes one answer for inclusion into the global images of male success. Participants' in Praelia MMA (re)establish a social hierarchy around historically androcentric forms of capital, as they enter into the field and play for the rewards at stake. Thus, I conclude that MMA does not automatically produce bodies capable of violence.

Student Declaration

I, Jeffrey Bishara, declare that the PhD thesis titled 'Violent Bodies? An Ethnographic Examination of a Mixed Martial Arts Club' is no more than 100,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliographies, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

All research procedures reported in this thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee: Approval Number HRE18-103

Jeffrey Bishara 14 February 2022

Statement of Authority of Access

I, Jeffrey Bishara, author of this thesis titled 'Violent Bodies? An Ethnographic Examination of a Mixed Martial Arts Club', submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, agree that this thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying and communication in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968

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You turn the most infinitesimal moments into cosmic size events.

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List of Abbreviations

BJJ	Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu
CT/F	Confrontational Tension and Fear
EE	Emotional Energy
IR	Interaction Ritual
MACS	Martial Arts and Combat Sports
MMA	Mixed Martial Arts
SRV	Sports Related Violence
UFC	Ultimate Fight Championship

Cast

Pseudonym	Role	Training Experience	Social Position
Luke	Head coach and owner of Praelia MMA, mainly coaches MMA and BJJ but will cover boxing, Muay Thai and wrestling when needed	Over 20 years training in various constituents of MMA. High-level black belt. Has fought professionally	Social elite primarily trains BJJ, wrestling & MMA
Tyler	Second coach of the MMA class	10 years training and coaching at Praelia	Social elite in MMA and BJJ
Nathan/Nath	Third coach of the MMA class	10 years training and coaching at Praelia	High level MMA member
Niko	No-Gi BJJ coach	10 years training and coaching at Praelia, 2 years in MMA, 8 years in BJJ	Social elite BJJ member
Mugz	Informant and MMA member	10 years martial arts experience, training at Praelia 5 years	High level MMA and BJJ member, has formed relationships outside of the gym
Ayaz	Ex-coach at Praelia MMA	20 years martial arts experience	Social elite
Sam	MMA Member at Praelia. Will fill in for Luke if Nath and Tyler are unavailable	8 years at Praelia, 2 years taekwondo, 2 years Muay Thai	High level MMA and wrestling member
Cameron/Cam	MMA Member at Praelia	1 year at Praelia, 11 years at previous gym (BJJ)	Low mid-level social position within MMA
Levent/Lev	MMA Member at Praelia	2 years training at Praelia, 6 years overall in martial arts	High mid-level MMA member
Ravi	MMA Member at Praelia	3 years training at Praelia, 3 years in Krav Maga	High level MMA and wrestling member
Lilly	MMA, Muay Thai and Boxing Member at Praelia	2 years training at Praelia	Mid-level MMA member
Tess	Works at reception	1 session	
Caleb	Boxing and Muay Thai boxing coach	2 years coaching at Praelia MMA & 15 years combat sport experience	Low level striking coach
Will	MMA Member at Praelia	3 years training at Praelia	High mid-level MMA member
Bronson	MMA Member at Praelia	3 years training at Praelia	Mid-level MMA member
Hugh	MMA Member at Praelia	2-3 years training at Praelia	Mid-low level MMA/Boxing

			member
Jane/Jenny and John/Jono/Johnny	Casuals	Range in experiences and time spent 1 week – 2 years	

Prologue

My experience with mixed martial arts began before I ever followed or participated in the sport. Looking back on my formative years, the primary influences in my attraction to combat sports were professional wrestling and action movies. I used to love the classics: Jean Claude Van Damme, Jackie Chan, Arnold Schwarzneger, Bruce Lee, and Steven Segal. Professional wrestling was an extension of that. I remember the first day I ever watched world championship wrestling (WCW). I was eight years old and I was at one of my older cousin's house, Abdo who was 14 and Scott Steiner aka Big Papa Pump, the 'Genetic Freak' appeared on the screen. In the late 90s the WCW was at the height of its popularity and was dominating the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) for audience viewership. Steiner was making his way down to the ring and I was immediately immersed in the action. The sheer size of him, the way he walked toward the ring with his entrance music, and his domineering manoeuvres in the ring. I was completely naïve to steroids and the scripted nature of live entertainment, but I knew he dwarfed Schwarzneger in Terminator 2 and True Lies.

I never watched wrestling on my own because it was only on pay television, so I used to beg my mum to take me to my aunties every week. A show ran for about two hours and it did more than capture our attention; it inspired us to mimic the moves on each other well after the shows had ended. We wrestled for hours, we didn't punch each other but we hurt ourselves with slams and submission holds. We wanted to feel like the characters we were watching, strong, fearless, tough men. Combat films had the same effect on us. Jean Claude Van Damme was our hero because he exuded strength and virility. He not only overcame his enemies, but he rescued the 'girl' and perpetuated male white knight fantasies. We also tried to fight like Bruce Lee, pretending to taste imaginary blood then imitated his sound effects. In the early 2000s Abdo got a PlayStation and introduced me to a new generation of 3D gaming. This virtual world was between playing wrestling and watching it; it had the same emotional intensity, without the physical exertion. He had 3D fighting games like Tekken, Mortal Kombat and Street Fighter.

It wasn't long before a friend of mine bought an Xbox. We used to head down to the video store and borrow games and this was my first contact with the UFC,

through their 2002 Xbox videogame, UFC: Tapout. I remember using a hand full of fighters, but Tito Ortiz's name was burnt into memory; at the time I had no idea who he was. He wore black fight shorts with long flames, had dyed peroxide blonde hair shaved close to the skull, and his nickname was, "The Huntington Beach Bad Boy". He put Van Damme to shame and he was a computer generated three-dimensional character. Aside from seeing him on the cover of the game, I had never seen him on Television. Wrestling had started to become a drag. I could no longer suspend my disbelief for the repetitive and predictable storylines, which had worn down the thrill inducing hormones produced by my dopamine receptors. This happened after my cousins dramatically burst my bubble.

One afternoon my cousin Hani challenged Abdo to a fight, to prove that professional wrestling was "just fake shit"—my mum often referred to Hani as a hoodlum in Arabic, and whenever I got into trouble at school she would describe my future to me all in Arabic, "You're gonna end up a *zahran* like your cousin!" I remember when I was ten or so, my school friends and I would go to the senior's oval and play fight with them (we were serious, the seniors weren't). After a while the older kids started calling me brick hands because I was really going for them. I recall hitting one of them in the stomach and angering him. He came at me and grabbed me by the shirt. His friend rushed over and stopped him. His name was Alex and he was a karate guy with a rat-tail, the hairstyle was everywhere in the outer suburbs of Melbourne in the early 2000s. These 'play' fights gave me an air of confidence I didn't have with peers my age.

When I was in the fifth grade I was in a confrontation with a classmate. He punched several times in the stomach and brought me to my knees in pain. I didn't seek retribution or fight back. When I got home, I was in a shitty mood—angry, powerless and frustrated. My mother noticed something was wrong and though I avoided telling her at first, I eventually did. The following morning she marched me down to school and asked me to point out the student who hit me. She went off on him in her broken Australian-Arab accent, "yo don' hit my son. Yo neva touch my son!" My fifth grade teacher Mr. Edge came out to see what the commotion was, "Mrs. Bishara, what is the problem?" he panickingly asked her. Mr. Edge was a stern man with a British accent. He was eventually fired after teaching us for two terms because he whacked a student on the knee. "He hit my son! Wha' are you gon' to

do?" she yelled at him. This five-foot four woman with an Afro had this man fumbling for an answer. "If he touch him again, I'm gon' teach him a lesson." She exclaimed before turning to me and saying in Arabic, "if this dog hits you again, you tell me straight away", and he never did. She was tough, and I wanted to be like that.

So when I happened to come across the UFC one day at my aunties, I was instantly hooked. A stocky tanned-skinned fighter with a short peroxide blonde Afro, named Josh Koshchek was fighting. That was around 2006, I hadn't thought about the sport for years. The only way I could access Pay-per-view's was through my auntie's illegal cable connection. Seeing this new style of fighting that wasn't boxing, fake wrestling or cinematic martial arts was entirely captivating. I recall being enthralled in the fight, and I don't even remember who Koshcheck fought. I suppose because he won. As a child I dabbled in martial arts but nothing stuck. The first martial art I ever tried was Judo which lasted a week, after that I tried Karate and then Ninjitsu which also only lasted a week; I was around 12 and 14. Neither of my parents ever encouraged or valued sport, let alone take me to any of the trials. My friend's parents took me, and my parents often had some reluctance and confusion as to why I was even going.

My parents are Syrian migrants who moved to Australia with four children in the mid-1980s. I was the youngest of five and the only Australian-born child in my immediate family. My father grew up on a farm with eight siblings in a small village not far from the West coast of Syria. He was born in the mid 1930s and started working on the farm from the age of eight. The agricultural economy at the time meant that his family had more economic capital, but also more 'status' than others in the town. He was encouraged to pursue university rather than the more difficult life of farming, and so at age 23 he left on a 10-day journey to get to Germany where he had access to free education. He initially enrolled in agricultural engineering but after completing his degree, he wanted to pursue medicine. He was the first person (only men at the time) in his village to go to university. After completing his medical degree he returned to Syria to finish his military service and was stationed in *Halab* (Aleppo) where he met my mother. My mother was one of six children. She was the fourth oldest, behind three of her brothers and in front of her two sisters. She grew up in Aleppo. My grandfather was in the military most of his life until becoming a customs guard. She was born at the start of 1951 and had little opportunity for

education. She received her 9th grade diploma before dropping out. In contrast to my father's family, they were seen at the opposite ends of usual compatibility. But as chance had it, they would encounter one another through mutual ties at the back end of my father's army service. They were wed within the month after meeting and decided to go back to Germany for opportunity and stability and had three of my sisters. After constantly moving from city to city around West Germany at the time, unable to settle and in relative isolation, they returned to the capital of Syria, *El Sham* (Damascus) where they conceived my fourth sister. After a series of school bombings at my sisters' school, rising instability in Damascus and civil war in Lebanon they migrated to Australia. Immigration in many ways is a process of loss as much as it is gain, with varying potential and consequences on people's lives. Where my sisters and I found stability and prosperity, my parents didn't.

This set the stage for a relatively rocky childhood with daily bouts of domestic violence and aggression, both physical and non-physical. Which has made my experience with violence personal in some ways. Despite violence being statistically uncommon, it undoubtedly permeates our everyday consciousness, whether in the invisible structures of family life, workplace exploitation, on television screens, from the very real (yet invisible) violence in sports, to the very fake action in cinema. Framing the context in which I was socialised, I came to understand my parents in specific ways. When they arrived in Australia my father was 48 years old. He had a basic level of English comprehension, and his education was not recognised. This led him to a string of odd jobs as he tried to gain recognition for his medical qualification. My mother, 32 at the time with four children under the age 12, found herself in a hustling economy. She would get women's suits and garments on wholesale, fit women and sell tailored suits at an increased price. She also scoured car auctions, bought damaged cars at a lowered price, and had her uncle and brother—that had migrated before her—who were mechanics to fix and sell the car at a higher price.

Where my mother had a growing network of support as her family migrated, my father was increasingly isolated. Not being allowed to work as a doctor, unable to find meaningful work to provide for his family, and watching the decades of hard work slip through his fingers, caused a deep fracture in his identity. In many ways, his masculinity specifically suffered. Through the eyes of those around him and

society broadly, he was unable to do what so many men of his generation had intimately tied their existence to. The frustration, bereavement and anger took its toll. His few outlets were his children. Which now, five years after migrating, a fifth one was on the way. As his oldest daughter finished high school, I was born.

Ever since I can remember he would always say, in some combination or another, "You must work *very very* hard, to give back to society. To have honour. You must be the *best*!" Then just as quickly, "You are lazy. Your life is very easy. I had to walk 5 kilometers, in snow, in heat, just to get to school. You have everything, life is a challenge." This back and forth tension he projected on me was a visible characterisation of class lines. The split between my mother's uneducated working class family and my father's agrarian, economically and socially 'elite' family (relative to those within the town). I was somewhere in between. Early in my education I had little care or interest in learning. I was enrolled into English aid classes because I was below level. I had learnt to speak Arabic before English and needed to be brought up to speed. I felt and looked different and school became a source of repulsion, despite my parents sacrificing so much financially to send me to an Anglican school they couldn't afford (as opposed to my sisters who attended one of the 'worst' schools in Victoria). I wasn't a high achieving student and the future of my education remained uncertain, until a personal trainer at a gym I trained at suggested I get my personal training certificate. My interest in the body became the catalyst for my eventual journey into an undergraduate degree in exercise science and human movement. Despite coming from a family background of non-participants in sport, I was drawn to martial arts and weight lifting.

In 2009 I signed up for a free week at Praelia MMA and I attended one Muay Thai class and a CrossFit session. Then one year later I started MMA in a mechanics garage that had been converted into a makeshift gym. It was about thirty square–meters and had one boxing bag. Hani found three free sessions in the local newspaper but he never attended. This was the first MMA class I trained in. I was hooked and I continued attending twice a week for 6 months until I had to stop because my instructor moved to a large warehouse and started a BJJ club. Two years later I joined the Hyena Cove BJJ club where my friend Mugz was training. I broke my toe in the second class and never returned. During this time I was completing my university degree and remained a fan of the UFC. Throughout the four years undergrad, I

undertook two sport sociology units in my second and final year. The subjects opened up my understanding of the body in ways I had previously not been exposed too which lead me to start an Honours research project. When I returned to Praelia MMA in 2015 for my Honours project, it was in the name of research. Little did I know I would remain there for four and a half years and use it as a base for my PhD research.

This group photo was posted on the Praelia's social media page after an MMA session. I am fourth form the right in the back row.

Section 1: Setting up the Phenomenon

Chapter One: "You just made it worse for the next guy." Introduction Into Violent Bodies

I had just finished a hard MMA session that ran 15 minutes overtime. Dripping in sweat, muscles filled with blood, drained of energy and life, I ran to my bag at the stands as fast as possible—with sluggish arms—I took my shin guards and one of my boxing gloves off. I was desperate and swigged a mouthful of water. My mouth was filled with the taste of iron and my throat felt like it was burning because I was breathing so heavily. I felt the cold water going down my *food pipe* contrasted against the high temperature of my body. Boxing class had started and Caleb split the boxing ring into quarters using rope. I asked him if I could *jump in*. I attend twice a week, but it was symbol of respect for missing the warm-up when the MMA class ran over time. Without speaking, he gave a single nod to acknowledge me and I stepped between the ropes. I was standing across someone I had seen at a couple MMA classes, but had very little interaction with. We touched gloves and started the round.

The first punch he threw was a solid hook that hit my shoulder. He was a shorter stockier fighter than me. He coiled like a spring filled with tension, then would begin his flurry of heavy hook after heavy hook. Because the ring was cut into quadrants, there wasn't much room to move. Coming from the MMA mats where there's lots of space to move, pick shots and breathe, I had to adjust. He set a pace I wasn't ready for. He hit me hard and fast; I hit him softly and slowly! He could see my punches coming, but he didn't ease up, even though he was easily beating me up. I started to make a read on his combos. The way he'd drop his left hand after a hook and leave his chin open. The same combination of punches he'd perform like a dance, left body, right body, left hook to the head with a pause *to take a picture*. I started to get tense as I fell into his rhythm, and the intensity he set. He was getting frustrated because I was playing defense and not much was getting through.

He started hitting me harder. Finally after one of his combinations, I threw a jab to the left side of his head, and stepped left with it, while at the same time lunging my right power hand straight for his open chin. It wasn't the hardest punch I have performed, but it was well placed and timed. My punch rattled and dazed him. His head flung back into space. His eyes were flickering and we had

> to stop the round. I apologised to him while he collected himself, with his head and arms hanging over the ropes. With almost no hesitation, he looked up at me and replied, "don't apologise, you just made it worse for the next guy." The comment was lost on me in the heat of the moment. The round came to an end and we switched partners. He moved into another quadrant of the ring to face a new opponent, as someone new stepped into mine. The bell rung and we started the round. Seconds in, I heard a powerful thud that was followed by a roaring groan. I looked over and his new partner was crouched on his knees on the floor holding his stomach gargling in pain.

Mixed martial arts or MMA is a full contact combat sport that uses grappling and striking, in standing and ground positions from a variety of martial arts disciplines and combat sports (MACS)[1] in a continuous free flowing fight form. Its principal appeal in relation to other MACS is its status in relation to the notion of 'real fighting' (Spencer 2012b; Bowman 2020). The emergence of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in 1993 in the U.S., aimed to decrease/limit rules in exchange for pursuing authenticity (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006).[2] Despite MMA's contemporary form having many rules, van Bottenburg and Heilbron (2006) claim that combat sports "will always exist on the limits of socially (in)tolerable levels of violence" (p. 55).[3] Therefore, the many sides involved will condemn and vilify while others bolster or naturalise, aspects of combat sports. Following the death of a fighter who suffered a knock out, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) put out a statement condemning all combat sports. In their vehement opposition to MMA, the AMA's 2015 statement on combat sport framed combat sports as events of interpersonal violence and called for their total ban (Australia Medical Association 2015). In a 2017 ABC Radio interview, AMA President Dr. Gannon summarised the general concerns over combat sports:

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[1] Channon and Jennings (2014) use this acronym.

[2] The first UFC had two rules (1) no eye gouging, and (2) no biting.

[3] Sánchez García (2021) has argued that particular attention should be paid to civilising trends which play a role in shaping a nation's threshold of acceptable violence. While in Europe the sport remains on the margins, the particular balance of power between the State and market in the U.S. meant there is a higher tolerance for acceptance of violence in the U.S., which allowed for an eventual proliferation of the sport.

> This is one of the most dangerous pastimes one could possibly undertake. It is—let's think about the primary purpose of this so-called sport; it is to render your opponents unable to continue to fight, or at least less able to do so that you score more points against them. I've heard all the arguments in favour of boxing. Look, I think Jeff's [Horn] story is a fabulous story about fitness and purpose in life, but we just need to get smarter. We need to think about other pastimes in this world that get people off the street, that give people an avenue to fitness, and avenue to self-confidence, an avenue to purpose that doesn't require smacking someone's brain to the point where it doesn't work again, causing acute brain injury, and, in far too many cases, chronic brain injury (Gannon 2017).

Interestingly, Gannon's concerns touch on the popular rhetoric promoted by parties with a vested interest in MMA/combat sports. MMA organisations (such as the UFC), MMA gyms and pro-MMA media promote MMA along the lines of fitness and purpose, self-confidence and getting people off unsafe streets. MMA media classify and stipulate the terms for their classifications in which they evaluate MMA (Brett 2017). More recently, investigations into the construction of unhealthy MMA pedagogies, from the perspective of discursive production, have become increasingly important in cultural sociology (Domaneschi and Ricci 2022). As well as sociological studies of critical pedagogies investigating the well-being and health of MMA practitioners performing embodied practices (Jennings 2019).

Controversy surrounding MMA often falls into two camps on opposite ends of the spectrum. The first camp rallies against MMA positioning it as a 'so-called' sport, and claim that its existence will only lead to violence spilling onto the streets and ruining our society. The second camp argues the opposite; mainly that it teaches self-discipline and is a social good. A quick Google search of a typical MMA gym will yield clear results that cater towards fitness and coordination, social skills and personal growth, self-defence and bully proofing children. The below headlines are examples of two popular conceptions, MMA will lead to violence spilling onto the streets, and the other is that it prevents violence and social disobedience:

NATIONAL VICTORIA

Cage fighting violence remains in the ring after Melbourne's first bout

(Millar 2015)

UFC and MMA aims to prevent social disobedience so don't blame it for Sydney's increasing street crime

(Walshaw 2015)

MMA continues to be represented in the media in contradictory ways. As a public good, MMA has been presented as a rehabilitation tool by a former fighter who runs MMA classes for imprisoned Islamic extremist in order to reintegrate them into society (Kirkpatrick 2017). Conversely, it has been used as a tool to radicalise and recruit members into Australian neo-Nazi extremist group National Socialist Network (NSN) (Zidan 2021).[4] Combat sports—and MMA in particular—remain controversial as societies continue to undergo changes in the threshold of repugnance of viewing violence (Elias and Dunning 1986). Sports-related violence (SRV) is often dealt with in contradictory and ambivalent ways. Blame is passed from management and coaches onto the fans, who are supposedly only attracted to the violence in sport. Athletes blame the coaches and claim to oppose violence but engage in violent actions due to the pressures placed on them by their coaches. Finally, fans blame athletes and justify SRV by claiming it is the athletes and the situational aspects of the sport that are violent (Goldstein 1983). With the proliferation of the UFC and MMA, accessing MMA gyms has become relatively easy, as they have rapidly popped up around the country. Concern over the effects of MMA on society leads to the question of the relationship between participating in MMA and growing street violence. Specifically, under what conditions does taking part in an everyday MMA gym produce violent dispositions?

The Emergence of MMA

[4] MMA has also been deployed by far-right groups in Europe "trying to co-opt the sport for the spread of their extreme ideas and recruitment of new members" (Sánchez García 2021, p. 13).

Sociological inquiry into the emergence of MMA has primarily been understood in two ways. Firstly, the emergence of MMA can be viewed through a process of informalisation, which suggests that a relaxation in social codes in society led to a breakthrough of the sport which had grown from the martial arts scene of the 1960s onwards (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010). Secondly, it can be understood through a sportisation process, which remains within in a broader civilising spurt. In other words, as everyday life continues to grow dull due to increased constraints on everyday people, MMA provided a quest for excitement in which participants and fans can escape from everyday drudgery (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). Both explanations draw on Eliasian figurational scholarship in order to explain MMA. The emergence of MMA within neoliberalism can further provide social context. Neoliberalism can be defined as a theory of political and economic practices that arose from the 1970s economic crisis. The essential function was to preserve capital accumulation for the elite classes, by reorganising the role of the State to preserve and create institutional frameworks for deregulation, privatisation and withdrawal from state intervention (Harvey 2005). This coincided with the rise of new forms of electronic media technology. The introduction of pay TV and pay-per-view led to a shift in orientation from the interests of spectators to the interests of viewers. These media companies had the primary goal of organising MMA events for ratings and profits (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). As Collins (2013) has argued, the imperial interest of the US, Britain and the West were defended by their military might and was reflected in sport. The UFC leveraged and benefitted from an ideological climate in which it could prosper.

Sport reflected life and politics of the time, no intervention, de-regulation, few rules and rampant competition leading to excessive violence. Broadly speaking, violence can be justified in ideologies that express the naturalness of the existing order of things. Specifically, human kind's existence and natural condition is but a war against all and manifests in competitiveness, mutual fear and pursuit of glory (Lewontin, Rose and Kamin 1984).[5] At the same time, cutbacks made by neoliberal

[5] This conception of the human condition is derived from a reductionist perspective of human biology, and is understood as unchangeable. Therefore our biological inevitability is what produces the conditions of our society. A society that attempts to resolve inequality and competitiveness (the facts

state reforms to healthcare and other social provisions led to promoting individual responsibility. New healthcare reforms exacerbated bodily anxieties in which subjects evaluated themselves and others in relation to health practices grounded in medicalised and neoliberal discourse (Kristensen, Lim and Askegaard 2016). Furthermore, trends in the consumption of health markets related to body projects have continued to rise (Shilling 1993). Since the 1970s and 1980s a proliferation of niche consumption has occurred. These new forms of consumerism were formed around different lifestyle and modes of cultural expression (e.g. sexuality, ethnicity, etc.). This shift occurred as new technologies moved away from making things for prolonged use (like cutlery), to an industry of making spectacle, which has been termed compensatory consumerism (Harvey 2020). The UFC was run by a new type of media entrepreneur focused on viewership, aimed to capture a newly formed market within broader compensatory consumption, thus framed the UFC as a one off spectacle (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006).

Violent Bodies

This thesis begins from the standpoint that people both constitute, and are constituted by, society. That is, the social structures and institutions that are shaped by people, shape people's patterns of personalities, behaviours, and embodied realities (Mills 1959). So why violent bodies? Essentialist understandings of violence and bodies have tended to draw on universal laws at the risk of reducing and reproducing problematic dualisms surrounding mind/body, agency/structure, nature/nurture, etc. The effect of this has resulted in deterministic understandings of violence rooted in men's biology and psychology, or conversely, social constructivist explanations that overemphasise people as passive entities acting in accordance to social rules produced by discourse. For example, dualisms within science have broadly created cause and effects, in which something is either one thing or another. The Darwinian (and subsequently modern) understanding of nature and biology, is based on a view that organisms find the world as it is and must adapt or die. It is the environment that acts upon organisms in which they are passive objects to an external world, which is

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of physical nature) is a utopian ideal, that stands in contradiction to the very reality of human nature (Lewontin et al. 1984).

the active subject. This alienates the organism from the world outside, which means the world is independent of the organisms and so cannot be changed by those organisms. Lewontin (1991) argues that this is an impoverished and incorrect view of the "relationship between organisms and the world they occupy, a world that living organisms by and large create by their own living activities" (p. 12). In biology living beings are determined by their DNA and the world outside us poses problems we that we did not create but need to overcome and only experience as objects (find a mate, food, resources and win against other competition). This means if we have the right genes they will win out and we will pass our genetic information to the next generation of offspring. We are instruments for the propagation of genes, temporary vehicles through which self-replicating molecules succeed or fail to spread through the world.

Thus, society is made up of individuals and those individuals are made up of genes, therefore society and culture is understood to be made up of bits and pieces of tastes and preferences. We can know people, societies and cultures by knowing their DNA. This justifies wealth and health inequalities within and between nations, because it is a biological inevitability. The atomistic machine view that has come to dominate science has diverged from Descartes "the world is *like* a clock", to "we think it *is* a clock" (Lewontin 1991, p. 14). The dominant theories used to explain human nature have relied on Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, reifying the social relations between people as permanent and unchangeable. This locates problems of health and disease "within the individual so that the individual becomes a problem for society to cope with rather than society becoming a problem for the individual" (Lewontin 1991, p. 16). Understanding any section of society and people therein, requires an understanding of processes located in society as a whole, as opposed to partial and truncated parts (Elias 1978, 1987; Rojek 2014). In this sense, human and non-human events that change the world, cause changes to systems, structures and patterns of behaviour (Mills 1959). Understanding how this looks in the minutiae of everyday life, in the bodies of people, brings us closer in attempts to answer questions surrounding violent bodies.

Exactly what is violence and how it is defined has been a subject of academic labour (Goldstein 1983; Guilbert 2004; Messner 2007; Spaaij 2015; Matthews and Channon 2017; Young 2019). The question sheds light on the subjective experiences

of sport participants and objective statistics of violence (Guilbert 2004; Wieviorka 2009; Matthews and Channon 2017) and whether or not violence that remains within the rules of sport should be considered violence at all (Collins 2008; Matthews and Channon 2017). In addition, violence within sport has been predominately understood as a feature of a particular form of masculinity (Messner 1990, 2007, 2016; Connell 1995; Coakley 1998; Young 2019). Thematically, MMA literature has suggested complex formations of masculinities within MMA, which are not formed in strict binaries around either inflicting violence on others or not (Hirose and Pih 2009; Abramson and Modzelewski 2010; Green 2011, 2015; Vaccaro, Schrock & McCabe 2011; Vaccaro and Swauger 2015; Channon and Matthews 2015). This debate is grounded in the historical origins of the formation of gender and the kinds of masculinities that thrive today. For example, the emotionless, non-complaining, tough hard-working man that continues to be an idealised form of masculinity, largely came to prominence at the beginning of the industrial revolution (Collins 2013). The conditions produced by institutions, modes of production and exchange, ideologies, and social structures, remain suppressed within our society,[6] and have deep effects on the constitution of personhood (Messner 2016; Besnier, Guinness, Hann and Kovač 2018). The particular features of the 1980s recession accelerated deindustrialisation, and resulted in rising levels of structural unemployment and the growth of low-paid non-unionised service sector jobs (Messner 2016).[7] The social location of workers positioned in low status jobs with little security and control over the working environment is closely related to occupational disease and illness (Shilling 1993). Working conditions have a strong tendency to produce certain emotional-bodily

[6] For example, four modes of exchange can be distinguished: (A) gift exchange, predominates pre-state societies which produced communal solidarity (Mauss 1967); (B) domination and protection, predominates in slave and feudal societies; (C) commodity exchange of objects, predominates capitalism; and (X) a further stage to come. Moving through each stage does not leave the other behind entirely, but merely suppresses them. Capitalism remains a triad of nation-state-capital: nation as the form of communal solidarity, state as the form of direct domination, and capital as form of economic exchange; all three are necessary for the reproduction of a capitalist society (Žižek 2018).

[7] The Australian experience of labour market deregulation differs from other post-industrial societies in some ways. In the Global Financial Crisis, Australia faired relatively well, in part this was due to its robust resources sector, and its unique relationship with working-class masculinity which has allowed it to adopt neoliberal discourse (Whitman 2018).

responses in people (Mills 1959; Connell 1987; Shilling 1993). In this way it is possible to understand how aggression and violence can become a feature of certain masculinities and femininities under specific conditions. For example, debt collectors—mostly men—learn to work up an aggressive and intimidating pitch that creates anxiety in their clients in order to coerce them into paying their debt. Overtime, this can affect the relationship they have with their body and become part of their personal relations in their private lives (Hochschild 1983). Trying to understand the connection of masculinity and violence at a personal level without understanding its global connection results in partial conceptions. "European/American masculinities were deeply implicated in the world-wide violence through which European/American culture became dominant" (Connell 1995, p. 186). Therefore, I propose that violent bodies emerge under conditions, which shape dispositions and practices within complex dynamics of interaction and structural and historical processes.

The Study

In order to understand the experiences of people who participate in MMA, I spent over 4 and a half years training at Praelia MMA (pseudonym) in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. Making sense of an MMA gym required the use of several conceptual tools. Most notably, I drew on the work of Bourdieu, Collins, Connell and Elias. Each provided me with several challenges and advantages. Broadly speaking, the theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools used both in and out the field, tended to complement the areas in which the respective social theorists paid less attention to in their work. Although the epistemological and ontological perspectives did not always converge, arguably using multiple theories elucidated the social world rather than obfuscated it. The following chapters in this thesis aim to develop a rich understanding of MMA in participant's lives, in addition to exploring the subsequent aims:

- To understand the role MMA plays in the formation and reproduction of gendered identities;

- Detail how participants negotiate the tensions of confrontational interactions in order to engage in brutal-body-contact;
- Outline the effects of the rituals and practices in MMA on the *habitus* and embodied qualities of personhood in everyday life;
- Understand the conditions in which MMA does/does not produce violent bodies.

My ethnography was largely inspired by Wacquant's (2004a) *Body and Soul*, and by drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, field, capital and practice, I am better able to understand how participants everyday capacities—to think, feel and act in patterned but dynamic ways—are constrained by their social positions (Wacquant 2016a) which are the embodied reflection of a history of struggles over legitimating forms of capital (Bourdieu 1985). Secondly, I turn to the micro-situations in which I deploy Collins (2008) interaction ritual chains (IRC) and emotional energy (EE) in order to make sense of the interactional dynamics of confrontations and rituals that facilitate bodies in social action. Elias has much to say about the effects of socialisation on *habitus*, bodies and emotion. In this sense Elias's process sociology is anti-transhistorical and accounts for changes in humans and our societies. This directly opposes the ideological implications of reductionists by explaining—in a non-universal fashion—how history shapes us (Elias 1978, 1987; Elias and Dunning 1986; Maguire 1991b). Connell similarly uses historical and socio-structural analysis which centres on bodies, gender and power. Connell highlights the complex interaction between biological and social dynamics of bodies (Connell 1987, 1995, 2005).

Bourdieu, Elias, Collins and Connell have all been used in some combination with one another (for example see Paulle 2013 for Collins and Bourdieu; see Paulle, van Heerikhuizen and Emirbayer 2012 for Bourdieu and Elias; see Thorpe 2010 for Bourdieu and Connell; see Shilling 1993 for Bourdieu, Elias and Connell). However, I have yet to come across a study of MMA that draws on a combination of all four researchers. The table below broadly highlights how I made sense of Praelia MMA in thinking with the researchers and their tools:

Themes	Social Theorist

The body, ethnicity, gender, embodiment, habitus and emotion.	Bourdieu, Connell, Collins and Elias
The rituals, dynamics of interaction and confrontations, social practices and socialisation.	Collins, Bourdieu, Connell and Elias
The organisation of social space and the social field.	Bourdieu, Connell and Elias

Significance of Research

Research examining MMA largely exists outside the Australian context. To date, few research projects have focused on everyday gyms that consist of members in the community who are largely there for reasons other than trying to make a career out of fighting. Research projects into everyday MMA participation have tended to focus on middle-class experiences of men in semi-professional or elite gyms (Abramson and Modzelewski 2010; Green 2011, 2015; Spencer 2009, 2012a, 2012b). Research focusing on everyday participants has mostly emerged from broad martial arts practice (collection of works in Spencer and Sánchez García 2013; Channon 2014; Channon and Jennings 2014; Jennings 2019).

Undertaking research into sports violence remains a highly important task. Studying sport, but not society remains a study out of context (Elias and Dunning 1986). Firstly, the tendency of research has been to separate sport violence from broader social structures and processes, which often result in essentialist understandings of violence in sport. This is both theoretically and practically not useful because the sorts of social dimensions that underpin behaviours in sport occur in other social institutions (Young 2019). Violence has tended to be understood in relation to masculinity, and deemphasised the dynamics of situations (Collins 2008), and the socialisation processes, emotion and broader cultural and historical factors (Elias 1978, 1987; Spencer 2012b). This has tended to split understandings of the complex dynamics between these theoretical camps. Secondly, deepening our understanding of the role MMA plays in shaping participants relationship to violence can better facilitate intervention into these spaces to capitalise on the educative potential of sport, martial arts and MMA. In addition, the masculinities that form

within, or occupy the MMA space are in many ways precarious and marginal, thus having a space of belonging in an increasingly alienating world under neoliberal capitalism may provide refuge from precarity, in a 'same same but different' way that the Woodland Boys and Girls Club did for Deedee's boys in the South side of Chicago (Wacquant 2004a).

Game Plan: Thesis Structure and Outline

Section one aims to develop the background and context for the thesis. Firstly, by exploring various theoretical perspectives on violence in sport. Secondly, tracing the emergence of MMA and UFC within Australia and Melbourne. Thirdly, outlining the theoretical tools and perspectives used to understand gender, masculinity and violence within sport and MMA. Lastly, discussing ethnography and its centrality to the research. This section broadly defines the direction of the thesis as it sets up violence, gender, the body and MMA and how they shape, limit or constrain agents in Praelia MMA. This section aims to demonstrate hegemony in institutions operating at the site of the body, and move away from the analytical tendency of working in a binary between hegemonic institution on one side and hegemonic masculinity on the other.

Chapter two, starts with the exploration of previous literature and theoretical arguments surrounding sport violence. I draw on Collins, Elias and Young to explain and define violence. I trace the historical origins of modern sport and situate it within social structures and processes. I then outline Collins' micro-sociological approach to violence and confrontational tension and fear. The aim is to setup an analytical framework that does not give supremacy to one level of analysis over another. **Chapter three** follows from this point and draws out in more detail the emergence of MMA, which is heavily influenced by Elias (and subsequently Dunning's) work. This chapter tends to focus on the U.S. and Australian context. I outline how the popularity of MMA grew in Australian and Melbourne through a textual analysis of local newspapers and yellow pages. I then look at philosophical, ethical and moral perspectives on MMA and violence. In **chapter four** I provide my main theoretical framework for the body and gender in practice, utilising Bourdieu and Connell's concepts. I draw on

Gramsci's hegemony to move away from the apparently inevitable reproduction of hegemonic masculinity in securing dominance of women and marginalised men. I then provide preliminary explanations of *habitus*, field and capital, before exploring how MMA can be a space of resistance. Overall, this chapter sets up the later chapters to demonstrate the tying of masculinity to the body, and naturalising it with violence in specific institutions. **Chapter five** outlines the methodological approach I used in my research while being in Praelia for over four and a half years. Here, I provide my definition of violence in MMA for this thesis and outline my (epistemological and ontological) assumptions, regarding violence. I then justify the importance of participant observation and outline the epistemological perspectives and assumptions of positivistic sciences that have in part become taken-for-granted. I outline my fieldwork experiences and the semi-structured life history interviews I conducted. I interviewed 13 participants, which have been amalgamated with over 40 people who I trained with over the years but never had a chance to formally interview. I describe them as a cast of characters, then contextualise Praelia MMA as a research site, as well as my biography and reflexivity as a researcher, and my analytical approach.

Section two focuses on the bulk of the ethnography within Praelia MMA. Using section one as the foundation, section two begins by providing an insight into the rituals, symbols and cultural resources within the gym, as well as theoretical exposition to aid the analysis on emotional energy. Secondly, it develops Praelia MMA as a specific social field and the *habituses*, capital and practises therein. This is followed by masculinities within Praelia to demonstrate the complex and contradictory formations of gendered dispositions and identities. Finally, I turn to my ethnographic tale to document the changes and developments I underwent in my time at Praelia. This section attempts to give the reader a sense of Praelia MMA as people enter, they forms bonds and a sense of belonging, build capital specific forms of capital, grow disinterested and leave, and undergo physical, emotional and psychological changes.

Beginning with **chapter six**, the focus on the rituals and dynamics of interaction and confrontations, this chapter primarily mobilises Collins theoretical lens in order to outline how emotional energy is boosted or depleted (jolting emotional energy upward or downward) in mundane and everyday interactions

and rituals, and how they affect group solidarity. I then describe where I fit within Praelia. **Chapter seven** begins to develop Praelia MMA as a specific social field and draws on Bourdieu's concepts in order to outline the species of capital, the logic of practice, specific tastes, and interaction rituals within this context. Specifically, I detail how people enter into interactions not as empty canvases but with historically significant forms of capital tied to their specific social locations. **Chapter eight** is the first chapter that begins to use masculinity and gender as an analytical tool to understand the MMA space. This chapter locates masculinity within the social institutions, which have become hegemonic and shape our relationship with our self and others. In this sense, I look at how MMA offers mostly men a space to craft, create and practice their masculine identities through a combat sport culturally exalted within specific social milieus as the predominant form of enacting a productive masculinity, despite its marginality in relation to broad cultural activities. **Chapter nine** is the final chapter of section two, which rests on the previous seven chapters in order to dive into—an albeit condensed version—of my time in Praelia MMA. I shift my writing style to an ethnographic descriptive narrative. This chapter aims to capture my immersion and as a result the changes in my disposition and relative success as a member of Praelia MMA.

Section three wraps up with **Chapter ten** to conclude the thesis and summarise the main findings and potential direction for future research for examining violence in MMA. Firstly I consider why MMA matters and secondly if we should be worried?

Chapter Two: "I don't really enjoy violence, I like fighting" – Ritual, Staged or Real? Violence in Sport

Violence in sport is relatively under researched in sociology, despite the fact that it is the best-recorded form of violence (Collins 2008). The bulk of the research about sports violence has been undertaken in the subfield of sport sociology (Young 2019). The various theories that explain violence related to sport and violence more broadly, can pose several problems when trying to understand violence in society. In order to avoid the biological and psychological reductive theories on violence and aggression, I turn to (a) sports-related violence (SRV) because it widens the lens from which violence related to sport can be researched and understood (Young 2019); and (b) a micro-sociological theory of violence, in order to understand the dynamics of violent interactions (Collins 2008). These two lenses complement one another by focusing on their respective areas, as well as raise important contradictions for understanding violence.

Firstly, SRV includes concrete or potentially harmful acts that are inseparable from the sports process, which can be understood through scrutinising the socially embedded character of sport. For example, SRV includes violence that arises out of force, consent, and exploitation of players labour—hegemony and symbolic violence; forms of environmental damage in hosting large-scale sporting events:[8] and the empirical gender bias in violence dominated by men. The SRV perspective asks whether violent behaviours in sports are better conceptualised as part of a socialisation process of gendered identities or socialisation into sport more broadly (or both) (Young 2019). Secondly, the micro-sociological theory of violence, places emphasis on the interactions and situational dynamics of sporting contests, paying close attention to the way sports are structured. As a result, contests confrontationally structured as offensive and defensive, produce the necessary conditions for violent confrontations outside the rules of sport. Confrontations within the rules of sport are not necessarily understood as violence per se. The focus on the here-and-now of

[8] The continued use of Earth as a reservoir of resources for productivity has resulted in adverse consequence on the living conditions disproportionately effecting populations of the global south (Žižek 2018).

interactions results in the historical development of sport—and therefore its history as a masculine vestige—to remain in the periphery when theorising violence in sport. The emphasis is on the interactions, not individuals, social background, culture or motivation and is a deliberate omission (Collins 2008). Importantly, this does away with understanding the context in which sport is played, which is a necessary step toward understanding the various roles and forms of violence in sport.

Both lenses can help understand sports-related violence, by examining what one theory focuses on and the other conceals. For example, the implications of violence that remains within the rules and role of socialisation into sport within a historically bound context. There is no doubt that by widening the focus of how violence is defined and theorised, we are more adequately equipped in avoiding the reductive folk thinking that often plagues how violence is represented and understood in society. Therefore, I now turn to the important task of how violence is defined.

Definitions of Violence

The two most general perspectives in the literature surrounding violence are dichotomously split into the internal, roughly corresponding to psychology and biology and the external, roughly corresponding to anthropology and sociology. The internal is categorised as the mind, personality or genes of the individual, and the external is understood as the social situations, values, structures and processes in which people act (Walby 1990; Young 2019). In addition there are two salient and interconnected positions that surround definitions of violence, which either focus on the perpetrator or on the victim. These can be understood as violence-as-force and violence-as-violation and terminologically most commonly associated with interpersonal violence—that is, manifesting in direct physical bodily attempts to harm, abuse or kill others (Matthews and Channon 2017). This single definition of violence can flatten what we understand as violence and fail to recognise the full diversity of violence. Forming a single definition is neither desirable nor possible and might be more akin to positivist disciplines rather than social sciences (Goldstein 1983; Messner 2007; Spaaij 2015; Matthews and Channon 2017). Common definitions and thinking about violence risk producing a restricted understanding of our social reality.

In order to avoid a biologically reductive or social deterministic understanding of violence—that is, ones "race" or economic position will inevitable result in violence—requires epistemological vigilance, which shifts away from common categories of thought and taken for granted assumptions (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015). Defining sports violence is an elusive task, which has left sports violence scholars (from various disciplines e.g. sociology, criminology, psychology, etc.) with partial and incomplete explanations and perspectives (Young 2000; Spaaij 2015). Therefore, sports violence becomes increasingly important to define "because it determines what behaviours and practices we render (in)visible, how we assess and respond to these, and where we look for explanations" (Spaaij 2015, p. 325).

Although a multi-faceted definition for understanding violence is preferred, it is not always possible. For example, in understanding sports violence, Messner (2007) starts with the reasonable assumption that most popular sports are predicated on the successful use of violence to achieve victory, by turning the human body into a weapon "to be used against other bodies resulting in pain, serious injury and possibly death" (p. 92).[9] This important contribution necessarily restricts the definition of violence and ignores other forms of violence such as moral, symbolic, verbal, economic, and so on (Bodin and Robène 2014), to focus on physical bodily contact within the rules of sport. It also ignores the subjectivity of violence, the way it is experienced, lived and observed, undergone by the various individuals, groups and societies (Wieviorka 2009; Spaaij 2015). Objective and empirically quantifiable measures of violence (statistics of crime e.g. assault, homicide, and theft, or number of casualties in war), do not capture the subjective nature of experience (Guilbert 2004). The objective implies strict universal perspectives, in contrast to the subjective, which considers relativistic changes that depend on the position of the person speaking (Wieviorka 2009). The subjective nature of violence is an opportunity to pay attention to the lives, experiences and definitions of those who engage in "'violence' on a regular basis" (Matthews and Channon 2017, p. 765; Messner 2007). MACS and contact sport become particularly useful in this sense.

[9] Again we encounter a contradiction with Collins (2008) who reserves the term sports violence for violence that occurs outside the rules of the game, and is made up of physical violence, this focus turns away from non-physical violence present in sport (e.g. Guilbert (2004) draws on soft violence which can be considered psychological).

Developing a conceptual language is important to account for the subtle differences between the ways in which individuals and groups signify their experiences in MACS and contact sports. In doing so, we may be better armed to avoid the risk of overlaying one's own interpretations of what constitutes 'violence' onto the accounts of the participants in research. Matthews and Channon (2017) demonstrate that participants negotiate complex differences in what they enjoy about their MACS and combat sport; and the complex way participants negotiate ritualised and interpersonal violence. For example, a nuanced difference in enjoying the 'physical' yet non-hurtful aspect of sports sits within Smith's (1983) typology of violence. Though in practice his four types of interpersonal violence are blurred, they provide a conceptual application. First is *brutal body contact* which is defined within the rules of the game, despite its illegality outside the rules of sport. Second is *borderline violence* which violates the official rules but is routine and normalised enough to be dealt with within the confines of the game (e.g. fouls and so on). Third is *quasi-criminal violence* which is considered unacceptable to the point that sports authorities will deal with it, suggesting a tacit social acceptance of violent behaviours in sport. Lastly is *criminal violence* which extends beyond acceptance within sport and is prosecuted in the court system (Smith 1983; Matthews and Channon 2017; Young 2019). Brutal body contact might not be viewed as violence per se, because of the ritualised dimension of consents bound within the rules of sport (Matthews and Channon 2017). However, this point might leave us vulnerable in attempting to deal with the complex terrain of sanctioned violence, in particular when it comes to the institutionalised violence constituted by combat sports (Sánchez García 2021). The overemphasis on subjectivity and consent within ritualised violence, de-contextualises sport's development within society.[10] Sport cannot be understood outside the context in which it is immersed. The "fervent cultures of aggression, risk and hubris which compromise participant health" and limit the possibility of safety, and subsequently influence "sports administration and the justice system, as well as sociologists of sport..." (Young 2019, p. 24). Broadly speaking, violence can also be justified and glorified when viewed as a defence of ideals, morals and of one's nation. However, framing violence without the appropriate awareness of its complexity runs

[10] Player-to-player violence is often condoned and culminates in ritual violence being rationalised as harmless (Young 2019).

the risk of ignoring social processes and focusing on the act itself, which cannot account for violence in other forms.[11]

Young's (2019) definition of SRV aims to avoid de-contextualizing sports violence as separate episodes of social action, unrelated to broader social structures and processes in which people work and live. By combining Coakley's (1998) definition of aggression and the WHO's definition of violence, Young arrives at the following definition of SRV:

> "(a) Direct acts of physical violence contained within or outside the rules of the game that result in injury to persons, animals or property; (b) Harmful or potentially harmful acts conducted in the context of sport that threaten or produce injury or that violate human justices and civil liberties." (p. 15)

Defining SRV in this way illuminates the lesser focused on areas of violence as violation—as well as understanding the overlap in various forms of violence.[12] The violation of human rights and justice makes Bourdieu's symbolic violence (or Gramsci's hegemony) conceptually useful for understanding the practical application of violence in the daily lives of everyday people. In this way, we are equipped with the ability to understand the context in which sports violence occurs, in relation to symbolic violence, which is a violence of misrecognition. Meaning, the social structures and chains of interdependence in which human interactions occur (and everything that constitutes it, e.g. emotions, body mechanics, language, the State, religion, the gender order, etc.), are taken-for-granted (Elias 1978; Bourdieu 1991; Matthews and Channon 2017; Burawoy 2019).

Symbolic violence (the violence of domination and subordination) is "a game that seduces participants into spontaneous consent while concealing the social

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[11] A 2014 Roy Morgan survey of 1307 participants, found that Australians aged 35 and above are in favour of the death penalty for deadly terrorist attacks in Australia. Those below 35 were only slightly less in favour (roymorgan.com). Certainly not a large enough sample size to generalise the entire attitude of the country, but none the less it provides an insight into an attitude about violence within this context.

[12] By example, violating workers human rights in sports-related 'sweat-shop' industries (Young 2019). "Poverty, marginalisation, alienation and oppression are hallmarks of such violence." (Matthews and Channon 2017, p. 754).

relations that are the conditions of its existence" (Burawoy 2019, p. 3). In sport we can understand this as athletes being used for financial gain, underpaid for their labour; enduring psychological and emotional distress from codified practices that are justified through the scientisation of the elite performance model; as well as acts of self-harm through drug use, strict diet and weight regulation and so on (Hughes and Coakley 1991; Maguire 1991a; Messner 2007; Young 2019). These various forms of violence in sport are legitimised and delegitimised through ideological layers surrounding notions such as fair play, nationalism and masculinity, in which the context and history of sport becomes a necessary step for understanding SRV. [13] In this sense, the arena of violence in sport is contradictory and ideologically complex, and therefore, it is necessary to understand the internal contradictions that serve different social ends (Eagleton 1991). Violence can be positioned in relation to its instrumentality, the physical, and psychological effects on an individual, group or society, and it can be understood ideologically. Sports violence may serve ideological purposes for reinforcing several inequalities as natural and necessary. Furthermore, sport is itself part of a system that is inherently violent, because relations of domination and exploitation are sustained through subtle forms of coercion and consent (Žižek 2009). Rather than understanding sporting practices within a self-contained universe, analysing a sport and understanding change, requires knowledge of the structure and the structural history of sport within the totality of sporting practices (Bourdieu 1988). It is the context within which sport emerged, to which I now turn.

A Brief History of Sport

[13] Ideology is complex and has many conceptions, each with limitations and applicability (Eagleton 1991). When referring to ideology I mean it as "…the ruling ideas of a particular society at a particular time. They are ideas that express the "naturalness" of an existing social order and help maintain it: The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e. which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual forces. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" (Lewontin, et al. 1984, p. 4).

The contemporary structure of sport as a rule bound and formally organised competitive contest only developed during the last 200 or so years in Europe and North America (Coakley, Hallinan, Jackson and Mewett 2009). In 1750s Britain, a shift occurred in the nature of boxing, horse racing and cricket that separated these sports from the folk games of the past. Not only were they constrained by the emergence of rules of play, but their predictability made way for their ability to generate revenue by paying to watch, being paid to play, or gambling. As sport developed alongside the industrial revolution, it was growing as a newly emerging entertainment industry, coinciding with the expansion of spending power and leisure time for upper and middle classes (Collins 2013). In the early years of Britain's industrial revolution, sport was viewed as the antithesis of values ascribed to work; church ministers preached the immorality of sport and the moral value of work. But by the late 1800s, in Australia and in other countries, there was an increased emphasis on sport no longer being defined as just enjoyable fun, but as a tool that could be used for achieving particular goals such as economic productivity, national loyalty and the development of admirable character traits, especially among young men (e.g. conditioning the bodies of working-class men).

Forms of sport that maintained the privilege of those in power were promoted in order to perpetuate values and orientations that supported capitalist business expansion (Coakley et al. 2009). The structural changes in the late 19th century and emergence of industrial capitalism crystalised the current patterns of gender relations we see today, for example the changing of rural agricultural economies into urban industrial ones created a shift in gender relations and in family structures which saw women primarily become caretakers and men workers (Kimmel 1987, 2000; Messner 1990, 2016; Bowman 2020). This uneven process played a part in the crisis in masculinity that began to surface. The attitudes and values of Victorian era society reflected in sport, culminated in the amateur code of the gentlemen. This was bound up with social segregation, middle-class masculinity, and British nationalism. The middle-class masculinity of the time was formed around stoicism, honour, duty and self-sacrifice, underpinning amateur sporting ideals, which were (and still remain) important to capitalist society. Men that were educated in the public school system prided themselves on their ability to give and take physical violence in their respective sport (e.g. rugby, soccer). Unlike working-class players who endured the

demands of manual labour jobs, middle-class sportsmen's working lives were generally sedentary, feeling "the need to demonstrate their masculinity in the most forceful of ways" (Collins 2013, p. 82). The changes in economic structures meant that cities were becoming industrial hubs, and enclosure acts made rural economies increasingly competitive. This forced families to move to cities for employment. Men began working in the factory 12 hours a day six days a week. Succumbing to any weakness, emotional sensitivity or lack of willpower, meant potentially losing wages, dismissal from work and the destitution of oneself and family (Collins 2013; Bowman 2020). "The origin of the working-class 'hard man' in life and in sport can be found in the brutal necessities of everyday life in early industrial capitalism" (Collins 2013, p. 40). Middle-class values on the other hand began to shift from the violence in sport to sporting skill (Elias and Dunning 1986).[14] Rowe (2004) explains the emergence of the social institution of sports as:

> …adaptation to modernization and industrialization. Physical play becomes more structured and regulated, it takes on many of the cohesive values necessary for society to exist (common purpose, mutual support, leadership, and discipline), especially in the schools, where children can learn socialization through sport. Sporting pursuits also develop into a modern industry that enables leisure time to be fruitfully and efficiently used (p. 99).

Sport functioned as an ideological buttress for capitalism and enabled people with power to reproduce their privilege in society without coercing workers (Coakley et al. 2009). For example, sport was integral for the maintenance of British rule in colonised countries through a process of socialisation. Schools were opened to the children of the elites, with sport at the core of their curriculum, fair play governed the conduct of games and reflected the attitudes of the British middle classes. Fair play offered definitions of maleness based on Muscular Christian ideals of being "physically courageous, strong-willed, prepared to give and take orders, and, above all, not feminine" (Collins 2013, p. 38). Muscular Christians believed involvement in

[14] Sport at times is treated as a purely pacifying tool for the masses. In such cases it loses its essence as a socially constituted, historical entity, and its varied uses throughout history (Bodin and Robène 2014).

sport was a legitimate avenue for spiritual growth (Coakley et al 2009). Among the English aristocracy in the nineteenth century, boxing was common in private schools. In fact, learning how to box was an important accomplishment required to make the 'English gentleman'. However, later in the century students from elite private schools spread boxing among working class youths in boys clubs. This was viewed as a way to build their character and teach them self-control. Throughout the twentieth century, this resulted in the popularity of boxing among the working classes to increase, both in its amateur and professional guises. This led to decreasing the popularity of boxing among the dominant classes in society (Shilling 1993; Collins 2013). The emphasis on bodily disciplines for obedience is based largely in belief, "and belief is what the body…concedes when the mind…says no" (Bourdieu 1988, p. 161). Sport is one example of how bodies were disciplined and the ideology of the dominant classes was imparted within changing social relations. This occurred within the wider conditions of the labour market, which emerged in Britain (and elsewhere) during the industrial revolution and created new social divisions in labour. Men and women were partitioned into economic and social roles to meet the demands of factory and family life (Shuttleworth 1990). [15] Disciplining bodies "is the instrument par excellence of all forms of "domestication."" The relationship that unites bodily postures to corresponding feelings can be understood in the feelings induced or reinforced by assuming certain postures and positions. Hence collective corporeal practices used in for example totalitarian regimes or the grand Olympic stage, help somatise the social and symbolising, with the aim of reinforcing the "social orchestration through its bodily collective mimesis" (Bourdieu 1988, p. 161).

Sports use in the maintenance of hegemony through somatising the social and symbolic world through collective bodily mimesis, extends into the realm of gender. For example, sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became:

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[15] The revaluation of traditional gender relations created what has been argued as a 'crisis of masculinity' (Kimmel 1987). The 'crisis of masculinity' appears to be cyclical, emerging in past centuries at points of social change and/or economic downturn (Walker and Roberts 2018). The 'crisis of masculinity' became a regular form of political and social concern, in particular in times of military or imperial doubt, fears of men's physiological and physical deterioration was emphasised (Collins 2013; Roberts 2014). The demarcation between the sexes found a foothold within institutions and spread.

> …a jealously guarded gendered field in the urban centres of Western societies, in which men could engage in ritualised forms of physical violence, which the nuclearization of the family and the increasing importance of middle-class white-collar labour had rendered largely unacceptable [civilising process]. Gender is constructed at the convergence and through the mutual interaction of multiple social, cultural, political, and economic dynamics that vary across time and space and that operate on many different scales (Besnier, et al. 2018, p. 842).

Sport has become increasingly important in defining masculinity, eclipsing other domains (Connell 1995). It has become a focus of sustained attention, a way of enacting productive masculinity that competes with other gendered forms. Masculinity has become a prime focus for much of the emerging field of MMA (as in sport sociology broadly). Since the nineteenth-century, sports' increasing importance in national culture has made it an important component in maintaining the hegemony of dominant groups (Rowe 2004), especially as they serve the mode of production that reinforces their means of existence. The tendency of MMA participation continues to be predominantly occupied by men and teenage boys, who share something in common with one another, broadly speaking—precarious masculinities (Besnier, et al. 2018). Precarious masculinities can be understood within the period and economic practices characterised as neoliberalism, which have destablised personhood with uncertainty (see chapter 8).

In Eliasian terms, modern sport emerged in the context of a civilising spurt and is closely linked with the process of increasing democratisation, industrialisation, rationalisation, rising standards of social control, emancipation and freedom (Rigauer 2000). Now turning to the civilising process in order to understand the current patterns of sport (and leisure) and violence, by continuing to trace how it emerged from the past (Maguire 1991b).

The Civilising Process

The civilising process is a specific technical term developed by Elias that differs from colloquial and popular meaning of the word civilisation and civilised. Central to the theory of the civilising process is the formation of the State, which maintains a

monopoly over violence and the socialisation of children in society (Mennell 1990). Firstly, Elias contends that the process of the formation of States, the subsequent subjugation of warrior classes to stricter control and "the 'courtization' of nobles in continental countries" had a hand in changing the code of sentiment and conduct in Europe (1986 p. 21). The civilising process is a historical transition of societies formalising laws through the creation of court society and the centralisation or monopolisation of physical force by the State and taxation. Making the use of physical force in the everyday, by people without the "right" to do so, a matter of civil prosecution. Civilising processes produce stricter control over behaviour and serve the upper classes as they constrain the lives of the middle and working classes. Constraints function as important instruments in domination, as competition for the same opportunities between upper and lower groups become more intense. These internalised processes are habituated and serve as marks of distinction and prestige that maintain the position of the upper classes (Elias 2000). Overtime, the constraints caused a dulling of everyday life. The duller life became, the more need there was for excitement in the mimesis of sport. The control of physical force led to slowly changing folk games (earlier forms of modern sport e.g. rugby, soccer and boxing) into codified sports, which produce excitement. As societies continue to undergo civilising processes, the 'threshold of repugnance' regarding bloodshed and violence have been increasingly pushed behind the scenes (Elias and Dunning 1986; Maguire 1993). Thus, the civilising process (sportisation) of sports is connected to a wider civilising spurt.

Many arenas of social life were affected. In Eliasian terms, the changes in sport were attempts at prolonging the pleasure of victory in mock-battle of sport. These were symptomatic of a far-reaching change in the personality structure of human beings, which was closely connected to changes in the power structure of society at large. Namely, the 'calming down' of violence in society and settling conflicts through non-violent means, like the party rituals of parliamentary government. Restraint from using violence in certain spheres became a mark of distinction in the aristocracy (Maguire 1991b). For example, folk games that were played in the Middle Ages changed in a similar direction, especially with the sensitivity towards violence. In boxing the introduction of technologies such as gloves sought to decrease bloodshed, and the formation of weight classes attempted

to create more equal opportunities for winning. Folk games were considerably more violent because the threshold of repugnance was comparatively high with regard to engaging in and witnessing violence in the Middle Ages. Rugby games had local rules, and often consisted of a 1000 or more players. These sports were eventually civilised through a process of (i) a complex set of formal rules that demanded strict control over the use of physical force, and prohibition of it in other forms; (ii) clearly defined intra-game sanctions, penalties given to offenders with the possibility of disqualification; (iii) the institutionalisation of a role which stands outside the game, who is tasked with controlling it (the referee); and (iv) a centralised rule making authority or body that enforces the rules. The standardisation of sport or the 'sportisation' of pastimes, Elias explains is their "transformation in English society into sports and exportation of some on a global scale, is an example of a civilising spurt" (Elias and Dunning 1986, p. 22). This coincided with the make-believe battles of sport, which elicit the excitement of real-life situations and a quest for excitement, with the dulling of society (Maguire 1991b).

However, in order for sports to keep the imitation of battle or excitement produced from sport, they must maintain a level of excitement for both participants and spectators.[16] The increase of viewership revenue and the political economy of sports tipped the focus from participant to viewers, which leaves sports at the hand of maintaining a balance that is continuously under the restraint of generating revenue for stakeholders (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006, 2010). The second level of the civilising process is the individual level where children learn/acquire adult standards of behaviour and feelings prevalent in their society, which can be otherwise termed socialisation. These changes that occur over many generations are considered to take the form of a structured process of change, with a discernible, though unplanned direction over time. There is a link between the long-term structural development of societies and long-term changes in people's social character or typical personality make up (Bourdieu referred to this as the social *habitus*). In other words, as the structure of society becomes more complex and interconnected, manners, culture and personality also change in a particular and discernable way (Mennell 1990). For example, violence becomes hard to commit as it is increasingly regulated by the

[16] Chapter 3 considers this in relation to MMA and the UFC.

State, which has license over legitimate violence. Like violence, love, hatred, and repentance, are symptoms of the same social and personality structure, which has over time become more subdued, moderate and calculated (Elias 1978). Emphasis is placed on the regulation on the immediacy of pleasure, drives and passion, which become internalised and violently fought within individuals against the supervising part of themselves.[17] This strict moulding of children leads to interpersonal conflicts which serve to pattern their personality structure and eventually the conflicts that once manifested in relationships between people, often struggle no less violently within them (Shilling 1993).

Critics of Elias's theory of the civilising process refute the notion that violence is reduced with modernity (Walby 2012). This suggests a reductive view of violence in society, which is pushed to the edges of society, belonging to categories of deviance of the disadvantaged or in the infrequent battles of militaries engaged in interstate war. Walby (2012) highlights the invisible forms of violence like gender-based-violence or violence against minorities, which from the perspective of the global south are less marginal. This can also be seen in the more 'invisible' forms of SRV, which are taken-for-granted (Young 2019). Though, this critique might have more to do with Elias's definitions of violence, where he often sought out the most extreme forms of violence (e.g. homicide) historically available to discuss, rather than his overall theory (Bodin and Robène 2014).[18] Many criticisms of Elias's theory are based on it being a Victorian progress theory, which ignores that the interconnectedness between people is not established once and forever and can be reversed. In this reading of the civilising process, violence is not reduced to the deviance of the disadvantaged, for example in cases when the social base of a class is destabilised, the pressure of erosion of their social basis can lead to spurts of violence in defending their position (Mennell 1990). These events have left "in the

[17] The single most powerful influence on Elias's early work was Freud (Menelle 1990), hence the deep resemblance to the Fruedian superego that acts as a censorious power which keeps us obedient in our everyday lives (Eagleton 1991).

[18] Violence appears to be decreasing when just considering homicide rates in Australia, which have dropped by 9 percent from 1990-2008. However, in contrast, from 1998-2008 sexual assaults have increased by 20 percent (Bricknell 2008). In this regard, it is clear how definitions and data selected limit Elias's civilising process.

contemporary Zeitgeist" a deeply imprinted fear that society is undergoing a process of 'decivilisation', which appears to disconfirm the civilising process (Elias and Dunning 1986, p. 225; Mennell 1990).

Decivilising processes are the opposite of the civilising process. In a decivilising trend the level of danger increases and the relative degree of detachment decreases. Self-control breaks down to the point that violence and instability consume human relations. This has a deep effect on social and personality structures, which sever large chains of interconnectedness between individuals, groups, states and countries. This erosion occurs when humans in society lose control over extra-human forces ('nature'), control over interpersonal and social forces, and control over themselves as individuals ('psychological' controls). Therefore, spiking the level of danger (Mennell 1990). Elias (1987) maintains that the evolutionary break that distinguishes human beings from other animals is the balance between human learned behaviour (socialisation) dominating unlearned conduct. Humans require access to a social fund of knowledge, passed on from generation to generation, in order to survive or become fully human. In this sense, viewing combat sport as evidence of decivilising is erroneous because sport can be viewed as 'civilising' the bodies of those who are socialised through it (Shilling 1993).

The degree of engagement of the body is associated with a primaeval experience of the physical and social world, which can be understood in relation to social position. That is the inseparable relation between the body to the world, which is conceived within the broader society in which bodies are constituted. For example, the social distance and arrangement of space in the most distinctive practises such as golf or tennis, guarantee opponents are distanced from one another, exclude contact through mediation of a ball, and distinctly, practitioners are separated from spectators. Conversely, the close proximity of body-to-body struggle within combat sports are understood as rugged. For example the nudity of opponents and the fact that they require no mediation through equipment and in the case of wrestling or MMA, fighting occurs on the ground (Bourdieu 1988). An Eliasian and Bourdieusian analysis of tennis makes further explains this point. Tennis is an example of an originally upper (middle) class sport that requires a relatively high level of accuracy and socialised self-restraint.

> Civility goes far beyond the fact that the players almost never fight. If a ball is hit hard and directly towards an opponent, or even if one unwittingly profits from the ball hitting the net, apologies are often offered by means of a rather subtle hand gesture. And no matter what is at stake, the ritual always closes down with handshakes over the net and with the appropriately elevated umpire symbolizing legitimate authority (Paulle, van Heerikhuizen, and Emirbayer 2012, p. 85).

Tennis seems to be an extremely restrained sport, devised by, and played for established groups. Established groups in Eliasian terms are the yardstick of whom 'outsiders' measure themselves (Elias and Scotson 1994). Through social cohesion and tight knit networks, established groups maintain myths about superiority and the "inherent, and therefore all the more shameful, inferiority of the newcomers" referred to as outsiders (Paulle et al. 2012, p. 81). Elias and Bourdieu's emphasis on the body in sport unravels how the social world functions simultaneously as systems of power relations and as a symbolic system that form minute distinctions of taste that become the basis for social judgement (Maguire 1991b). Elias viewed that emotional bodily self-control "tended to operate as the most fundamental power resource and as a prerequisite to the sedimentation of all kinds of abilities and forms of knowledge", Bourdieu paid "close attention to body-based learning, knowledge, skills, and practical action" (Paulle et al 2012, p. 84). Sport then becomes a terrain where it is possible to develop critical and theoretical discourse to counter (masculine) domination as a naturalised state of human existence and understand the process of self-realisation of identity-formation (Maguire 1991b; Brown 2006).

If we take this partial yet purposeful delineation of tennis, we are placed in the centre of analysis to think about how middle and upper class ways of being (speaking, moving, feeling and thinking) and accumulating capital (building social capital through business networks and opportunities) for adults and then their offspring are developed. These elite microcosm's moving together repeatedly over time create carnal connections and group solidarities. The seemingly meaningless building of relationships among "people with a good first serve", potentially lie at the heart of the forming of fantasies "about self-made men, natural distinction, and the inherent inferiority of those who engage in less 'refined' sports like football, wrestling, darts, and auto racing" (Paulle et al. 2012, p. 85). The dialogue between Elias and Bourdieu

connects the social construction of taste, emotions and the body as interwoven issues, in understanding how cultural tastes and desires are created and sustained (Maguire 1991b). This is necessary for understanding humans as dynamic beings rather than static reifications of demographic characteristics.

Having an adequate theory for aggression and violence requires an understanding of humans in relation to one another and their environment (Elias 1987). The drive towards aggression or excitement, must be supported through explaining what the function of aggression is within the entire organism, and what changes this function have on total patterning of the personality structure itself (Elias 1978). For example, the threat of attack (from animals, other humans, natural disasters) has caused changes in personality structure, which have socially conditioned a psychological need for pleasurable excitement (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010). From this perspective the focus on audience-oriented staged and controlled fair fights are understood as liberating excitement of a struggle and the internal pacification of individuals in society, rather than evidence of a decivilising trend in the quest for excitement (Elias and Dunning 1986).[19]

Elias's work demonstrates that "human emotions and psychological dispositions…[are] shaped by changing social conditions and relationships…[and how] social constraint…become incorporated in individuals' habitus as internal, psychological, and emotional constraint" (van Krieken 2017, p. 1). Elias defines the habitus as the restricted "balance between spontaneity and constriction in the expression of affects and emotions" (Sánchez García 2013, p. 155). As states were monopolising control over violence, the organisation of sport was changing with the introduction of codified rules, leagues, and departure away from folk style sports. Restraints were placed upon individuals both internal and external, cutting down killing and violence into taboo. But sport offered people a possibility to fight a contest directly or indirectly with their body and soul, without regret or bad conscience. Elias (1986) states that this led to trends in viewing violence; in which violence is then justified because one is an observer. Elias's conception of sport reflecting societies trend towards a civilising spurt, at times ignores the role the economic base of society played. The abandoning of folk games during the

[19] See chapter 3 for the quest for excitement.

courtisation of society coincides with Britain's transforming capitalist economy. This compliments the reading of the civilising process and trends toward civility. As the increasing mechanisms of control became internalised, folk games no longer reflected the new values of competition, victory and profit. This was also reflected in the emergence of ideas of self-interest and competition in political and cultural life. During the late 17th century the idea of human nature being inherently selfish and competitive came to dominate philosophical and economic discussion to legitimate existing forms of oppression. Sport emerged as a commodity, not despite capitalism, but because of it (Collins 2013).

Sport and leisure—proposed Durkheim—also have a recuperative power in restoring the workers energies and remaking collective life (Rojek 2014). Therefore, the commodification of sport cannot fully destroy the emotional and symbolic dimensions of sport, as a site for identification and embodied experiences. Turning to Collins (2004) micro-sociology, to bring forth at level of everyday interactions, firstly, how energies are restored and secondly, how confrontations unfold in sport.

Micro-sociology: Interactions of Here and Now Confrontations

For Collins (2008) violence is statistically uncommon. Typically, violence is aborted and usually only results in ritualised interaction of bluster and bluff. This usually comes in the form of verbal threats and very few people become competent in committing violence successfully. Collins's focus on the micro-situational dynamics and the mechanisms used to engage in violent confrontations opens up a framework of analysis that demonstrates violence as socially constituted, structured and a learned form of interaction. It is at the micro level that violence research in particular has been misunderstood. Collins (2004) is primarily concerned with the micro-situational dynamics of interactions of the here and now. For Collins the secrets of large-scale macro-sociological changes are found on the micro-level. The emphasis is on the actual flow of events "in the emotion of lived time" (Collins 2008, p. 283), rather than the background characteristics of the players. Instead, the focus is on the dynamics of the sport, in which encounters are structured as confrontational (or offensively and defensively). I will provide a brief overview of Collins interaction rituals (IR's) and emotional energy (EE).

Collins (2004) view's emotions as being long-term (mood) and short term (joy from a run) which exist on a continuum of high and low EE. For example, joy is not specifically located to one part of the brain, but an overall activity of the brain functioning. Sadness on the other hand is the failure or decline in the functioning of the entire neurological system. Unlike fear and anger which function in a specific part of the brain, the amygdala. Collins' thesis of IR chains and EE is that emotions are the mechanisms that hold society together by producing moral solidarity. EE is the social emotion, and IR's transform EE, which increase, decrease or recharge EE at the same level prior to the IR. If someone obtains high EE from a group, they gain confidence and enthusiasm from an interaction and form ritual solidarity with that group. On the opposite end, someone on the low end of the EE continuum will not feel solidarity and therefore will not be attracted to the group, feel drained or depressed by it and will want to avoid it. Collins contends that folk categories only view emotions as dramatic shifts. This leads people to take for granted the emotional energy that allows everything to proceed as normal as emotion. Collins' theory of IR chains is defined as "…a theory of situations. It is a theory of momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters" (Collins 2004, p. 3).

Conceptualising emotions as something that happens to the subject, splits mind from body, by locating the subject in the mind and views emotions as having an abstract autonomy. Conceptualising emotions within the body as dispositions of the habitus, allows us to explain how the body stores "information from past experiences in habituated processes and contributes this knowledge to human activity and consciousness" (Scheer 2012, p. 201). Here, the *habitus* learns what is and is not acceptable, however does not conform strictly to a set of rules (Bourdieu 1977).[20] The conceptualisation of emotions as being 'hardwired' into individual bodies became a prominent framework during the 19th and 20th century. In relation to men and masculinities, the study of emotions has had some conceptual confusion. This has risen from the conflation of physiology with expression, the assumption that language and action correspond, emotionality generally connotes 'positive' behaviour, a false polarity between emotional and rational action, and that emotions are connected

[20] *Habitus* is explained in more detail in chapter 3.

primarily with individual bodies. This can result in the loss of the "political implications particularly in how social factors regulate the development and circulation of emotions, and how these necessarily shift with social change" (de Boise and Hearn 2017, p. 787). There remains the point of view that emotions are good for gender equality, which partly stems from the perception that emotions are less masculine. This assumption relies on the notion of non-commitment to rationality through expressing emotion, however the distinction between emotion and rationality it is not clearly identifiable. Men's fears of being judged as unmanly by peers, partners or colleagues can support cultural displays of 'rationality'. This can function to support systems of inequality within capitalist societies without improving material conditions of people within gender relations can privilege behaviour, and instead serve to support certain forms of employment and social policy (Bourdieu 2001; de Boise and Hearn 2017; Reddy, Sharma and Jha 2018).

Dualistic and binary models of emotions can lead to emphasising cognition without 'feeling', which fails relatively to situate small-scale situations within the chains of interdependence which make the everyday world (Maguire 1991b). Conceptualising emotions in this way makes very clear that "no emotion of a grown up human person is ever an entirely unlearned, genetically fixated reaction pattern." (Elias 1987, p. 352). This is relevant in sport because "the performing body [is] both a product and symbol of the socio-culturally constructed self" (Brown 2006, p. 167). Humans are biologically constituted with a natural disposition to learn how to regulate self, according to the social *habitus* (Maguire 1991b).[21] Considering these perspectives of body-based learning, knowledge, skills and practical action, the situated and lived body is the fundamental source of perceptions and pre-interpretive strategies—emotions are embodied (Paulle et al. 2012). The socialisation of bodily emotion in the formation of *habitus* persist throughout life, as did "the violence that gets under students skin into their very bones, and remains as dispositions of fear, insecurity and intimidation long outlasting the occurrence of the events…" (Paulle 2013; Emirbayer and Desmond 2015, p. 248).

[21] For example, emotional labour has gendered structural qualities tied to access, money, power, authority and status. Where women specialise in mastering violence and aggression in service of "being nice", men master dealing with fear and vulnerability in private (Hochschild 1983).

In confrontational situations fear arises as the dominant emotion. If those involved cannot offset or circumvent this barrier of fear, they will not be able to go through with the violent confrontation. Collins calls this emotion/barrier confrontational tension and fear (CT/F).[22] Collins's theory of violence is worth quoting at length:

> Once we look, we find that violence is an array of processes that all follow from a common situational feature of violent confrontations… violence is a set of pathways around confrontational tension and fear… even in situations of apparently uncontrollable anger, people are tense and often fearful in the immediate threat of violence—including their own violence; this is the emotional dynamic that determines what they will do if fighting actually breaks out (2008, p. 8).

Most of the time violence is aborted or blocked by a barrier of CT/F, which makes violence difficult to carry out and when it does it is incompetent and messy. In order for violence to occur, there must be a series of pathways around the CT/F that is present in all violence (Collins 2008). In a non-sporting context, this might come in the form of surprise attacks (e.g. king hit), attacking the weak (e.g. weapons or group), or attacking from a distance (e.g. sniper or drive-by):

> For violence to be successful, persons must find a pathway around the barrier of confrontational tension. There are five such pathways: (1) Attacking the weak; (2) audience-oriented staged and controlled fair fights; (3) confrontation-avoiding remote violence [military bombs, drone strikes, etc.]; (4) confrontation-avoiding by deception [presenting normal everyday self just before striking, e.g. suicide bomber]; and (5) confrontation-avoiding by absorption in technique (Collins 2009, p. 11).

In a sporting context these pathways can be used in various situations to analyse and explain the dynamics in sports violence. For Collins (2008) there are three types of sports violence: One, players fighting one another on the field or during the game; two, player-verse-spectator violence; and three, spectator violence against each other,

[22] Sometimes written as *ct*/f, ct/f or c/tf

property or police, which takes place away from the game. Sports such as ice hockey, American football, rugby or Australian Rules football, have the most extra-curricular violence, that is violence outside the rules of the sport. Soccer has little extra-curricular violence, but could be made more violent by giving players padding, and changing the rules so that rough play does not cause such a disadvantage that teams can lose. In this regard, violence is not the expression of masculinity or encapsulated as a separate activity "apart from the process of winning the game" (Collins 2008, p. 300). For the most part, Collins (2008) contends that machismo culture, is not a culture of violence, but rather a culture about staging an impression of violence. Most of the time is spent on performing the rituals that form these violent impressions, like aggressive verbal and nonverbal games, telling stories about violence, and boasting about themselves in aggressive ways. Thus, it is the structural features of the sport that determine on field violence. Arguments that treat violence as instrumental to 'men' or 'males' rather than certain masculinities verge on essentialism. They are also susceptible to running the risk of "misdiagnosing the necessary ingredients for violence or the specific masculinities that are associated with socially corrosive violent behaviour" (Spencer 2012b, p. 116).[23] Circumventing CT/F can be achieved through focusing on everything else aside from the confrontation itself. In MACS training, these are everyday rituals (e.g. fist bump before the start of a round), the limits of time and place (e.g. the rounds, the session itself, where one can engage in combat in the gym space, one would never see people boxing in the weights area or grappling on the boxing mats), the starting and stopping points (e.g. transitioning between drills, when one is allowed or not allowed to drink water, etc.), that create a pathway around CT/F to engage in brutal body-to-body contact. Concentrating so much on everything else separates sport as space outside of the everyday, as something that is sacred and special (Collins 2008).

[23] Essentialising violence as instrumental to men or males rather than certain masculinities, hinges on the biological argument that lacks the breadth and depth required to understand violence. A problem arises when considered from the perspective of liberalism that attempts to explain away violence against women in a conventional analysis of "acts of a few wayward, generally psychologically deranged, men. The latter are considered abnormal, distinct from other men, and to be few in number… [This] explanation focuses on psychological processes rather than social context" (Walby 1990, p. 129). Opposed to addressing the problematic structures of inequality in gender relations and the prevalence of more invisible forms of violence in society.

In staged combat sports such as boxing, MMA and wrestling, the frequent use of brutal body-to-body contact means that extra-curricular violence is minimal. This is because violence cannot be used to make a dramatic statement by escalating the fighting. By turning to the Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield ear-biting incident this point becomes clear. Collins (2008) suggests that intuition might lead us to think that Holyfield, who was already beating Tyson might attempt to punish Tyson by attempting to box him harder, and overwhelm him with devastating blows or worse yet, bite him back. However, revenge was not sought in the form of escalating physical violence. Holyfield stopped boxing with Tyson, and punished him by refusing to continue fighting, the "ultimate sanction" in a fair fight (p. 206). After Tyson bit Holyfield the artificiality that staged combat is predicated on, broke down and allowed CT/F to remerge. The pain itself is not enough to explain stopping because boxing and combat sportspeople notoriously endure extreme amounts of physical pain—broken noses, hands, ribs, toes, cuts that split open ears and even detached retinas—and continue fighting to gain victory. [24]

An oversimplified understanding of violence can lead to an analysis that becomes reliant on anger as a cause for violence. But anger is not automatically or easily converted into violent outcomes (Collins 2009). This form of reasoning falls under the frustration-aggression hypothesis. But this hypothesis cannot explain how violence unfolds, or explain situations in which frustration does not lead to aggression and violence (Young 2019). This also misses the various ways that 'fighters' are able to bring down their physiological arousal in order to function effectively in violent situations and the interactional process that occur within confrontations (Collins 2012). In other words, much effort is required in order for violence to unfold and this is exemplified in the specific and intensive training required to undo the trend toward non-violent resolutions of disputes. For example soldiers require a lot of training to be able to fire their weapons accurately and even then, overtime they mentally 'break' under the conditions of war (Elias 1978; Collins 2008). This leads us down the path of the nominally violent, the actively violent, and the completely violent.

[24] Violence has space to escalate in a gym because partners are not generally sparring at full power. As well, there is often disparities in skill, size, age, strength, wearing of certain gear and group membership (being a part of the caucus of established members).

For an adequate theory of violence, understanding that even the completely violent are not necessarily competent at violence brings into view violence at the level of the everyday. The actively violent and the completely violent can be described as a violent elite, who are able to 'get in the zone' within the dynamics of confrontations. Similar to how athletes describe getting in the zone, time slows down and allows them to see things happen as patterns or in a predictable way. This varies in different contexts, for example in baseball the batter might see an enlarged baseball and is able to predict its trajectory based on the movements of the pitcher. The tunnel of violence contrasts this, where everything becomes a haze, perception is warped and memory of events are limited and fractured. Proficiency in the tunnel of violence is built through techniques in training—whether in the formal institutions of the military or the underground academy of the streets. What differentiates the violent elite from others is not merely their possession of cultural resources[25] (for example physical capital), but that they outcompete others similarly situated to dominate confrontational attention space.[26] In confrontations EE is built up and worn down by being tested. This allows us to understand two things: firstly, that the techniques used by the violent elite (e.g. attacking the weak, etc.) are not techniques that one acquires once and for all. In fact, techniques can be de-energised and de-learned giving way to unwonted moments of fear and loss of EE. Secondly, in such tests of EE, in for example an MMA gym, the cycle of negative EE loss may lead to an eventual disengagement which is grounded in a deterioration of material supports (no longer worth the financial expenditure), failure of recognition of self and becoming disappointed in expectations of outcomes. The relationship between micro and macro-sociology is not a dichotomous antagonism and the two levels should be coordinated together if they produce useful results. The micro-sociology of violence is one of the interactional processes of emotional fields laid out in micro slices of

[25] Collins (1993, 2004) uses cultural resources, cultural capital, and collective symbols, which can be thought of as similar to Bourdieu's cultural capital but in broader terms. Collins uses cultural capital because it is more easily abbreviated to CC.

[26] Attention spaces are the structure of the field that limit the amount of emotional energy individuals within it feel. For example, within crowds of up to 100, no more than one fight between two factions will occur because the amount of EE individuals can gain as a result of the attention space (Collins 2008).

time and space (Collins 2008). I now turn to tracing the emergence of MMA, and attempt to synthesise and demonstrate a clear guide to the thesis more broadly. That is, the context in which bodily practises occur.

Chapter Three: Thrilling Sport or Killing Sport? MMA and Violence

In this chapter I outline the emergence of MMA in the U.S. and then Australia, which has tended to be understood through Elias's civilising process and figurational sociology (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010). Although I largely focus on the Australian and U.S. MMA/UFC context, MMA is wide spread and thus has local trajectories in places such as Europe (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010; Sánchez García 2021), Japan (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010) and elsewhere. I then delve into the quest for excitement. Van Bottenberg and Heilbron (2006) draw on Elias in relation to the mimetic nature of MMA and explain the meteoric rise of MMA's popularity within the wider civilising process, where acceptable forms of violence become reserved to limited enclaves like boxing and wrestling, due to the dulling of everyday life. Over recent decades, MMA has grown as a leisure practice becoming increasingly homogenised, and classes have become structured with their own curriculum (Blue 2012; Brown and Jennings 2013). The repugnance caused by MMA might be better understood as indicative of a moral panic surrounding a highly visible form of physical sport-related violence, in public view, rather than the emergence of MMA reflecting an overall de-civilising process (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010). MMA and combat sport remain "on the limits of socially (in)tolerable levels of violence" (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2010, p. 55). In light of this, I consider the emerging literature surrounding the morality of MMA in the philosophy of sport, as philosophers grapple with the ethics of MMA violence.

No-holds-barred: The Rising MMA Phenomenon

The rise of modern MMA[27] with the initial conception of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in 1993, to its eventual outlawing in 1997 and subsequent

[27] MMA was initially referred to as No-Holds-Barred or Ultimate Fighting in the 1990s, derived from translating the Portuguese term *vale-tudo* meaning anything goes, an is an example of UFC's origin from these Brazilian contests (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010).

purchase by Zuffa in 2001, is well documented in academic literature and MMA popular culture. The UFC is the most popular MMA promoter and broadcasts MMA fights in over 149 countries to almost a billion households worldwide (Weaving 2013). The first UFC was setup by Semaphore Entertainment Group as a pay-per-view tournament event where "eight of the deadliest fighters in the world" were set to meet in "no-holds-barred combat" (NHB) to determine who would be the "ultimate fighting champion". It had "no rules, no scores, [and] no time limits", "two men enter, one man leaves", the winner taking the 50 thousand dollar reward. It began as a cash grab spectacle that promoted itself as a one off event. It was style verse style, Savate (French kickboxing) competing against Sumo, Brazilian jiu jitsu (BJJ) against boxing and Shootfighting against Taekwondo, etc. At the time BJJ was virtually unheard of outside of Brazil. The intention of the first UFC event and several events onwards until 2001 was to maximise the audience's focus on the violence and spectacle of the event, rather than on athletic ability or martial arts competence. The relative success of the first event led to subsequent events being held.

The UFC also stimulated the development of Pride FC, which was a Japanese based MMA promotion that held its first event in 1997. Unlike the UFC, Pride was held in a boxing ring opposed to a cage and had a distinct set of rules (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010).[28] The first Pride event had an attendance of 37, 000, which would not be superseded by a UFC event until UFC 129 in 2011 (Tapology.com). During 1996 and 1997, in the U.S. cable networks succumbed to the political pressure from politicians such as Senator John McCain, who likened the UFC to human cockfighting, and claimed it was un-American to hit a man when he was down, eventually leading to the cessation of airing events on pay-per-view (Greene 2018).[29] The almost immediate backlash against the UFC, led to its banning in 49 states.

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[28] Pride had three rounds, the first round lasted 10 minutes, the second and third round lasted five minutes each with two minute rests in between. Initially, soccer kicks and knees to the head of a grounded opponent were legal for a period of time, but elbows to the face were not.

[29] McCain supported the invasion of Iraq and murder of hundreds of thousands of people. Perhaps due to the invisibility of the horrors of war, perhaps due to the ideological tyranny of fear from "weapons mass destruction". It was not until 2018 in McCain's memoir did he admit that the Iraq war was a

NHB contests almost collapsed in North America because they were no longer able to capitalise on the lucrative market, which had dissolved due to the new outlawing of cage fighting and NHB. These events were seen as revolting, and could not be called sports (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). In Japan, Pride had far more success and drew on the tradition of Japanese wrestling from the 1960s. Pride and the UFC at times infiltrated each other's markets and at other times held joint events (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010). In 2001 Zuffa[30] emerged as a new player and purchased the UFC for $2 million USD. Since then, MMA has continued to progress in the direction of re-sportisation and spectularisation (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). A unified set of rules for MMA were established and slowly adopted nationally in the United States before being exported globally to most MMA organizations around the world.[31] The introduction of unified rules, safety gear, illegal and legal moves, regulated the UFC into a more palpable combat sport along the lines of boxing and grew its popularity (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010). The purchase of Pride FC by the UFC in 2007 allowed the UFC to consolidate MMA as a global sport (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010).

Van Bottenburg and Heilbron (2010) explain the re-sportisation phase that MMA has continued to undergo since 2001 as entrepreneurial strategies. The strategies were to make alterations in a direction that would lead to regaining access to the pay-per-view market they were banned from, which emerged as tighter regulations were enforced on new media companies. The following examples are not an exhaustive list, but demonstrate the continued trend of sportising and legitimising MMA. In 2012 the formation of the international mixed martial arts federation (IMMAF) and world mixed martial arts association (WMMAA) were founded interdependently with the common goal of achieving recognition from the Olympic movement—the two federations merged in 2018 (immaf.org). The 2016 IMMAF

"mistake", this came four years after he retracted the initial comparisons he made about the UFC as "human cockfighting" and his statements about hitting "a man when he was down was un-American" (Greene 2018).

[30] Zuffa LLC was owned by casino operators Lorenzo and Frank Feritta (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006).

[31] This is reflected in the rules for the conduct of professional MMA contests in Victoria.

finals took place in UFC fight week, where UFC advertised its UFC 200 event.[32] In 2015, the UFC announced their USADA (United States Anti-Doping Agency) anti-doping program, which not only operates in the United States, but also with international anti-doping organisations around the world, to ensure, irrelevant of a fighter's home country, they will be subject to the USADA anti-doping program (ufc.usada.org). In addition new uniforms were introduced moving away from the original random array of fighters sponsors. In 2015 the UFC and Reebok signed a six-year agreement (Reinsmith 2019).

In 2016, the UFC was purchased by WME-IMG for 4 billion USD. WME-IMG is a Hollywood entertainment management group, spear headed by Ari Emanuel, who promised to open doors for fighters and the company alike outside the world of fighting. This was followed by the UFC opening their first Performance Institute (PI) in Las Vegas in 2017, which cost 12 million USD. The facility offers a range of services such as athlete development, strength and conditioning, physical therapy, nutrition and combat science (ufc.com; Saha 2018). In 2018, ESPN bought the exclusive television rights for the UFC from the Fox network for 1.5 billion USD and will be exclusively televising 30 events over five years. The example of such changes, of which there are many more, "are indicative of MMA's shift from a socially marginal activity to a relatively secure and expanding modern sport" (Sánchez García and Malcom 2010, p. 48).

Van Bottenburg and Heilbron (2006) argue that a change in the balance of power between organisers, viewers, practitioners, and spectators led to profiting from emerging pay-per-view technology, by a new type of media entrepreneur that cared less about the spectators and practitioners, and more about the viewers. Everyday viewers are less concerned about the technicalities and more interested in the excitement produced by transgressing accepted rules and conventions. The early days of the UFC attempted to capture a specific segment of viewers with antinomian excitement (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). Antinomian excitement or an "antinomian dynamic" is the excitement produced by the "forbidden or unavailable",

[32] The IMMAF strategy to foster a respectable image for MMA has been to align it with the Olympic amateur ethos and develop a milder, safer format that bans elbows, forearms and knee strikes to opponents. This also includes cosmetic changes such as the covering of naked bodies with rash guards and use of shin pads to decrease cuts and bloodshed (Sánchez García 2021).

that result from practices of modesty (Collins 2004, p. 246). The deregulation of television broadcasting in the 1980s created a cutthroat competition, especially among pay-TV platforms, which broadcasted the cheapest programming to produce, such as reality shows and sport.[33]

The globalization and commodification of sport has led to sport governing bodies, clubs and teams to become subservient to the interest of television corporations (Besnier, et al. 2018). From this viewpoint, MMA remains on the knifes-edge of sporting violence, and maintains a balancing act of antinomian dynamics, where the threshold of acceptable violence—which will continue to change—cannot be transgressed. By the time the UFC held its first Australian event in 2010, it had emerged from the margins and was on the way toward being in the mainstream.

[33] In 2005 the UFC piggybacked off of reality TV show popularity and created their own called the ultimate fighter. 16 fighters placed in a house together competing for a 100 thousand dollar UFC contract. The show was a turning point for the UFC into the mainstream (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010; Sánchez García 2021).

Pre-UFC

Vale Tudo (No-holds-Barred) matches held in Brazil

1993

First UFC event in United States.

1996

McCain takes aim at UFC causing a near total ban in 50 states of the U.S.

1997

First MMA event held in Japan. Pride FC is formed with 37 thousand in attendance.

1997

First UFC event outside the U.S. takes place in UFC Japan two months after Pride.

2001

Zuffa purchases the UFC. The New Jersey athletic board adopts the unified rules of mixed martial arts.

2002

UFC releases UFC: Tapout videogame.

2005

First season of the Ultimate Fighter airs. Finale brings the sport to mainstream audiences.

2007

UFC purchases Pride FC enabling the consolidation of MMA as a global sport.

2010

First Australian UFC in Sydney, NSW, aired live on free-to-air Network Ten's channel One.

2011

UFC purchases Strikeforce MMA, further establishing hegemony in the MMA market.

2012

IMMAF and WMMA independently established with the aim of making MMA an Olympic sport.

2015

First Victorian cage fight in Melbourne followed by and first UFC event in the city.

2018

IMMAF and WMMA merge with continued effort toward Olympic goal.

2018

The Ultimate Fighter plays on free-to-air in Australia.

2019

Record breaking attendance of any UFC event took place in Melbourne UFC 243.

The MMA boom in Melbourne is relatively under-investigated. The rise of MMA and the UFC's economic growth has resulted in a subsequent rise in local gyms in an emerging market. Since the first Australian UFC event in 2010 (UFC 110) was held in the state of Queensland, Melbourne held its first UFC event in 2015. Up until 2014 the state of Victoria had a ban on cage fights. In March 2015, Victoria saw its first legal cage fight in Melbourne, after the Victorian Labor government removed the statewide ban on cage fights (McMahon 2015; Millar 2015). UFC 193[34] took place in November 2015 and was headlined by Ronda Rousey and Holly Holm. At the time, Rousey was the UFC's highest grossing fighter and UFC 193 held the record for the highest attendance of any UFC event globally.[35] The UFC president, Dana White was quoted saying, "Australia has become our biggest market as we've gone global" (Submission radio 2019). In 2011, Marshall Zelazn managing director of UFC's international development said, "Pound for pound [Australia] is our biggest market," he continued "I think it's the open-mindedness to contact sport, and [Australian's have] a very physical culture…I don't think this culture pre-judges anything and they're super-big sports fans" (Black and Loh 2011). However, the UFC continued to garner negative mainstream media attention similar to those in the United States early in its conception. Rothfield (2013) writes, "Since when is kicking, elbowing, kneeing, punching and stomping an opponent classified as sport? This was nothing but barbaric savagery that should be banned in this country". Panegyres (2016) echoes similar sentiments, "When you remove the veil of smooth marketing and the charismatic characters, what we are left with is a barbaric blood spectacle that should be banned".

The rise in popularity of MMA had an effect on the ground, as martial arts schools and gyms in Melbourne began to capitalise on MMA as a product, by including "MMA" in their advertising and branding (Bishara 2015). In Melbourne the term MMA was first commercially used by Greensborough MMA in 2003. Although

[34] This was the first UFC event I attended.

[35] This was eventually superseded when Australian Middleweight champion Robert Whittaker, fought New Zealand Middleweight contender Israel Adesanya in Melbourne at UFC 243 in 2019 (Nayak 2019)

it is difficult to say the exact time MMA started in Melbourne, there was a trend in the growing number of schools using the term, which significantly increased in 2008 (Yellow Pages 2008; Bishara 2015). Prior to 2003 there were clubs that taught a variation of MMA called shootfighting.[36] This style of fighting was made popular in UFC 1. Image 1.0 and 2.0 show Hangar 4 was originally a martial arts school teaching shootfighting and BJJ, however, in 2015 it claimed to be Melbourne's first MMA gym (hangar4.com.au 2015). This might allude to precursors of the MMA class prior to 2003. Hangar 4 is explicitly selling real life skill and self-defence. They warn hopeful attendees that they "are NOT a traditional martial arts school". At the everyday level, the UFC's continued sportisation and change in image had a flow on effect to local martial arts and combat schools. Hangar 4 strategically shifted away from negative associations of "Shootfighting" (Image 1.0) to "Mixed martial arts" (Image 2.0). This reflects an overall trend that was made by the UFC's shift away from no-holds-bared and cage fighting to MMA, in their strategy to legality (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). Hangar 4's current website boasts a family friendly environment and kids classes, which reflects a broader shift across MMA gyms in Victoria (Bishara 2015).

Image 1.0

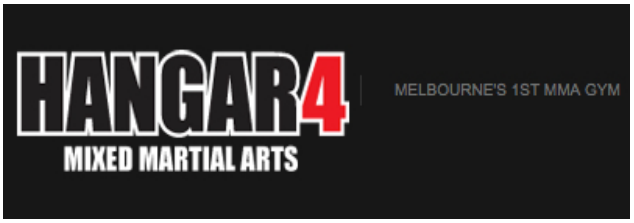


Image 2.0

[36] Shootfighting is a hybrid martial art much like MMA. Combatants fight both standing and on the ground (shootfighting.com 2015).

The change in size of advertisements and in orientations of traditional martial art schools towards MMA, demonstrates its marketability. Traditional martial arts schools began using advertising space to explicitly place MMA in their gyms (Yellow Pages 2001-2012; Green 2011; Bishara 2015). The commercial viability of MMA classes appeared to grow from around 2008. Clubs began using MMA in their name more frequently (e.g. Greensborough Mixed Martial Arts, AST Mixed Martial Arts, Blackbelt MMA Self-Defense Academy), and clubs that did not have MMA in their name, (e.g. Aero Strike Martial Arts), utilised larger advertising space to promote their mixed martial arts classes (Yellow Pages 2010; Bishara 2015). MMA marketing distinguished itself from traditional advertising that focused on the benefits for children and adolescents, onto adults who want to learn how to 'really fight' (Green 2011; Bishara 2015).[37] In Western societies, martial arts (like sport) are regarded as building desirable character traits in children, which they can take into adulthood (Coakley et al. 2009). These activities appear to teach skills and discipline, applicable to situations in everyday life outside of the martial arts studio (Ryan 2011; Bishara 2015). Image 3.0 is an overt illustration of the perceived benefits for 'kids' learning martial arts.

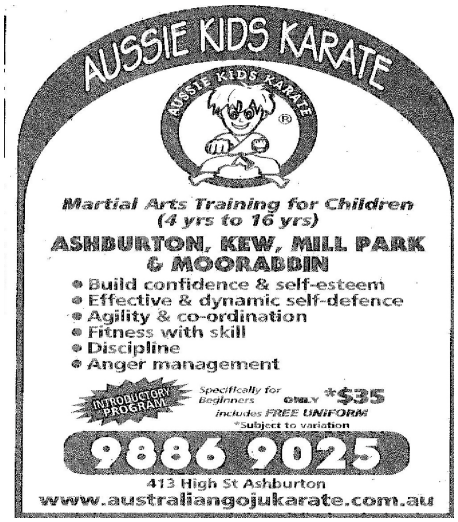


Image 3.0

[37] This is not a ubiquitous process, for example, self-improvement amongst the middle-class milieu in the United States continues to be an important motivator (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010).

Martial arts gyms capitalise on the MMA boom by taking a more adult centric approach or placing "MMA" on their advertisements. Melbourne Martial Arts Academy exemplifies the latter approach. Image 4.0 is an image from the 2005 Yellow pages advertising classes for Kickboxing, Muay Thai and Kyokushin Karate. Image 5.0 is taken from the 2007 Yellow pages. The academy's classes increased with the addition of Boxing and BJJ. Although there is no exclusive MMA class listed, the advert has an MMA combat sign printed on it (Bishara 2015).

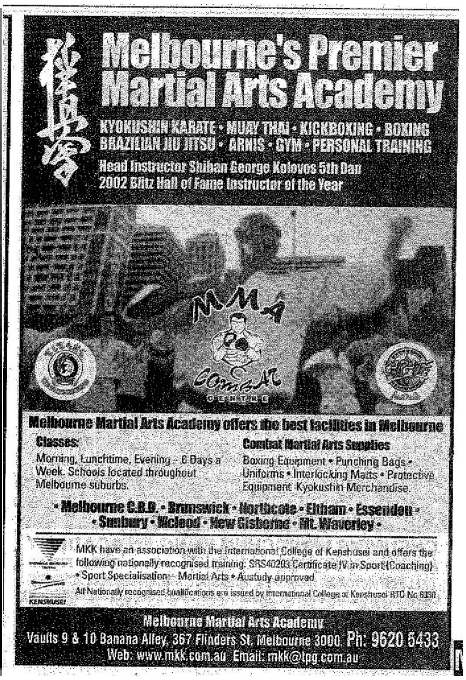
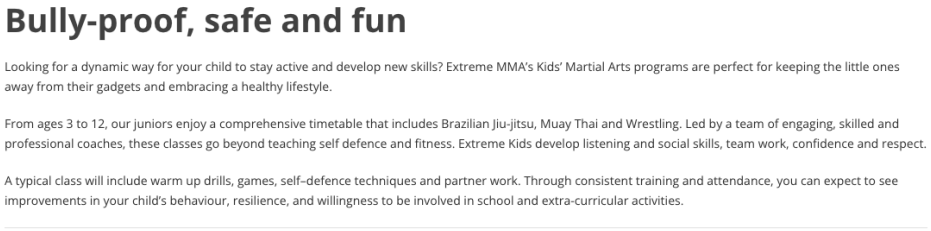


Image 4.0 Image 5.0

The UFC's emergence within societies broader rising insecurity and precarity of the 1980s and 1990s—the gradual stripping away of social services and economic safety—that lead to deindustrialisation that destabalised working class and poor men's economic potential has largely characterised society as 'dangerous' (Connell 1995; Harvey 2005; Waquant 2009, 2016b; Collins 2013; Messner 2016). MMA's gyms draw on this rhetoric by taking aim at children and their parents, as they promote "bully proofing". The below two images are from Melbourne MMA gym websites.

Image 6.0



Bully-proof, safe and fun

Looking for a dynamic way for your child to stay active and develop new skills? Extreme MMA's Kids' Martial Arts programs are perfect for keeping the little ones away from their gadgets and embracing a healthy lifestyle.

From ages 3 to 12, our juniors enjoy a comprehensive timetable that includes Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai and Wrestling. Led by a team of engaging, skilled and professional coaches, these classes go beyond teaching self defence and fitness. Extreme Kids develop listening and social skills, team work, confidence and respect.

A typical class will include warm up drills, games, self-defence techniques and partner work. Through consistent training and attendance, you can expect to see improvements in your child's behaviour, resilience, and willingness to be involved in school and extra-curricular activities.

Image 7.0

Bully proofing perpetuates the self-responsibility of individuals defending themselves within a "naturally" dangerous of society. Folk assumptions about violence being easy and everywhere dominate the public imaginary (Shuttleworth 1990; Collins 2008). Martial arts and MMA clubs attempt to capitalise on sports' perceived ability to keep "young males off the streets while increasing participants' bonds to schools, conventional peers, and also increasing self-esteem, social capital and upward mobility" (Jump 2017, p. 1094). Gyms aim to profit from the popularity of the UFC/MMA as it continues to be sportised, globalised and standardised (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). MMA has developed along similar lines to boxing in "increasingly globalised process of standardisation of pugilistic logics of practice (i.e. winning, losing, professional, amateur, legitimate, illegitimate, types of body (weight, condition, age, gender) and uses of the body techniques, etc.)" (Brown and Jennings 2013, p. 33).[38] The UFC has extended into building franchised gyms and expanded into segments of the market that converge with consumer body projects and anxieties over individual responsibility of health (Shilling 1993; Kristensen, et al. 2016).

[38] Boxing underwent codification in 1743, which took it from a combat format with few rules, a mix of hand to hand fighting as well as wrestling and other weapons such as swords to a more predicable rule-bound activity (Collins 2013).

There are currently ten official UFC franchised gyms opened, and nine more being built, around Australia (one in Victoria). Although there are many differences to account for within the variety of cultural locations that does not universally regulate MMA (Brown and Jennings 2013), it is certainly underway. The economic validity of MMA, similar to boxing, has created a martial discipline in its own right taught as a mixed style with a core syllabus of moves and positions (Blue 2012). The constituent martial arts that make up MMA (e.g. boxing, BJJ, Muay Thai) have grown in popularity alongside MMA (Green 2011). This creates opportunities for increasing interclub competitions that benefit local promoters. Wacquant (2004a) superbly highlights the economics of boxing in *Body and Soul* detailing numerous examples in the fight at Studio 104. Everyone works to make money, from selling tickets to selling alcohol, ring girls to journeymen boxers trying to pay their rent, to money laundering.[39]

Gyms have largely formed how they teach the MMA class in relation to elite MMA. Coaching staff and fighters will formulate game plans based on their opponents skill set, their physical attributes (e.g. height, power, reach, etc.), reaction speed analysis, habits and technique flaws, etc. For instance a shorter fighter will close the range by getting in on the inside of the lengthier fighter and engage in a clinch and strike from close range (dirty boxing). They might also press them up against the cage, wear them down and use the resistance of the cage to take them down and completely nullify the range advantage of their opponent. This is where the sport of MMA is distinct from an art form or self-defence system associated with traditional martial arts or military combat such as Krav Maga. Techniques are repeatedly practiced with a strategic basis that is implemented through specific drills, in live situations against resisting bodies. Traditional martial arts emphasise the kata, which is a form of practicing techniques against an invisible opponent in a dance like sequence. MMA is "not a system of pedagogy based solely on a katascopic master and student relationship" (Spencer 2009, p. 131).[40] Elite level game plans filter down into everyday gyms and reinforce the sport club aspect of MMA. This most likely leads to the 'dark' side of MMA which often leads to injury (Jennings 2019). The

[39] Wacquant highlights the exploitative economic social order of capitalism.

[40] As Spencer (2009) demonstrates a lot of learning happens between students, generally more experienced assisting the less experienced.

perceived realness of MMA bouts underpinned by traditional martial arts blurs the line between sport, art and real life, and allows MMA to transiently exist in its application as self-defence (Image 8.0), martial art, and sport/fitness product.

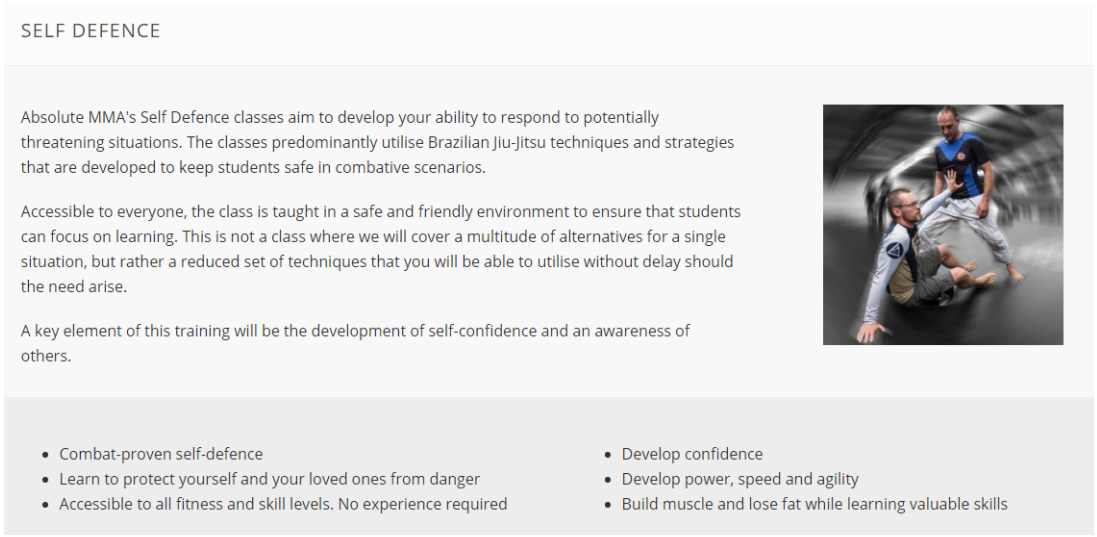


Image 8.0

As more people watch and train in MMA it continues to occupy a space in the global market alongside the advanced technologies of leisure consumption that have proliferated the entertainment economy (Collins 2008). Through the commodification of martial arts via the UFC the fetishism of MMA emerges. The commodification of MMA is grounded in "the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour" (Marx 2013, p. 46). When products of labour are transformed into commodities and reproduced, a fetish is attached to them (Marx 2013). The fetish character of commodity injects meaning and value beyond its use and physical properties (Sullivan 1992). The UFC sells and produces fights (commodities) that are injected with meaning beyond their use in order to satisfy human want. This was achievable through the sportisation process, which blurred the levels of violence with cosmetic changes (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010; Sánchez García 2021). The UFC continues to transgress the generally accepted forms of tension to go beyond the ordinary limits of violence in a quest for producing excitement (van Bottenburg and Heilbron 2006). In light of this I now turn my attention to the quest for excitement and mimesis, the entertainment economy and people's relationship to violence.

The Quest for Excitement and Mimesis

The quest for excitement occurs within societies that undergo a civilising process. Elias and Dunning (1986) suggest that through a yardstick comparison of standards with societies at an earlier stage of development, it is possible to see how changes in everyday excitement have decreased in relation to industrialised societies. Mimetic activities can be explained as activities that create a 'make-believe' setting. These activities vary in intensity and style, but have basic structural commonalities. That is, they provide situations that allow emotions to flow more easily and elicit excitement by imitation of real-life situations, without the 'real' dangers or risks. The excitement which people seek from leisure differs from other forms of excitement in certain respects, in that it is largely a pleasurable excitement (Elias and Dunning 1986). Excitement arises from creating tension by controlled or imaginary 'real' danger, for example, mimetic fear and/or pleasure, sadness and/or joy. Though the mimetic sphere invokes imaginary settings, it forms a distinct part of social reality no less real than other parts of social life. These activities are not static and "the manner in which this quest for enjoyable excitement finds expression in social institutions and customs varies greatly over time and space", the 'mimetic' sphere contains "elements which are integral to all leisure forms, namely sociability, motility and imagination." (Maguire 1991b, p. 29). The production of mimetic tension and antinomian excitement are tied back to the body and foregrounded in relation to "human agency, the production of cultural and economic capital and the attainment and maintenance of social status" (Maguire 1993, p. 33; Shilling 1991).

Civilising spurts, or the pacification of States, led to increased restraint on physical force, which resulted in a move away from gaining pleasure through being violent, to taking pleasure in seeing violence being done. Here, sport afforded members of society the opportunity to view or take part in contests without bad conscience, because they were considered acceptable (Elias and Dunning 1986). For example, Elias turns to fox hunting to exemplify how changes in the rules overtime were made to prolong contests. Pleasure shifted from the hunting and eating of animals in stages of earlier developed societies, to the hunt itself. The chase became the source of pleasure and in aristocratic societies it was a 'sin' to shoot a fox. This

deprived the gentlemen of the excitement of the hunt and was an unforgivable solecism. As these facets of bodily practice gradually became more impeded by shame and repugnance, the transformation of bodily impulses towards aggressiveness and cruelty resulted in a transfer of emotions from direct action to mimetic activities and visual pleasures of spectating (Maguire 1993).

In a similar way, fighting contests are also prolonged to create the dramatic effects that come with sporting contests. Staged combat or fair fights are unusually long face-to-face struggles compared to the usual "brevity of real-life fights" (Collins 2008, p. 296). Much of what makes up what we take as the archetype of what fighting is supposed to be in a fair fight is depicted in the content of literature, cinema, drama, informal gossip and popular entertainment. The cultural prestige of fair and unfair fights have a history in special enclaves and aristocratic circles which have codified and formalised their rules (e.g. boxing, fencing, duelling, etc.) (Bourdieu 1986; Elias and Dunning 1986; Collins 2008; Collins 2013). The televised staged fights of today, are like duels of the past, in that they develop plot tension and go through several levels of suspense, as well as delays, which allow suspense to build. This focuses the audience on what to expect, including the moments of highest drama where there is the greatest uncertainty. Uncertainties intensify the plot, in which there is often a narrative trope like pitting a hero against villain. Narratives even play a moral lesson, where losers might have internal victories, despite losing externally. Even duelling was more for show and image than reality (Collins 2008).

The structure of MMA bouts plays a role in building tension. An MMA bout is fifteen minutes long, with two one-minute breaks in between the rounds (championship fights are twenty-five minutes long with four one minute breaks). If the structure of an MMA bout were changed to a lengthier three, ten-minute rounds, fights that went beyond the second round would dramatically slow down. For example, Pride Fighting Championship (FC) fights (a Japanese MMA promotion that was bought by the UFC in 2007) similarly had three rounds, the first round went for 10 minutes and round 2 and 3 went for five minutes each. In a survey of 24 Pride FC events (roughly 210 fights), only four fights were finished in the third round, three were submission victories and one was a Technical Knockout (TKO). This suggests that the structure of fights in MMA deliberately balances the tension/excitement of fights by having shorter rounds. Not so short that the grappling would bore viewers

and not so long that there would be no finish. Fighters are also encouraged by the referee to advance their fighting position and judges score fighters on their ability to control 'the centre of the octagon'. Another important feature of MMA is where fights take place. The cage provides an enclosed area so that fighters may wrestle against it. In the first UFC, the cage floor was a semi-thick soft mat like surface that provided more cushioning, but also slowed down movement. The UFC cage canvas is rough for grip and hard for agility. The UFC also uses two cage sizes. The large cage is $70m^2$, 9m across and 1.85m high. The second cage is 40 percent smaller. This means that there is less room to move, avoid strikes and more chance for pressing opponents up against the cage and striking them whilst grounded.[41] A common example in the modern era is boxing and the evolution of striking. When boxing gloves were introduced in bareknuckle combat, it drastically changed the way boxers could strike. These changes shape and constrain competitors as well as managing the palatable levels of blood and gore.

The viewing of violence as the sole pleasure should not be overemphasised (Sánchez García 2021). Understanding MMA purely from the aesthetics of the cage and bloodshed could incline critics to see social regression (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010; Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010; Brett 2017). Promotional materials sensationalise fighters in powerful and almost superhuman ways. Taking the most violent and impactful moments (a flash knockout punch, a brutal head kick, or a flurry of punches to a grounded opponent that eventually lead to a technical knockout), the celebration of victories are then dubbed with video of the fighter talking about their journey through adversity on their way to the top. This is much like other sports that aim to build tension, through drama and storytelling (Collins 2008).

The UFC capitalises on the excesses of violence so long as it remains palatable. One of the rare captured moments of violence outside a formal MMA fight took place in April 2018. One of the UFC's best-selling fighters, Conor McGregor, threw a steel dolly into a window of a bus filled with UFC fighters. His target was Khabib Nurmagomedov. The glass cut and injured several fighters. This was unprecedented in the UFC on such a public level. McGregor flew from Dublin on his

[41] These dynamics are now structured and ritualised through routine training as part of the 'curriculum' (Chapter 5).

private plane with 30 companions and they surrounded the bus as it was leaving an underground carpark. The entire incident was filmed. McGregor and Nurmagomedov did not have a scheduled fight with each other. Despite the attack, a number of fighters on the bus went on to compete, Nurmagomedov among them. McGregor and Nurmagomedov would fight in October of that year. The snippets of footage from the incident were used by the UFC in the promotion leading up to the fight and in other UFC events prior. After Nurmagomedov defeated McGregor in the fourth round he jumped over the cage into the crowd and attacked McGregor's teammate. This led to members of Nurmagomedov's team to jump into the cage and attack McGregor. The pay-per-view buys were 2.4 million and the highest in the history of the sport, the second highest selling event had 1.6 million buys (Tapology.com). The economic basis for the promotion of violence cannot be ignored, and at the same time should not be overemphasised.[42]

A survey conducted with 2,723 participants from around the world, found that 22 percent of MMA consumers admit to watching MMA because of the violence, 16 percent of fans were drawn to the blood in MMA, 39 percent of fans or 'insiders' view the violence as innocuous, and 61 percent of fans agree that MMA is violent (Cheever 2009). The enjoyment of viewing violence does not necessarily permeate beyond the aesthetic violence of MMA and equate to MMA fans being violent people. Framing this through an overall civilising trend can bring to light the effects of the threshold of repugnance and social *habitus*. For example, the tendency for MMA media discourse has been to frame MMA as 'art'. This aestheticisation of violence as art has the potential to turn violence into a "spectacle indistinguishable from its material reality" (Brett 2017, p. 27). Matthews and Channon (2016) examined the disconnect between representation and materiality in ice hockey, and

[42] The incident between McGregor and Nurmagomedov might be understood as a UFC fighter easily committing violence. However, through a micro-sociological lens, the pathways used to overcome CT/F are revealed. There are a at least two pathways I would like to highlight. Firstly, it was a surprise attack; secondly, McGregors side disproportionately outnumbered the fighters on the bus. This provided McGregor with a situational advantage, which allowed him to dictate the encounter. The sheer number of people with McGregor surprised, startled and caught everyone off guard. This resulted in the people on the bus who did not know it was McGregor to become fearful. The success of attacking the weak does not come from physical dominance but situational dominance; here the attackers momentum was imposed in the situation.

suggested that the continued spectacularisation in sport hides the real harms and is not taken seriously by fans.[43] The detachment from material reality of athletes bodies is connected to the tendency to hide the effects of violence as the threshold of repugnance is lowered. The relationship between fan viewership and MMA promoters permeates all levels of the sport. Even at the amateur and lower professional levels mixed martial artists are less concerned with winning at all costs, and more concerned with "sacrificing their bodies, giving their all, enduring pain, and putting on a "good show"" (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010, p. 166).

The process toward greater civility inherently produces the foundation for social unrest and the struggle between the "mechanisms of governance and uncivil performances like sport fighting" (Brent and Kraska 2013, p. 360). Where MMA emerged as an expressive "visceral reaction to a highly rationalised and [highly] regulated society" (Hardes 2019, p. 13). The feelings and expressions of those competing in and viewing MMA are then not an innate lust for violence, but a constructed need for excitement (Shilling 1993; Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010; Hardes 2019). MMA, like boxing and the people who practice or watch it, are sometimes viewed as uncivilised and barbaric. Burke (1998) calls for the *redescription* of boxers (or fighters) because the treatment of boxing to a boxer in this manner serves to damage and cause them pain when described in the words of journalists and academics. The boxers practice is made to seem like nothing more than barbaric savagery, animal-like viciousness and useless. In this vein, I briefly turn to the emerging body of research in the ethics and morals of MMA violence, in order to capture the main arguments presented.

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[43] As athletes are no longer treated as workers converting their physical capital into economic capital—that is, selling their bodily capacities for a salary in spite risking minor and major physical injuries—fans symbolically produce, maintain and consume "the damaged bodies of athletes" in the market of professional sporting spectacle (Matthews and Channon 2016, p. 4). Recently the UFC built a performance institute (PI) in Shanghai. It is being billed as "the world's largest, state-of-the-art MMA training and development facility" (Lee 2019). The UFC's expansion into Asia continues to farm elite athletes and market them to a new audience. This comes under the guise by Dana White as providing the "ton of talent throughout Asia" the elite services of the PI for the benefit of athletes and not the benefit of the business (Saha 2019). This will also be Australia and New Zealand's most accessible elite facility. Shanghai being just over 10 hours travel from Melbourne.

Philosophical Perspectives: The Ethics and Morals of MMA Violence

The emerging body of literature on the morality of MMA provides an interesting perspective to the debate on violence (Dixon 2015, 2016; Weimer 2017; Kershnar and Kelly 2019). Sociologists working in the field of MMA have largely followed Wacquant in his use of Bourdieu, focusing on martial *habitus* (embodied dispositions) using ethnographic methods and trained alongside MMA participants (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010; Green 2011, 2015; Spencer 2012b; Stenius 2015; Vaccaro and Swauger 2015; Jennings 2019). For example, Abramson & Modzelewski (2010) use these ethnographic methods to demonstrate how fighters negotiate violence and view their practice within a "caged morality", separate from "real" violence. However, in the field of philosophy and sport, MMA has been examined along Kant's Categorical Imperative to understand if violence in MMA is morally permissible (Kershnar and Kelly 2019).

The Morally Objectionable

Dixon (2015) builds on Simon's (1991) argument that violence intentially causing physical harm is especially problematic when it has no relation to the abilities that sport was designed to test. This use of internalism does not provide useful when it comes to sports that are *inherently* violent (e.g. violence is an essential ingredient of the physical abilities) (Dixon 2016). Dixon (2015) likens MMA to street fighting rather than a sport. He objects to MMA along the Kantian lines of "ends in themselves" (p. 367), noting that fighters treat one another as objects to be damaged (Dixon 2016). Dixon (2016) argues morally evaluating 'blood sports' requires a necessary move outside the 'gratuitous logic' of the sport to ask if activities in which violence is an integral part can be justified. He then asks if sport can improve societies values and be a catalyst for social change? Dixon (2016) takes the paternalistic arguments for a total ban of boxing and MMA, and instead argues for a single restriction against blows to the head. Dixon draws on Simon's (1991) arguments that such sports need radical reform in order to reward skill, strategy and accuracy of striking and techniques, rather than damaging or knockout blows. Dixon's argument assumes that fighters are a homogenous group that hold

objectionable attitudes towards one another. An objectionable attitude is considered to occur when a person views another as having less value than they have (Kershnar and Kelly 2019).[44] Treating people as means to achieve a goal, provided they are not treated *merely* as a means, follows the logic of treating people as ends in themselves and therefore is considered to be morally unobjectionable (Weimer 2017). Treating someone as an end is a matter of allowing them to employ their autonomy; decide on which "goals" they will pursue; how they will do so; and maintain an ability to shape one's life (Weimer 2017; Kershnar and Kelly 2019). Dixon cannot argue MMA is intrinsically immoral on the basis of autonomy alone and so attempts to frame participation in MMA to require a mutually respectful context. An MMA fighter's consent to participate can be viewed as non-autonomous if there is a lack of information about the risks involved or lack of viable economic options for MMA fighters who do—or hope to—fight professionally (Dixon 2016; Weimer 2017). Dixon ignores from his argument the large subculture of people (mostly men) who train in MMA recreationally, do so despite having the conventional avenues of status and success (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010):

> What distinguishes this litany of morally problematic consensual activities from morally harmless…interactions is that the former are inherently degrading. Mere consent is too flimsy a basis to create a mutually respectful context that overrides the demeaning nature of the interactions (Dixon 2015, p. 327).

Dixon (2015) places MMA on the later end of a continuum he conceptualises from innocuous diner-waitress interactions at one end, to systematically unequal sexual relations and demining game shows at the other. Dixon's argument does not consider if the actions of MMA fighters "necessarily violate human dignity [and if there] are… contexts in which… are compatible with respecting the recipient as an end in herself?" (Weimer 2017, p. 261). Dixon's argument is often overdetermined by the idea that pain is always harmful and oppressive (Raj 2010), whilst offering insight into consent being often used as the libertarian moral trump card, which releases the

[44] Ideologically, this serves the interests of the dominant class, by assigning an intrinsic value to people, justifying the reproduction of a dominant hierarchical order of society based on an inner essence rather than having an economic and cultural base (Bourdieu 1991).

responsibility of achieving equality. This has broad political and economic implications as corporations can profit from the damaged bodies of fighters (Dixon 2016).

Intrinsic Immorality: BDSM and MMA

Weimer (2017) uses BDSM (bondage and disciple, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism) practice to demonstrate the gap in Dixon's (2015, 2016) argument. Weimer argues when properly elaborated on, BDSM as a framework implies that MMA cannot be condemned as intrinsically immoral. MMA remains a point of intense and political anxiety similarly to the forms of intimacy that use physically or verbally aggressive acts. Drawing on a socio-legal context, Raj (2010) stress the importance of distinguish between embodied qualities of violence, and consider power, pleasure and subjectivities implicated in such practices. BDSM, like MMA, has a mimetic element that participants enjoy. When trying to understand forms of mimetic violence it is important to consider consent and legitimacy (Matthews and Channon 2017). This argument can be developed further through applying micro-sociological interactional dynamics and antinomian excitement—a key ingredient in sexual interactions. Collins (2004) applies interaction ritual chains (IRC) to sexual interactions,[45] which emphasise how emotional build occurs around, bodily co-presence, mutual focus of attention, common emotion and a barrier to outsiders:

1. Intercourse is bodily co-presence of the strongest possible degree. It assembles a very small group, usually two persons…
2. Intercourse has a strong mutual focus of attention, the awareness of contact with each other's body, and of the actions by which each other's body affects the other.
3. The common emotion or shared mood is sexual excitement, which builds up over the course of the interaction.

[45] Although Collins does not directly apply IRC's to BDSM, he states that the "model fits most forms of sexual interaction" (p. 230).

4. Intercourse typically has a very strong barrier to outsiders; it is carried on in private, and there are strong taboos on others viewing it.

(Collins 2004, p. 231)

There is an interesting crossover in contact sport and BDSM that authors have drawn on. Pringle (2009) for example 'defamiliarises' rugby violence by juxtaposing practices of pleasures in order to make the familiar unfamiliar. This important task demonstrates how certain forms of violence become taken for granted. Pringle uses S&M, which he defines "as the gaining of pleasure, typically but not exclusively in regard to sexual practices, by alternately or simultaneously enduring and causing pain to somebody else" (p. 226).

Critiques of Pringle's argument mostly rest on the potential risk of reproducing heteronormative notions that bind relationships in reproduction and romance (Raj 2010) and his limited definition of violence (Matthews and Channon 2017). Nonetheless, Pringle's treatment of S&M as an idiosyncratic homongenous practice makes it more easily transposed to the world of rugby without effectively teasing out the complexity of subjectivities of participants engaged in the practice. Dominance in rugby is conflated with dominance in BDSM practices,

> the roles associated with dominating or being dominated are also fluid within rugby, because the tackler and oppositional ball carrier change roles throughout the game and both can end up being punished dependent on the success of their performances (Pringle 2009, p. 227).

Often the logical conclusions within such definitions of violence lead authors to take rugby, MMA (and BDSM), as contextually moral. Those involved are freed from everyday sanctions (e.g. hurting others through acts of aggression and SRV) that is contained within a consented to rule-bound system (Pringle 2009; Abramson & Modzelewski 2010; Weimer 2017). Importantly there is a difference between sex and sport. Specifically, one is a practice of pleasure whilst the other, a practice of pleasure bound in a spirit of competition and contest. Therefore it is possible to argue that each have a different kind of consent, ambitions and motivations, despite the types of overlaps noted in the literature. Pringle's argument for consent in sport also overlooks

the nuance about a preference to avoid harm—even if the potential of pain is embraced and understood as being necessary for the game, it is not explicitly sought for pleasure. The pleasure of sport is (often) in victory, the means is (sometimes) incidental violence. For instance, "violence may involve feelings of anger, fear, sadness and frustration, but also satisfaction, pride, even happiness, depending on the context" (de Boise and Hearn 2017). Therefore, understanding pleasure within a binary model of emotions, "'present or absent', is too simplistic to capture the motivational aspects of embodied experience" (de Boise and Hearn 2017, p. 785).

End in Themselves

The philosophy of sport (at least the arguments highlighted here) would benefit from a deeper definition of violence and SRV in order to advance the concepts of morality, consent and participation. Understanding how such activities are tied to broader structural and social processes would make clearer how they have emerged and therefore the social implication of their existence (Young 2019). Importantly, bodies can be subjectively viewed as experiencing violence and intimacy in culturally specific and historically located ways (Raj 2010). Dixon (2015) touches on important points surrounding notions of consent and the treatment of people as end in themselves opposed to means to an end. Firstly, consent can be gained through various political and embodied means in which people can consent to their own disempowerment (Gramsci 1973; Bourdieu 1985; Shilling 1993). Secondly, the treatment of people as ends in themselves can illuminate how human action—how people come to relate to the world around them—is constrained by political, social and historical contexts (Burawoy 2019). This opens up a deeper question of the role of MMA in people's lives who are constrained by their economic and social conditions. Whilst MMA fighters or everyday MMA participants engage in a sport that sells images of success and power, they are rarely able to stabilise their acquired power through institutions (Foucault 1997). The embodied nature of human action relates to dynamic issues of power, culture, and distinction—that is, how agency, the production of cultural and economic capital and attainment and maintenance of social status can be better conceptualised and solved (Shilling 1991, 1993; Maguire 1993). Thus I will now turn to the body and gender in MMA practice. This chapter will set

up the gender framework from which I made sense of Praelia and outline the central analytical tools in which I complement hegemonic masculinity with, namely *habitus*, field and capital. It is to the embodied character of humans in practice I now turn my attention to masculinity, MMA and violence.

Chapter Four: The Body and Gender in Practice – Masculinity, MMA and Violence

This chapter turns to the body and gender to set up another piece of the framework from which I understand the mixed martial arts space. A central part of Connell's (1987, 1995) work on masculinities is her focus on bodies. I conceive the body as a complex interaction between biological, psychological and social processes interconnected within human activity—that is, interacting and engaging in social action, in living formations of people acting out their lives in cultural/structural contexts that structure social exchange (Maguire 1993). The body is conceived as an unfinished, but not infinitely malleable, social, psychological and biological phenomenon. It is not only constrained by and invested in social relations but in fact forms the basis for and contributes to them. Human beings' capacity to walk, talk, use tools and give birth provides us with the capacity to develop social relations and transform our world (Shilling 1993).

Social relations are not static cultural/structural contexts that produce predictable action per se, but have subtle blends of continuity and change, and affect within limits, the bodies, personalities and embodied qualities of people. To capture the relationship of bodies and gender, I conceptualise hegemonic masculinity as changing in relation to broader cultural/structural contexts rather than in its previously vague use as a static characterisation of men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). I follow Connell and Messerchmidt's (2005) rethinking of hegemonic masculinity and outlay Gramsci's concept of hegemony to demonstrate that the ascendency of one group over another is not inevitable, which can account for changes. History is vital for understanding the conditions in a given society as it reveals the kind of structures, components and variety of social order; how history has shaped and changed society; the historical specificity of institutions and ideologies; and the types of people who prevail, become oppressed, are liberated, or suppressed. We reveal through understanding the conditions of society the conduct and kinds of character we observe (Mills 1959).

Turning to Bourdieu's *habitus*, capital, field and practice helps to deal with understanding large- and small-scale interactions. In order to understand gender within MMA, I start from the position that gender is historical and grounded within cultural/structural contexts which are embodied expressions of the fields from which they emerged.[46] In this sense we can understand the body and gender through history. Firstly, gender relations are inherently historical, their making and remaking is a political process which affects the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change. Secondly, masculinity and femininity are often thought to proceed from the body as expressions of male and female bodies. This has been largely understood in naturalistic views of the body which were bolted onto existing gender divisions in society.[47] Bodies cannot be understood as neutral mediums of social practice. The material reality of bodies matter, what they are and are not able to do. Bodies are in play in social practices. MMA is only one part in understanding men's bodies and their relation to masculinity. Though partial, it is important and allows us to probe the institutional arrangements that produce inequality to better understand gender politics (Shilling 1993; Connell 1995).

Hegemonic Masculinity

What are the conditions in which we can understand who will prevail and ascend? This is of high importance for understanding hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a configuration of gender practices that is always relational, dependent on location and time, and presumed to guarantee the domination of men over women. This occurs through hegemonic gender relations, in which unequal gender relations between men and women are consented to and embodied. The function of gender

[46] I do not mean to suggest that gender is detached from sexed bodies.

[47] Women bear children because of sex, but women nurture children because of gender (Lerner 1986). There are significant periods in history where there is increased rigidity in the demarcation of gender. For example in 19th century England (and other Western societies), women were rendered helpless by the tyranny of their bodies, in need of external support and medication. In contrast, men were "self-made" and relied on the "self-help" of their internal resources. This mid-Victorian ideology was an attempted erasure of female agency (Shuttleworth 1990).

hegemony obscures unequal gender relations as it permeates private and public life, which enables and encourages union around unequal gender relations. Connell (1987) explains hegemony as:

> A social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun or by threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is (p. 184).

Gramsci explains hegemony as a balance between force and consent without force predominating over consent, specifically in civil society (Gramsci 1971; Burawoy 2019). Gramsci (1971, p. 244) notes:

> The State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules.

In other words, the State is viewed as an 'equilibrium between political society and civil society'—or 'the hegemony of one social group over the whole nation'—where domination is maintained through private 'organisations such as the church, trade unions or schools'. Gramsci points to civil society as the entire complex of social, cultural and political organisations, and institutions that are not strictly part of the State. Hegemony is pictured specifically as an "equilibrium between "leadership" or "direction" based on consent, and "domination" based on coercion in the broadest sense" (Gramsci 1973, pp. 41-42). It is the state's relation to civil society in which it "not only justifies and maintains its domination but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (Gramsci 1971, p. 245).[48] Hegemony does not equate to total control, nor is it automatic and undisturbed and a 'theory of practice'

[48] The hegemony of the ruling class must always be maintained through direction and domination. This is always a continual work in progress and if direction lags and the ideological grasp loosens on the masses, the State enters into crisis and competing classes can penetrate unoccupied spaces attempting to advance towards a hegemonic position (Gramsci 1973; Rowe 2004).

provides an analytical framework for understanding gender and bodies as they come to consent to relations of inequality (Connell 1987, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity legitimises and bolsters neoliberal discourse, which supports neoliberal social, political, and economic paradigms. Spaces are then created by hegemonic identities that make neoliberalism common sense (Whitman 2018). This logic allows us to take seriously Connell's (1995) question surrounding masculinity as the problem that produces inequality in gender politics, or the institutional arrangements that produce inequality, which has tended to lead to an either or question surrounding the institutions of the neoliberal order being hegemonic opposed to a particular masculinity or masculinities (Besnier et al. 2018). By outlining and drawing out these processes we are able to acknowledge the social dynamic of masculinity, without reading it through men's psychology (or biology) and the significance of the issue becomes the interplay between personality and social relations (Connell 1995).[49] This gives us a sense of human beings 'in the round', as the structure of biological, psychological and social processes are understood as interconnected, having subtle blends of continuity and change (Mills 1959; Elias 1987; Maguire 1991a, 199b, 1993; Shilling 1993).

Despite the dominant groups' many advantages in directing social values and controlling institutions, at times it must cede ground to popular resistance (Rowe 2004). The ascendency of men has been embedded within many institutions and influenced practice, policy and the direction of social values. For example, religious and scientific frameworks, have historically been dominated by naturalistic and traditionalist views that regarded "women's subordination as universal, God-given, or natural, hence immutable" (Lerner 1986, p. 16). A side effect of this has resulted in the tendency of literature surrounding masculinity and gender following the post-structuralist turn of the 1980s to fragment from broader political and economic dynamics. This lens has tended to obscure the world by presuming the world is unknowable in any objective sense, and can only be known through discourse. The emphasis on language deemphasises any foundation of society with an economic base and underlying tensions. Therefore, rendering no distinction between appearances and

[49] This requires a nuanced approach which acknowledges homophobic, misogynistic and patriarchal ideologies, without reducing these dispositions as emerging from an innate character of men or masculinity (Connell 1995).

the full truth. For example, discrimination against women and the free labour they do (housework, childbearing, etc.), is imposed through capitalism and is partly maintained through ideological conceptions of women's nature. This affects women who are not mothers or "keep house for men". The distance between the economic realities and the everyday discrimination against women in daily life, accumulates over a lifetime of experiences—the role of one's parents', media and books, social ties and so on—culminating in the attitudes and dispositions of how men and women deal with women (Sullivan 1990; Shilling 1993; West 1996; McNamee 2005; Palvidis 2010; Heller 2016).

Hegemonic masculinity is a cultural ideal rather than an actual personality of men. In fact, the winning of hegemony involves the creation of models of masculinity which are fantasy figures like film characters played by actors such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger (Connell 1987, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2019). The concept of hegemonic masculinity has no meaning outside its relation with emphasised femininity and non-hegemonic masculinities. Masculinities and femininities are defined by complex combinations of strategies of resistance and forms of non-compliance, whereas as others are defined around combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation with subordination. As such, the interplay among these creates dynamics of change in the gender order (Connell 1987). Understanding agents within gender relations makes clearer how collectively they are broadly tied into "orchestras of hegemonic masculinity" (Messerschmidt 2019, p. 87). This includes emphasised femininity—or forms of femininity that are compliant, complementary and accommodating of hegemonic masculinity—and non-hegemonic masculinities.

Connell (1995) identified four non-hegemonic masculinities that hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to: complicit masculinities, these do not embody hegemonic masculinity, yet through practice gain some of the benefits of unequal gender relations, which when practiced help sustain hegemonic masculinity. Subordinate masculinities which are constructed as less than and are deviant to hegemonic masculinity. Marginalised masculinities are trivialised or discriminated against because of unequal relations external to gender relations such as class, race, ethnicity, and age. The final form, protest masculinities, "are constructed as compensatory hypermasculinities that are formed in reaction to social positions

lacking economic and political power" (Messerschmidt 2019 p. 87).[50] Hegemonic and complicit masculinities have the potential to resolve the motivation crisis for capitalism through a gender motivation. This crisis is produced when the cultural and ideological reasons for economic performance and political consent are undermined (Connell 1995). Broadly speaking, the detachment from traditional ideologies by great masses creates a 'crisis of authority' of the generation in power, disrupting the ruling class from being able to maintain hegemony. Thus, the hegemony of those in power remains a continuing work in progress rather than an inevitable state (Rowe 2004). Gender motivation can occur through institutions' capacity to organise collective practice (Connell 1995). In a post-industrial political economy—characterised by neoliberal state policies—the institutionalisation of common sense language of equity and fairness comes replace politicised feminism (Messner 2016). This rationality of workplace structure, whilst institutionally condemns outright misogyny, contracts the possibility of anti-feminist tensions and backlash that coincide with declining economic opportunities disproportionately effecting working class men, and the perception that women's increased social position now puts men at a disadvantage (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2013; Messner 2016).

Unequal gender relations are embodied as a somatisation of domination, in that, structures and relations are naturalised and sedimented through everyday practice and form hegemonic gender relations, between men and women(Bourdieu 2001). An embodied imprint of a collective history maybe found and reduced to a generic and universal family structure. In this sense, the family structure becomes natural to the point of invisibility and can serve as an arena of oppression, ideologically reproducing and justifying the social divisions of labour between men and women (Eagleton 1991).[51] The family structure itself is entwined with social structures such as the education system, youth sport and occupational culture, which

[50] Messerschmidt (2019) makes clear that critical masculinities scholars should make a distinction between hegemonic and dominate masculinities rather than wrongly labelling hegemonic masculinities, and recognising the differences among masculinities in terms of local, regional and global settings, but also in terms of hybrid dominating versus protective and material versus discursive hegemonic masculinities.

[51] This does not suggest that families cannot at once be refuges from the growing pressures of social life, or inherent within them are automatically oppressive relations.

historically have relied on women's free labour in order to function. As men win bread, women taxi their children to and from school, prepare their food and clean their clothes (Shilling 1991; Thompson 1999).[52] Analysing practices which are produced and reproduced over time and become embodied in the everyday—naturalised in our hearts, minds, bones and blood—moves away from searching for bearers of hegemonic masculinity.[53] Therefore we are able to distinguish between masculinities that legitimate unequal gender relations from ones that do not (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

The ambiguity of hegemonic masculinity has often remained in scholars' attempts to imbue actors with hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type opposed to understanding hegemonic masculinity to have:

> …the consent of a widespread population…the forms of masculinity that are respected and seen as natural, appropriate, proper and that dominate are not necessarily the toughest, roughest or most sporting forms of masculine behaviour…thus not… [Australian] footballer masculinity any more than warrior masculinity or other ideals of masculinity with their concomitant traits are necessarily hegemonic today (Cover 2015, p. 65).

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[52] Another example, are the elements of sexual character embedded in the sets of practices in occupational cultures. Professional occupations for example combine theoretical knowledge with technical expertise to monopolise practice, which has been constructed historically as a form of masculinity: "emotionally flat, centred on a specialised skill, insistent on professional esteem and technically based dominance over other workers, and requiring for its highest (specialist) development the complete freedom from childcare and domestic work provided by having wives and maids to do it" (Connell 1987, p. 181). This highly self-rationalised and alienated man (from nature, society and self) resonates with what Mills (1959) has referred to this as the cheerful robot, in which 'man' has been turned into a robot by the conditions of his circumstance—occupational cultures.

[53] It might be useful to think of regional/local MMA masculine *habitus* that produces dispositions related to specific fields (Desmond 2006), rather than a global MMA masculine *habitus* that dominate all other forms of masculinity. Coles (2008) offers some interesting possibilities for thinking differently about multiple masculinities in various spaces, however Thorpe (2010) views Coles conception of 'the field of masculinity' as problematic because it presents gender, in particular masculinity, as a separate field. Rather, Thorpe puts forward that gender is better conceptualised as part of a field.

Distinguishing among masculinities may better capture (though the words suggests a freezing of these dynamic relations) how various masculinities are realised in relation to a specific *habitus* in a space. Thorpe (2010) suggests that scholars' considered the concept hegemonic masculinity as ambiguous—tended to overemphasise structure and was dualistic, focusing only on men and ignoring women. Thorpe also suggests incorporating a "feminist reading of Bourdieu's original conceptual schema—field, capital, habitus, practice—may facilitate fresh insights into the multiplicity, dynamicism, and fluidity of masculinities and gender relations in contemporary sport and physical cultures" (p. 177). Bringing Connell and Bourdieu's work together has proven useful in various research applications. The work of Bridges (2009), Coles (2009), Thrope (2010) and Robinson and Robertson (2014) have used various concepts in tandem. For example, Bridges (2009) uses Bourdieu's cultural capital and Connell's hegemonic masculinity through the hybrid concept gender capital. This merges cultural capital and hegemonic masculinity as "strategies for making sense of systems of valuation that vary between and among groups, and by context" (Bridges 2009, p. 92).

Conversely, Reddy, Sharma and Jha (2018) argue against the use of Connell and Bourdieu as they diverge from the notion of a formation of a positive hegemonic masculinity. In this regard, they claim that:

> Change would mean change in the material structures as well as ideological structures that govern gender relations. It would necessarily mean that a positive hegemonic masculinity obviates the need for the material and ideological structures that underlie the gender relations. The possibility of democratizing gender relations and abolishment of power differentials cannot be conceptualized when the gender hierarchy emerged and evolved as a means to aid certain modes of social and economic production in which power differentials are the foundation (p. 305).

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) claim that Bourdieu's (2001) masculine domination "has given a new lease on life to functionalism in gender analysis." They claim hegemonic masculinity is not self-reproducing, "whether through habitus or any other mechanism." But requires "the policing of men as well as the exclusion or

discrediting of women" (p. 884). In light of this brief discussion on the various uses and divergences, I now turn to Bourdieu's conceptual schema in more depth.

Habitus

The Bourdieusian *habitus*[54] is the embodied nature of the internalisation of social and symbolic structures of society and the externalisation of what has been internalised. The structures of society can be thought of as 'deposited' in people,[55] and come to light in their "dispositions, trained capacitates and patterned propensities to think, feel and act, in determinate ways, which in turn guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu" (Wacquant 2016a, p. 65). Thus, the individual and group history is naturalised and sedimented in the body, and social structure is turned "mental structure and sensorimotor engine". Further, Bourdieu (1977) describes *habitus* as being produced from the structures of particular environments that are the material conditions of existence. *Habitus* is a system of durable and transposable dispositions. Not only is the *habitus* structured by particular environments but *habitus* structures environments.[56]

> That is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively

[54] Both Bourdieu and Elias use *habitus* as a kind of 'second nature', in which people gradually come to feel at home in objective situations that "time-consuming and energy-consuming explicit mental representations might only get in the way" (Paulle et al. 2012, p. 74). However, for Elias there is more emphasis placed on the balance between spontaneity and constriction (Sánchez García 2013).

[55] This is can be explained as a process of learning and relearning, classifications, codes and procedures that structure social exchanges in practice (Maguire 1993). In thinking with Collins (1993, 2004), the success of an interaction (those that produce high EE) is likely to lead to reinvesting in further interactions that yield the same outcome.

[56] "The notion of habitus implies a whole common sense, a way of perceiving and acting…" (Sánchez García 2013, p. 155). The habitus forms in the context of people's social locations and as such, the reproduction of social structures is not static. Because an individual's body is never 'fully finished', and is constantly affected by changing social, cultural and economic processes (Shilling 1993).

> orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (p. 72).

The habitus is generative, that is inventive and creative within limits, rather than determining and predicable. It can be thought of similar to the embodied performances of mixed martial artists that burn in movement pathways, and a physical grammar for engaging spontaneously and creatively in each new confrontation with an opponent (Brown 2006). Moreover, *habitus* can be split into general and specific. The general *habitus* is the system of dispositions, ways of thinking and acting in the world, formed early on in life. The specific *habitus* is later acquired through specific organisations and institutions (e.g. education, training, discipline in organisations). Individuals who naturally 'fit in' a space like Praelia MMA, do so because their general *habitus* transforms into a specific *habitus* with little friction, in contrast to individuals who are at odds with the "fundamental structures and practices" in a particular space (Desmond 2006, p. 391).

Field

The social structures that shape *habitus* are defined by fields, which can be thought of as a network, or configuration of objective relations between positions that actors hold. Fields can be metaphorically imagined as bubble like spheres of social life, but without the linguistic implication of limits and boundaries, the boundaries should be viewed as elastic and overlapping with influence over other fields rather than isolated (Swartz 1997; Coles 2009). To analyse a field, one must analyse the position of the field in relation to the field of power. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) use writers or artists like intellectuals more generally, to illustrate how the literary field and artists occupy the dominated fraction of the dominant class. This requires a mapping of the objective relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority in the field. Lastly, the analysis of the *habitus* of agents must be undertaken to illuminate a definite trajectory within the field, as more or less favourable opportunities are actualised as a result of the acquired dispositions through the internalisation of a determinate type of social and economic condition.

Field becomes increasingly important in theory of practice. The forms of capital within the field of symbolic goods are limited and scarce. These "power resources" are distinctive because they are the temporary effects of symbolic struggle. Past struggles over the value of various species and amounts of capital that have largely shifted to unconscious or habituated valuations, which can "create, temporarily maintain, and destroy capitals. They can set up, preserve, and redefine the boundaries and principles of division of a Bourdieusian field" (Paulle et al. 2012, p. 74). For example, a clash of styles in the field of boxing can result in coaches looking for new strategies, footwork and punching combinations. These changes which arise from finding an edge in competition, can change the structuring of the field and result in confrontations and contestation of the hegemony within the field (Brown 2006).

Agent occupancy of positions in the social universe are defined in relation to neighbouring positions in the field. This is what Bourdieu referred to as the field of forces, which is a set of objective power relations imposed on anyone who enters a given field. The position of a particular agent can be defined by the position they occupy in different fields and the distribution of power active within those fields. These are principally the distribution of economic, social and cultural as well as symbolic capital.

Capital

In a field there is a symbolic struggle over legitimising forms of capital (Swartz 1997). There are three broad types of capital that tend to exist within most fields: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital can be thought of in terms of financial resources. Social capital is the status of individuals within one's social networks. Cultural capital is made up by various cultural skills, tastes, preferences, qualifications and physical capital. These operate in distinction between the classes and set in place a hierarchy based on the distribution of specific capital. The rank of individuals, groups, and organisations is determined by expressing the valued capital within a field (Coles 2009, p. 36). Applying a relational logic is to seek out the

underlying relations that shape action, the patterns of interest and struggle in the conflictual character of social life (Swartz 1997).

Symbolic capital—another name for distinction—is capital in whatever form, that is perceived by agents who are endowed with categories of perception which have arisen from the internalisation of the structure of its distribution. In other words, this is the form of capital in which different forms of capital are perceived, recognised and taken as self-evident (Bourdieu 1985). Men's ascendency is taken as self-evident—that is, the organisation of everyday life reflects the structures that shape the everyday—and recognised as natural, opposed historically configured objective relations. The material conditions of existence that structure and are structured by our *habitus* fade deep away. Individuals who prosper in a given society, institution, or social context have adopted the logic of its field, or in other words, adhere to the *doxa*[57] of the field, made possible through embodied cultural capital.

Bourdieu's concern with the body arises from his treatment of cultural capital. Cultural capital related to the body has been referred to as physical capital and treated as a form of capital in its own right. The production of physical capital develops bodies in ways that are recognised as possessing value in social fields. This becomes a useful conceptualisation of the physical, in order to "examine the forms of embodiment which create the basis of all other varieties of capital" (Shilling 1993, p. 149). Physical capital is converted through bodily participation in work, leisure and other fields into different forms of capital. Often, physical capital is converted into "economic capital (money, goods and services), cultural capital (for example, education) and social capital networks which enable reciprocal calls to be made on the goods and services of its members)" (Shilling 1994, p. 128). For example, the

[57] *Doxa* in ancient Greek philosophy was an arbitrary opinion on things, limited to the evident and self-evident, a set of fundamental beliefs not needing assertion in an explicit form (it is seen and heard) representing the lived ideology of a society or culture (Bourdieu 2000; Pavlidis 2010). When one adheres to the *doxa* of the field, they are caught up in the game, in the *illusio,* which is "understood as a fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes which is inherent in that membership" (Bourdieu 2000, p. 11). Once agents within a field accept its viewpoints, they struggle to take viewpoints external to that which constitutes that social field (Bourdieu 2000). Here viewpoint should not be taken to mean and emphasise simply the mind over body, but the entire complex of social systems that become embodied and acted on.

social connections or networks of an actor enables them to gain access or profit from other forms e.g. cultural and economic (Robinson and Robertson 2014). The *embodied* state of cultural capital is such that it occurs in long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body. The embodied state requires a labour of inculcation and assimilation, which makes up the *habitus* and therefore unlike money or property rights cannot simply be acquired through gift. This is precisely why the acquisition of cultural capital leaves visible marks from the earliest conditions of it acquisition (Bourdieu 1986).[58] Understanding the relations and politics of gender through *habitus*, capital, field and practice, equip one with tools of tracing how the current gender relations have unfolded, and how we might change and solve issues of inequality we face, through the ascendancy of one group(s) over another. For example, the *habitus* is produced from the structures of particular environments—and structures particular environments—in relation to the material conditions of existence, the functions of masculine domination persist in the objective structures of social space and institutional arrangements. As capital accumulating subjects enter fields and play for what is at stake, capital is embodied and thus produces persistent dispositions in men and women that form around unequal gendered relations (Bourdieu 1977, 2001).

Resisting Gendered Expectations in MMA Practice

MMA provides its participants with more than just training for becoming professional fighters. It supplies a social network in which members form close bonds and relationships with people from relatively diverse educations, occupations, religions, cultures and world-views. In varying contexts MMA takes on different meanings, the subjective accounts of those who participate tell stories of camaraderie and friendship, teachings of patience and calmness, improving health and fitness, self-improvement in wellbeing and self-confidence. MMA provides deeper meaning to those who participate. However, attempting to understand these meanings outside of their social context and their inherent contradictions, abstracts them from the concrete. Thus, we are at risk of understanding these meanings as static formations,

[58] Elias (2000) also noted how upward social mobility tends to leave marks in behaviour that reveal the immense effort required for social advancement.

rather than historically formed social relations (Bridges 2009; Pavlidis 2010). Women's increased participation in the public sphere has led to a sort of 'muscular backlash'. As cognitive, occupational and lifestyle differences between men and women decayed, body image emerges as one of the few areas men can distinguish themselves from women. As women increased their social and political gains, imagery of male bodies exploded, promoting "masculinity as a set of prized qualities which are under threat and which should be defended" through fighting off the feminisation of society by excluding women from the public sphere (Shilling 1993, p. 34).

Bridges (2009) argues that occupations such as bodybuilding, modeling, athletics or boxing become sociologically useful for discussing the 'inscription' of gender–or what Connell (1987) refers to as 'practical transformations' of the body. Subcultures monitor what Bridges calls gender capital, through their evaluation and specific practices that alter aesthetic dispositions. Living in a somatic society results in embodying social anxiety and political issues, therefore bodybuilding or in this case MMA, can "illuminate aspects of wider gender-political agendas inherent in social practice, bodies and identities. Bodily practices are easily labeled individual issues. However, identities and individual practices are not detached from the wider social arenas in which they occur" (Bridges 2009, p. 87).

Women's participation in MMA is in direct conflict with traditional gendered ideology. Taking part in a traditionally male dominated space—and the male monopoly over sport generally—can disrupt expectations and directly challenge fundamental pillars of women's perceived inferiority (Mierzwinski, Velija and Malcolm 2014). Negative gender perceptions are reinforced by who can/cannot and who do/do not participate in sports seen as 'male specific' (Jump 2017) and reinforce the notion that masculinity proceeds from male bodies. Thus conflating manhood, manliness and masculinity to inherently exist within a male body, as a strategic part of gender ideology, has resulted in marginalising feminine masculinities and masculine femininities (Connell 1995; Halberstam 1998).[59] In addition, women's

[59] Women were excluded from boxing by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) until 2012 and from the UFC until 2013. Unlike women's boxing which was practised and popular since the 18th century (Mierzwinski et al. 2014), in MMA, the first women's MMA organisation started in Japan in 2001. 12 years before they were included in the UFC.

bodies are policed through a naturalised discourse, that is to say, what is or is not natural for women's bodies to do.[60] Here, building muscle or a fighting body becomes especially interesting as it has the capacity to destabilise dominant concepts of gender identity (Brown 2006). In order to challenge the conditions of sexual inequality, it is important to find ways that highlight sexual difference as socially constructed through how we do gender (Channon 2014).[61] At the elite level of MMA, Weaving (2013) uses Young's (1980) classic argument 'throwing like a girl' to explore how women's lived body experiences, in and through participating in MMA, are not solely rooted in body-objects but in subject-objects. The prolonged practice of sport has the ability to profoundly transform the "subjective and objective experience of the body", from being a "body-for-others" to a "body for oneself" (Bourdieu 2001 p. 67).

Within sporting practices, at the level of the *habitus*, women are able to radically disrupt traditionally feminine ways of moving, and feeling the body and engaging with other people's bodies (Brown 2006).[62] However, because MMA has been constructed on sports that emerged as a male preserve, women in the UFC are traditionally measured according to male standards. The preliminary and specific analysis of Ronda Rousey demonstrates how women outside the cage might be 'forced' to adopt hyper-feminine heterosexual personas (Weaving 2013). Women must also frame their participation as to not threaten the dominant social norms of their reproductive capacity or male physical superiority (Mierzwinski, et al. 2014).[63]

Through MMA training, women's embodiment could be profoundly changed through an empowering cultivation of physical and mental agency.

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[60] Women in boxing fight two less rounds than men and each round lasts one minute less, reifying the supposed "innate" weakness of women "unable" to a) fight as long as the men, and b) positioning women's boxing as unthreatening to men's "natural" strength and abilities.

[61] However, this is not to be over-emphasised, as post-modernist social constructivist views of the gendered body as infinitely malleable, ignore it as a material, physical and biological entity (Shilling 1993; Connell 1995).

[62] This is not to suggest that the feminine ways of being must be disrupted, but rather the relation between masculinity/femininity, male/female, man/woman placed in a superior/inferior, dominate/dominated, hierarchy which constrains equity of human rights.

[63] There would be a benefit of an analysis of newly rising stars and current belt holders within the UFC such as Amanda Nunes, Valentina Shevchenko and Weili Zhang, to see what, if anything, has changed (positively).

However this cannot be limited or justified to training in self-defence, but rather allowing a reconstruction of gendered selves that reject notions of innate female weakness and vulnerability, and thereby come to embody a 're-made', 'empowered' sense of femininity. By training with partners of the opposite sex, men and women's gendered subjectivities can be 'transformed' through this experience (Channon and Jennings 2014). The relevance of elite MMA in constructing the meaning of grassroots participation is complex because those who practice MMA consume the sport at different levels and are positioned within clubs hierarchically. They not only disseminate discourse that shapes the gym and 'mind' of the participants but also shapes embodiment through techniques and practices, which condition the body. The organisation of social space has developed through political and historical forces, which shape and constrain agents within these environments. Social space, as feminist geographers have offered, is experienced bodily and therefore reflects (and has the potential to reinforce) gendered power relations (van Ingen 2003). The diversity of a group has the potential to subvert patriarchal norms, with the possibility of transforming gendered subjectivities of men and women (Channon and Jennings 2014). Participating in combat sports has the potential to reveal the incomplete inscriptions of ideology onto the body, by demonstrating that the body is a socially qualified one that must continually be remade. The emphasis lies on the repetition, which leads to a (re)negotiation of gendered identity (Crews and Lennox 2019). For example, marginalised masculinities in MMA illuminate the "multiplicity and heterogeneity of masculinity construction processes" in relation to hegemonic forms (Hirose and Pih 2009, p.191).[64] Men's (re)negotiation of gendered identities is an essential part of constructing identities which are not grounded in hegemony that enables and encourages union around unequal gender relations. We are not merely raising consciousness and ignoring "the extraordinary inertia which results from the inscription of social structures in bodies," and ignoring "a dispositional theory of practices". Rather, emphasising

[64] Hirose and Pih's (2009) analysis of MMA discourse was applied at the elite level and would benefit from further research in order to see how this operates at the local level. The affects of discourse on dispositions in the formation of masculinity are not always clear. Although masculinity may be surrounded by and perceived through discourse, it is not reducible to discourse (Shilling 1993).

“a thoroughgoing process of counter training, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete's training, durably transform habitus.” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 172). As Marx noted, “the general relationship established between men and women in a society is a yardstick for its whole level of cultural development” (Sullivan 1992, p. 20).

Folk understandings of human beings have persistently captured our imagination and limited our understanding of social phenomenon. Understanding how gender emerges, forms, shapes and helps constitute human action, provides a way of changing problematic institutional and hegemonic relations opposed to strictly focusing on gender as problematic. This buttresses on the nature between the statistical over-representation of men in violent related behaviours compared to women, and the forming of masculinities and femininities within traditionally marginalised spaces such as MMA, becoming problematised. In a predominantly working-class gym, it was important that I did not caricature “certain men as always performing nefarious forms of masculinity” (Elliott and Roberts 2020, p. 779). It is at this juncture I now cast my attention to the methodological tools in which I conducted this research. I detail the importance of ethnography for this project, the fieldwork process and analysis, as well as the important cast of participants in Praelia MMA.

Chapter Five: Methodology

In the following sections of this chapter I begin with my definition of violence for this thesis, which draws on the various elements from chapters two-four in order to frame violence for this study. I will then detail the importance and role of ethnography in my research and how I conducted my fieldwork. Then I introduce the key cast of people who I trained with over the four plus years. Drawing on my experience with over 40 participants and 13 life-history interviews, I amalgamate the cast of characters in order to protect their identities. I provide mini-biographies to describe hierarchical positions within the gym, in relation to field and forms of capital. This is followed by Praelia as a research site and my biography as a researcher. Lastly I extrapolate my interview process, how I analysed my data and ethical considerations for the research.

The role of gender, violence and sport (with emphasis varied on each aspect) in Western society has become of increasing interest to sociologist of sport (Goldstein 1983; Messner 1990, 2007; Young 2019). MMA occupies the upper limit of acceptable sporting violence and has been a polarising social and political debate since its emergence. The intention of my project and therefore subsequent research, was designed in light of understanding if indeed the proclaimed violence of MMA, threatens the 'morals' of mainstream Western society by creating violent individuals. This public outcry against MMA highlights two interesting assumptions about violence, firstly it is clear that there are visible and invisible forms of violence and secondly, violence is depicted like a contagious pathogen. If the violence from MMA was threatening the morals of society, then it seemed important to investigate everyday MMA participants' lives.

Undertaking a sociological investigation into the practice of MMA is one way to avoid reducing the people who practice MMA to simply violent people (Burke 1998). In this reduction we not only cause those people pain, but we discount the pedagogical syllabus of the gym onto its members and how men and women are taught to negotiate violent and belligerent behavior, and further contribute to the debates surrounding violence, the impacts of sports violence in popular culture and problematic hypermasculinity (Butera 2008; Cover 2015; Jennings 2019). In light of this, I turn to how I define violence for this thesis.

Defining Violence in MMA

In chapter two and three I detailed the various lenses and definitions of violence, without providing one of my own. In order to better frame violence for my thesis, I define violence in MMA between what currently best captures the lived experience of members in the gym, and within the broader social context of which Praelia MMA is constituted.[65] My definition and understanding of violence in this thesis is as such: firstly, I start from *symbolic violence* because it demonstrates how the organisation of society is institutionalised, naturalised and fades away into the background. Here, we find how contemporary socialisation processes of gender are reared in institutions such as sport. For example, to be a man fully realised, you must be appropriately hardened and toughened up. This also allows us to account for how changes in gendered dispositions remain persistent, but also change. Secondly, this makes clearer the backdrop of *ritualised violence*, in which historically men would engage in 'acceptable' and 'theatrical' (though harmful) forms of ritual violence and staged combat in contact and combat sports. This opens up the dynamics of interactions in which emotions and mimesis come into play, but also how confrontations unfold on a micro-level. Lastly, using a sport related violence (SRV) lens, violence can be understood within broader political, economic and social action rather than being reduced to an individual's psychology or biology. Both the subjective and objective definitions of violence are incorporated.

I take seriously the subjective definitions of violence in order to avoid reifying participants of MMA (and myself) as objects of violence. Therefore, I consider that the perspectives of those who practice in sports considered dangerous, by redefining what is often described as violence, might be better understood as brutal body-to-body contact or confrontational interactions. Though the intention is not to harm, the potential for harming and risk of injury remains. This places the interactions at the centre of analysis, whilst maintaining that the cultural capital 'up for grabs' within the social space has emerged historically. In other words, complex processes that have patterned human behaviour are constituted in relation to our environment and one

[65] I do not claim this definition as complete or the only way to define violence in MMA.

another. In this sense, both the physical and non-physical harm related to violence (or brutal body-to-body contact) can be better understood. My definition of violence assumes that the biological capabilities and material realities (e.g. needing to produce to survive) enabled human beings to firstly, adapt to a great variety of conditions on earth to produce a living without any major biological differentiation or division into different species. Secondly, human beings adapted vastly through conditions of social differentiation, learning from experience and handing on knowledge from one generation to another in order to adapt themselves to new surroundings (Elias 1987; Molyneux 2012). Perhaps, the early necessity for hunting pertained to meeting the needs of people. The changing conditions on earth meant adapting to new surroundings and in this way violence became a socially conditioned way of producing a living. The complexity of the MMA phenomenon (as with sport generally) cannot simply be reduced to the violence, but is to be understood through the various aspects as a sport and leisure, as an institution, product for audience consumption, and so on.

Why Ethnography?

I want to start by engaging in a discussion of what ethnography is and why it was important for my research. The increasing trend in science (social and natural) has been the uncritical use of method that privileges forms of knowledge over others in a quest for objectivity. There has been a tendency for the humanities to resist against objectivity and positivism, and demonstrate the problems with the naïve acceptance of the positivistic supremacy as 'natural'. The backlash towards the ascendancy of objectivity has at times gone too far the other way, tending to completely do away with knowing the material world (tending to overemphasise discourse as the only way of knowing) through relativism. Relativism can be boiled down into two sorts: skepticism (all knowledge is false, nothing is true, no point of view or assessment is valid) and permissivism (all descriptions of reality are true and equally valid) (McNamee 2005). This largely emerged with the postmodern turn in recent decades (Shilling 1993; West 1996; McNamee 2005; Palvidis 2010; Heller 2016). The ethnographic methodology can provide the researcher a deeper understanding of the field (in the Bourdieusian sense) and over other methods, can produce richer data

through embedding oneself in a particular field (Desmond 2014). Moreover, to think in terms of field is to think relationally as a corrective against positivism (Swartz 1997), opposed to entirely doing away with knowing the material world.

The ethnographic method has its intellectual roots in anthropology and sociology, and employs a spectrum of qualitative methods in order to obtain access to particular human phenomena (Allen Collinson and Hockey 2005). The origins of ethnography in anthropology emerged as a way to investigate "small-scale societies" that differed to Western culture in the course of colonial expansion (Connell 1995, p. 30). As classical sociology developed from anthropology, its focus changed from the differences between human beings over long evolutionary periods to the similarities between industrial capitalist societies and the defining characteristics of urban, industrial societies (Turner 1991). Ethnography has survived and thrived for the past 50 years in anthropology and the social sciences. There has been an "increasing variation in what the term is taken to mean" (Hammersley 2017, p. 1) and how it is used. Ethnography can be described as a:

> …relatively long-term data collection process, taking place in *naturally* occurring settings, relying on participant observation, or personal engagement more generally, employing a range of types of data, aimed at documenting what *actually* goes on, emphasises the significance of the meanings people give to objects, including themselves, in the course of their activities, in other words culture, and *holistic* in focus (Hammersley 2017, p. 4 emphasis added).

Although this description largely aligns with my methodological approach, it can restrict and disregard the possibilities for new ways of doing ethnography.[66]

[66] The classical definitions of ethnography are becoming increasingly difficult for researchers to engage with in contemporary contexts and ethnographers are finding innovative ways to contend with the broad trend. For example, limits of long duration, spending time with people outside of a specific setting, are less feasible than they once were (Pink 2015). Despite many years since the days of 'Malinowskian-styled fieldwork', remnants remain in the ethos of our research imaginaries and can limit the discussion of fieldnotes and fieldwork to an ordinary and publishable way (Marcus 2009; Lassiter and Campbell 2010). This can have a flow on effect, limiting the pool of ideas and constricting the imagination from which we might borrow, build upon and eventually invent or discover new ways of doing ethnography (Clough 2000).

Researchers suggest a key to ethnography is to develop the object of research, through constructing a theoretical model that informs a scientific object. This combats a reliance on common categories of thought (Desmond 2014). Ethnography in this light should 'fit the problem' and continue to be reflected on during the research in the aim to describe social worlds (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). When entering a social world, the researcher brings with them taken-for-granted categories of thought through embodied experiences which are not necessarily visible. These categories of thought define the limit of what is thinkable and predetermine thought, which affects and guides the practical carrying out of social inquiry. This requires a change in theory of practice and practical operations of research (for example the philosophy of science see McNamee 2005), which can lead to paying attention to "properties of ritual practice" that might otherwise be treated as meaningless (e.g. using 'race', gender, or class as categories that determine behaviour) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 40).

In martial arts, ethnographic research remains an underdeveloped area that only receives scattered attention, despite its usage since the 1970s (Spencer and Sánchez García 2013). This is what made being a participant observer in my research essential. I could have conducted interviews and observed the gym, but perhaps I would have risked being a disembodied researcher removing myself from the research and analyses of the body as a subject (Shilling 1993). Participatory fieldwork is able to penetrate the social production and assembly of the gym culture (Wacquant 2004a).[67]

Using Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* became particularly useful because of its role as a tool in the field and for data analysis. Bourdieu's sociology works to "uncover the most profoundly buried structures of various social worlds which constitute that social universe, as well as the mechanisms which tend to ensure their reproduction" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 7). Using a *habitus*-driven approach in the field and *historicising the habitus* in analysis, externalises what has been internalised and forgotten. The dispositions and skills acquired in the gym grant insights "beyond those solely pertaining to individuals' development" (Desmond

[67] This is not to say that fieldwork automatically does this because of the embodied experience alone. There remains taken-for-granted structures that affect our ability to be reflexive, delimiting our thoughts and *prethought*.

2006, p. 412). Fresh light is shed on the social order—in which skills were crafted—that is reproduced through everyday micro-level mechanisms. This is particularly useful when understanding the construction of masculinity and role of violence in the gym.

Since Wacquant's (2004a) ethnography, there has been an emergence of MACS studies, which have made use of the concept of *habitus* by Pierre Bourdieu as an analytical tool (Brown and Jennings 2013; Jennings 2019). *Habitus* is the matrix of which dispositions, values and habits are inscribed on the body, and are constructed by the structures the individual was born in, however are not limited to the individual. The complexity of these arrangements peer into the structures that helped arrange them and have historically given rise to capital in social fields that 'gamers' are eager to play. Another way of saying this would be the historical labour involved to create and recreate objective and subjective structures (e.g. education, family, and religion, gender, ethnicity/race, tall/short, weak/strong, etc.), which, from Bourdieu's perspective, lie at the heart of interactions and exist as schemes of perception that evaluate bodies in social spaces, that are naturalised and hieratically ordered (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 2001). By using *habitus* as an analytical tool for data, it is possible to better understand the structures that organise our schemes of perception and social universe. This makes way for understanding the material forces that shape gendered bodies and identities (Connell 1987).

To explore *habitus* in the field of MMA and capture social action as it is lived and manufactured, I borrow from Wacquant as he states that the "social agent is before anything else a being of flesh, nerves, and senses…" (2004a, p. vii). In order to "better capture social action as it is manufactured and lived" (Wacquant 2011, p. 81) and to expand textual genres, styles of ethnography and change the practical operations of research, requires one to embody the everyday gym experience. Wacquant (2004a) phrases this point perfectly in his prologue of *Body and Soul*, "One must not step into the ring by proxy with the extra-ordinary figure of the "champ" but "hit the bags" alongside anonymous boxers in their habitual setting of the gym" (p. 6).

For Wacquant, it would be difficulty for an outsider to understand the MMA gym—or boxing gym—because of the abundant symbols within this complex institution (Wacquant 2004a) and the interactions which are ordered by hierarchical

power that are not directly observable (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The gym is "a small-scale civilising machine" that imposes and moulds the practice of its inhabitants, promoting internalisation of controls and obedience to authority while immersing its attendants in its personal community (Wacquant 2005, p. 459). This directly opposes the common category of thought about people who do MMA, as it was largely and to some extent still represented as 'human cockfighting'. Rather, it seems pertinent "to think again about violence by adopting a research methodology that pays far greater heed to the lives, experiences and definitions favoured by participants and practitioners who engage with apparent 'violence' on a regular basis" (Matthews and Channon 2016, p. 765). I acknowledge that the events that occurred through my time at Praelia MMA had multiple possible readings and are not free from my embodied experience as a researcher crafting a thesis (Allison Collinson and Hockey 2005). With that in mind, I now turn to a fieldnote from the first four months of my training to capture the day-to-day fieldwork.

Fieldwork: The Day to Day

> Fifty-five minutes of training and it is down to the last three minute round. Three more minutes of full contact MMA, mixing everything I have learnt in the past four months into a seamless sequence of kicking, punching, takedowns, submissions and striking on the ground.
>
> My heart is beating so heavily I can hear it. I can only just breathe because of my mouth guard and I am walking flatfooted. I am so nervous and exhausted my legs can hardly support my body weight. I feel like I am holding bricks in my gloves and can barely hold them up to protect my face. If I cannot smell the leather of my gloves, I am going to get punched in the head. I think about smelling the leather so much it becomes my mantra after every punch I throw. I do not know whether I will get through the round. I envision telling my partner that I cannot continue, but seeing him bounce from side to side across from me suppresses the urge. I do not want to let him down.
>
> He throws a jab that lands on my left glove bringing my mind back to the moment. Without thinking, I strike him back with a jab of my own and wait to see his response. I start planning my combo; duck low, come high with the cross, and finish with an outside leg kick; he will never see it coming. As I strike, he kicks me in my

stomach emptying the wind out of my lungs: I did not see that coming. I see him wind up for his flurry and I throw my mantra out the window. I cocoon my head with my arms hoping nothing gets through.

As I back away I see an opening in his defence and land a stiff jab to his chin, which does nothing. He keeps moving toward me like a terminator before disappearing from my field of view. Suddenly my feet are off the ground and I have just enough time to brace before landing on the floor. He lands onto my chest in side control position and my back hits the mat hard. My right glove is stuck behind my back, my sweat is burning my eyes and he is crushing the wind out my body with all his weight on my chest.

He starts throwing light punches to my stomach to soften me up. I free my arm to defend against his strikes, which he uses as a distraction to move into mount control. He sits back onto my stomach and postures up, and his weight presses into my bladder. For a moment I think about how horrible it would be if I were to lose control of my bladder. I try and get off my back and onto my side but his base is too strong.

There is no way out, I buck him with my hips so he falls onto me and I wrap my arms around his body. His chest is now pressed up against my face, the soft fabric of his training top rests on my cheek, and the scent of fabric softener gives me a moment to breathe. I feel him starting to climb his knees up the side of my body. He posts his arms out and starts grinding his shoulder into my face. I can't move; I feel like my head is being demolished in a vice, trapped between the mat and his shoulder bone. He breaks my grip and postures up again finishing me with soft punches to the head. The timer sounds and he helps me up, we touch gloves and give each other a one-armed hug and a pat on the back (Bishara 2015).

Praelia's new layout after the cage was removed.

The above fieldnote aimed to demonstrate the action involved in sport, is an embodied and practically accomplished activity with several implications on fieldwork (Allison Collinson and Hockey 2005). Firstly, fieldwork often left me physically and mentally depleted. Initially my senses were on overdrive every time I entered into the gravity of social life. The effect of social gravity and continuous investment into Praelia made it more difficult to leave and is especially apparent in ethnographic work. I spent three to nine hours a week at Praelia from the beginning of March 2015 to the end of July 2019. The effort of leaving was emotional (Hage 2009) and leaving the relationships formed during fieldwork was a struggle (Desmond 2014). Secondly, senses other than sight became an entry into learning about other people's worlds and a source of data (Pink 2015). Typically sight has been privileged over the other senses in ethnography. The sensual superiority sight claims in sociology has in part been contributed to by Simmel's sociology of the senses (Spencer 2012b) and the Eurocentric belief of mind and reason, and non-Europeans with body and senses typically thought of as "savage sensuality" (Howes

2003, p. 4).[68] Therefore, using a multi-sensory approach made 'sense' for my project (Sparkes 2009).

Training sessions were tough.[69] During the first year I joined, I trained in the MMA (1hr) and wrestling (1hr) class twice a week. In my second year I began to attend the boxing (1hr) classes twice a week in addition to wrestling and MMA. I was at the gym three to four days a week for up to nine hours, but six hours were spent in actual classes training. In my third year I started attending sparring sessions on Saturday mornings. I became dedicated to Saturday morning sparring, no matter what time I went to bed or how much I drank the night before, despite the haziness of mornings and little energy, I would get up, drink my coffee, brush my teeth and go to training. These eventually turned into Friday night sparring sessions.

When the new Muay Thai coach started, I took up the class after MMA. I seldom did wrestling, MMA and Muay Thai classes on the one night. I was not fit enough. I became less interested in wrestling class over the years and it was too taxing to keep up. In my third year I had my first interclub bout. This was a competitively organised event that had 200-300 people in attendance, half of which were competing on the day. It started at 8am and finished at 6pm, with over 20 gyms competing against one another in boxing, Muay Thai and MMA. In my fifth year I maintained MMA only, with Friday night sparring. My living situation had changed several times and the travel distance grew to 40-45 minutes each way.

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[68] Senses can be understood in their cultural context as they arise from the body, and the degree of biological, psychological and social variation in how they are experienced (Shilling 1993; Scheer 2012). For example, one might think of blindness leading to new ways of people experiencing sound, or cultural emphasis on certain sensorial expressions (Sparkes 2009).

[69] The most rigorous training sessions were one and a half hours of pure sparring in all art forms and variations of the art forms, e.g. boxing, kickboxing/Thai boxing, boxing with takedowns, wrestling on the wall (this simulated wrestling against the cage), wrestling from a particular positions (for example in a compromised position, the partner would start with a hold of one leg), freestyle grappling with strikes, and full MMA sparring. These were all three-minute rounds with one-minute breaks in between and roughly worked out to 22 rounds. These sessions were open to all gym members, however often only the more advanced members and those preparing for fights would attend. The sessions also took place on Friday nights, with a maximum of eight members (aside from a junior BJJ class which took place in the first half hour, no other classes ran at that time).

I would be at the gym at least 30 minutes before my first session so I could train with or chat to people. I would do the same after class for the same reason. This aided me in building relationships with the regular MMA group who often attended wrestling and MMA together. Because of the dynamics of the MMA class, my position as researcher had to be continuously established and reestablished with members. This was done in an organic fashion during conversation with new members. When first meeting someone, the "why are you doing MMA?" question would often arise and I could explain my position as a researcher. Coaches often discouraged conversations during training, with some exception for more seasoned members who regularly attended class. During technical drills[70] the pace was slower and facilitated the space for conversations with partners.[71]

I would voice record my fieldnotes on my way home and then transcribe them the following day.[72] Because of the embodied experience of sport, I made an effort to record more than my conversations. For example body language during techniques as well as technical demonstrations, particular movements, the way people walked—how coaches and participants responded to various genders, body types, ethnicities, and so on—and made certain gestures, or their fighting style; scents from the smell of gloves to training partners perfumes or laundry detergent (and lack of), temperature, and sound (from music to the sound of thumping bags or desperate exhalations). This included my own movement, my progression, how I was positioned in a conversation (being the butt of a joke), what I said, how I responded, etc. Fieldnotes help describe the nature of training and the space *in situ* (Spencer 2009) and are a useful tool for critical reflection, which shape the ethnography (Walford 2009; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). The social practices and rituals in Praelia were important artefacts in understanding the effects they have on muscle and skeletal development, the

[70] There are general drills which are more aerobic in nature and focus on improving speed and endurance opposed to technical drills, which focus on positioning and body placement in order to perform a technique.

[71] If conversations overtook the drill a coach would come around and either stand quietly to observe, or ask us why we were 'not doing what we were supposed to be doing'. Most of the time I was able to engage with, or in, conversation was before and after training, after training was the easiest because everyone's spirits were high.

[72] For the sake of time, I did not do this verbatim because some recordings were in excess of 40 minutes.

disciplining management of bodies and the occupation of space, and their enduring effects on embodiment (Lowe 1984; Connell 1987; Shilling 1993; Collins 2008; Scheer 2012). The micro-sociological analysis can turn various situations into nuanced methods that can be applied in analysis.

In total I spent 1500 hours in the field over the research period, which resulted in an excess of 60 thousand words of fieldnotes. I was continuously reflecting on and coding my fieldnotes throughout my fieldwork. Firstly as they developed and then lastly, reflecting on the complete works over the four years. Finding thematic threads through *open coding*, then a line-by-line *fine coding* analysis that used smaller sets of promising ideas for the final ethnography (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). Which also included how I amalgamated the cast of characters who made my research project possible.

The Cast

This ethnography aimed to capture the social field and 'cut and thrust' of social action of MMA practitioners at Praelia. 40 participants, 13 of who were formally interviewed, made up the cast. Interviews varied in length, the shortest was one hour and the longest was two and a half hours. In total, I had over 22 hours of interviews. Initially I set out to interview anyone who had been a part of the MMA class. However, with the limitation of non-commitment from some members and single location ethnography, it proved difficult. There was disinterest expressed by some central members from the class, who although agreed to the interviews initially, continued to cancel our meeting times, repeatedly asked me about what questions I was going to ask them, or skeptical about their role within the research (Elliott and Roberts 2020). To address this issue, I interviewed members who, although did not attend MMA often, were positioned highly in the social hierarchy and started their martial arts 'journey' at Praelia MMA.[73] Many of the practitioners I trained with over

[73] For most of the MMA participants (69%), it was typical to begin extracurricular sport below the age of 10. The formal introduction into the Australian youth sport model meant that most became accustomed to competition. Two members were on track into state level competition, however did not make it through. Of the four members who did not take part in extracurricular sport, one migrated to

several years occupied qualitatively different positions in social space, but their belonging to the same field meant that practitioners were participants in the struggles that define its stakes (Desmond 2014).

The purpose of using amalgams was twofold. Firstly, I reduced, changed or combined specific identifiers so that outsiders could not identify participants to maintain an assurance of anonymity for the practitioners involved. Secondly, the dispositions, attitudes, ways of feeling and thinking, which might have been lacking in specific individuals, could be emphasised because of their importance in understanding Praelia (Grenfell and Rinehart 2003). In this sense, it was important to recognise and portray the men interviewed as real people with "lives, practices, behaviours, feelings and perspectives" (Elliott and Roberts 2020, p. 779) extending beyond our time spent together in Praelia. With that in mind, I now turn to introducing the cast at Praelia MMA.

Luke is the head coach and owner of the gym. Luke originally opened and owned Praelia with three other people, however the bumpy start and complications eventually led Luke to buying out his partners and securing full ownership. Praelia opened up as an unfinished gym. Classes were missing coaches, there were no properly fitted change rooms, padding on the walls and so on. There was a boxing ring and some BJJ mats. He also owns his own domestic electrical business that he runs in the hours outside of managing the gym. He is a high-level black belt and spars hard. He has won major Australian BJJ titles and made it to the preliminary fights on the UFC's Ultimate Fighter show. He has achieved the top status in BJJ, as an Australian competitor and a master's champion (winning all Australian titles). He has fought for top MMA promotions in Australia. Luke tends spar at a high intensity, often contradicting his own instructions to "go easy and take care of each other". He grew up in the commission flats around Melbourne. He has a generally quiet and reserved personality. He comes from an athletic background and made it into a reserve team in the Australian Football League.[74] Everyone mostly gets along with

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Australia in his 20s (but went to a sport school overseas) and the other three only played sport in school before starting a martial art at the ages of 13 and 16 respectively.

[74] AFL is the national game of Australia and is the dominant masculinised sporting code. AFL players are often exalted as the embodiment of Australian masculinity and portrayed as sporting heroes (Agnew and Drummond 2015).

Luke, but the senior members paint him out at times as someone who does not really care about his members as much as he does about their business. Luke only pays some of his coaches, and the resources from the gym provide him with enough income to work his other job part-time 15 - 20 hours a week.[75]

Luke sees kids as the future of the gym and this is reflected in the changes he has made to the place. He does not want to take on any fighters, unless they have been training with him from the start, he claims that fighters are hard work and at this point in his life with the development of his younger students and his family, he feels as if he has more important things going, than spending too much time on people, "who just come and go and don't give. Fighters just take, they take a lot. I'll only organise fights for my boys. If they've been training with me for a while and show commitment and follow the gym rules, loyalty, integrity and give more than you take. Then I'll corner them." Although training the next world champion would be nice, Luke prefers to see the average person that lacks confidence, progress from being "terrible" when they first started training, to having a "few amateur fights which completely change their lives".

Tyler is an assistant coach and all his MMA training has been at Praelia with Luke as his main trainer. When Tyler first started he recalls the cold more than anything else in the unfinished gym. He has an authoritarian coaching style and will often punish people for falling out of line. He often contradicts his claims to "take it easy if you're not feeling well" and will pressure members to train. He enjoys banter and giving people "shit" often using it to make people train harder or bully them. He is a high level BJJ practitioner and has fought in MMA semi-professionally. He is a slow but suffocating grappler who rarely uses explosive movements. When it comes to striking he is mean and gritty. During the research period he started a new occupation as a police officer, stopped coaching, but continued training. Tyler generally spars at the same intensity irrelevant of the skill level of his opponent. He tends to pick his sparring partners so he can train hard. Tyler tends to tell 'white lies' in order to boost his status and affects how people view him. Niko, Mugz and Will have no issue challenging him.

[75] Based on the cheapest membership price this is roughly 24 thousand dollars a month.

Nathan started as a drop in coach and would mostly spend time training. Over the years he started taking one class a week becoming one of the main coaches. He's easy going and has fought MMA multiple times. He is experienced, and like Tyler, has only trained MMA at Praelia. He has been there since the gym opened. He spars hard and pushes the pace, however he will mostly adapt to his sparring partners ability. He is often complimentary whether in a coaching position or training partner. He has a child-like character about him and he is not shy of playing the goof.

Niko is a high-level BJJ artist. He used to train MMA but largely spends time coaching and training BJJ. He does some MMA every so often, mostly attending Friday night sparring sessions because they are not formal classes. He holds a lot of social capital in the space because of his rank and status, he views himself as cocky and is part of the inner circle of the gym. He, Tyler and Luke spend time together outside of gym time for special events. This is because Niko spends 20 hours a week at the gym and called it his part-time job. He and I formed a close connection over the years despite only training together a handful of times, our friendship formed off the mats, especially because of my relationship with Mugz.

Mugz is an informant who I have a close relationship with outside the gym. He is a mid-level BJJ competitor and has a relationship with Nathan, Niko and Ayaz outside of the gym. He is often aware of the gossip and the lesser spoken about subjects during gym hours. He is viewed as someone who has great potential but does not have the discipline to maintain training enough to achieve this potential. Luke and Tyler have an ambivalence toward his training. However Luke enjoys his personality outside the gym context because they share mutual friends and bond over stories about partying. He is a schoolteacher with a background in business and logistics. Prior to this he and Tyler worked together at an outdoor recreation store for several years.

Ayaz is a high-level BJJ artist and instructor. He is an informant who has stopped training and coaching at Praelia MMA, and trained me briefly. He is friends with Luke and before Praelia, he and Ayaz trained together in the early 2000s. At the time, the highest ranked belt in BJJ in the country was a blue-belt (second belt). He has little MMA experience and has never fought, however his students who compete in MMA continue to request that he is in their corner (coaching) on fight night. This is because of the relationships he builds with his students (he vehemently opposes

referring to his students as students, preferring to call them friends). He engages with them outside of class and enjoys political and philosophical discussions. He now coaches at the Hyena Cove (pseudonym), which is also affiliated under the same gym as Praelia.

Sam is in his late 40s and has been training at Praelia for eight years. He has a relationship with Luke outside the gym and is very social. He has no official competition experience. He has a mid-level management position in technical labour work. Outside the gym, Luke and Sam have attended UFC fights together. He loves training, but feels "old". He has two children he speaks about often. He is not very technical but has been through a lot of gym "wars" that he prides himself on. Sam enjoys sparring and will generally take it easy on new members. He does not enjoy hard sparring sessions because of the prolonged effects on the brain, but that does not stop him from matching the hard pace of a sparring partner. He feels like he can tell people to take it easy if he had too, but he never has.

Cameron is a mid-level BJJ practitioner. He is not viewed in a positive light. He is not disliked, but is socially on the margins. He has come from another gym in New Zealand, and Tyler and Niko often question the status of his belt. He is ethnically profiled as "Asian Cam". He is fit and highly intelligent. He has a double degree in chemistry and economics, and a masters degree in business logistics. He is unsure about fighting, but loves MMA. He only trains once or twice a week and often has little control of his power in sparring. This has led him to be injured in a couple of instances when sparring against more skilled partners who become reactionary.

Levent is a young, great striker and wants to fight professionally, but is constantly injured. He rarely 'goes hard' on people, but has lost his temper a couple of times. He had a few kickboxing fights prior to joining Praelia MMA. He wants to be in the UFC one day and feels like Praelia is a "brotherhood". He does manual labour work for an uncle while he is studying to become a fitness instructor.

Ravi trains in multiple martial arts and has a background in Krav Maga. He migrated to Australia from India to study his masters in Biochemistry. He started at Praelia MMA after reaching the highest status in Krav Maga and wanted to develop the more technical aspects of grappling and striking. He can go hard in sparring or in wrestling if provoked. He gets along with Sam and others who attend wrestling. Most

of his friendship group has formed from people he has played sport with. He has a background playing cricket and participated in Karate as a child.

Lilly has trained in MMA, boxing, BJJ and Muay Thai. She is more socially comfortable in boxing than MMA and drops in and out of MMA. She is very technical but enjoys striking more than grappling and is relaxed and natural in sparring and will spar hard. She is studying to become a psychologist.

Tess trialled MMA but prefers boxing and fitness classes. She no longer trains however continues to work at reception. She is studying health at university and has a close relationship with Niko. She manages accounts, sign-ins and helps Luke with the day-to-day administration such as merchandise orders. Tess manages the social media platforms, through generating content for promotional opportunities by taking videos and photos of the classes to post online.

Caleb is a boxing and Muay Thai coach who did not "fit in" the gym environment. He has an amateur background in Kickboxing and is a foundation coach. He is at times light hearted and comical, and at other times stern and says very little. He can take over people's spaces and become territorial. He has trained at many gyms and Luke hired him because he needed someone to cover for the previous boxing coach who left.

Will has an athletic background and is strong. He has played multiple sports such as tennis and basketball. He has an interest in becoming a UFC fighter and has had four fights. He studied at university to become an accountant. He did it as a compromise to keep his parents satisfied. His mother is more opposed to his mixed martial arts contests than his father, who he now works for. His dad has a background in Karate and owns an accounting firm. Tyler, Niko and Nathan tend to feminise Will. His fighting style, attire and decisions are often the butt of the joke. However, he is quick to defend himself and is confident in his *comebacks*.

Bronson is socially on the outside of the group and has a timid quality in his demeanour. He trains in almost every discipline excluding Muay Thai. He is small statured, fit, but not overly muscular. He maintains a high intensity in training and is competitive. He works in retail and is struggling to find a career path. He is often at the gym early and will stay back late. A year after I joined Praelia, he started training at the age of 17. Within the first few months of starting Tyler nicknamed him after an

unpopular boy band singer because they share a similar appearance. It was used in a condescending way to make fun of him. But has now become the norm.

Hugh had some semi-professional fights, but after a string of losses grew depressed and unmotivated. He is a mid-low-level guy who trains hard, spars hard and often makes jokes that are not funny. He will attempt to put people down to make himself feel better. He is quite strong and uses this to impose his will on people, but his lack of technicality makes people with higher skills show him up and he hates it. He is highly muscular and has been accused of using steroids by Tyler and Niko. There was a period where he started to verbally and physically bullying younger members of the group. Aggressive homophobic slurs were aimed at the adolescents he bullied. This was distinct because he rarely would engage with members who were older or held a higher status in this way.

Jane/*Jenny* and *John/Jono* are participants who have dropped in for a session or two, or members who only had a short to medium stint at Praelia MMA up to two years.

Praelia MMA: Research Setting

Praelia MMA was not my initial choice when I started my project. I had trained there when it first opened up in the late 2000s. I got a free week trial and attended one Muay Thai and CrossFit class and had not returned there since. Mugz had been training there on and off over the years. He and I went together one Wednesday night and he introduced me to Luke. I told Luke about my project and what I was looking to do. He was happy for me to join and showed some interest in the project. Several of the other MMA gyms I found were not MMA gyms to begin with. Praelia is one of the more established MMA gyms in the area. A lot of gyms that had been martial arts or boxing gyms before the 'MMA boom', found coaches to fill the gap. Boxing gyms found coaches to teach grappling, BJJ gyms found coaches to teach striking and they called themselves MMA gyms (Bishara 2015). However, Praelia was from the era that was built from the ground up to be an MMA gym. This made it a good place to conduct research because it was well-established and had a thriving membership base.

Praelia MMA is affiliated with Ethereal Augs (pseudonym), a top Australian BJJ team that ranks in the top 10 of Australian BJJ/MMA clubs for awarded competition points, wins and medals. On their official website they list over 25 clubs around Australia that are under their affiliation. The skill and accomplishments of the members and coaches is a strong identifier that the gym has an established position within the community. Praelia had 10 black-belt's, five brown-belts and eight or more purple belts (the three highest levels in BJJ), the head coaches had all competed in amateur, semi-professional and professional boxing, Muay Thai (the Muay Thai coach was brought over as a specialist from Bangkok), wrestling, BJJ or MMA bouts, and some in multiple disciplines.

The coaches at Praelia had all varied in achievement and status and offered some of the best coaches available, searching out new coaches who had successful fighting profiles in various disciplines. There have been three fighters that have competed in the UFC. I was training under a top five UFC fighter for some weeks. Before I left, Luke hired a current UFC prospect to run one class a week. Although there are high-level competitors, Praelia is not an elite gym. The average member of the MMA group spends three to five hours training at the gym per week. Half of the most committed MMA members aspire to fight and make it to the UFC and of them only 25 percent have actually fought in an amateur or semi-professional fight.[76] Praelia has a good reputation within the MMA community in the area. Up until recently there was a full sized cage for fighters training and competing in MMA, however it has since been swapped out for more training mats, maximising the space for more members. Of course there are still padded walls to train for cage drills.

The office was shifted from the middle of the gym to the front where members and the general public can walk in. The space is organised in a more conventional fashion now with Tess at the front to manage sign-ins and general inquiries. New signage and a fresh coat of deep grey paint gave the gym quite a presence when walking up to it. A three tier seating area was built to create a family environment on the weekends where parents can watch their children train. Praelia is only open after work hours, providing no morning or midday classes to members

[76] Although the meanings and purposes participants give to their training can change, their commitment and monastic devotion to MMA continues because of its transformative capacity on self-identity (Shilling 1993; Brown and Jennings 2013).

except for Saturday. Having an MMA membership gives you access to wrestling classes, which run an hour before MMA. In addition to MMA classes, there are Friday night and Saturday morning sparring. These sessions are pure sparring and very few members attend but remain open to anyone from the gym. Praelia offers seven memberships; boxing, Thai Boxing, MMA, BJJ, Fitness, Gold and Kids (the minimum adult membership price is 120 dollars a month, with the gold being the most expensive 180 dollars a month). Praelia has roughly 200 members.

The gym balances the demand on the market by targeting children and men wanting to be fighters. They took a short run at the women's self-defence market with a women's only BJJ class, but it did not last long due to dwindling numbers. The remainder of the class (n=3) was absorbed into the general BJJ class. Since then they have started women's only Muay Thai classes. BJJ has the most classes per week, the most people competing and the biggest turnouts. The inner circle of the gym was certainly at the core of the BJJ group. These members were there the longest in terms of time spent over the years, but also in terms of time per week. Praelia MMA made sense because I had an 'in' with Mugz, it had an established membership base, it was conceived as an MMA gym to start and had an established reputation and affiliation within the local MMA community.

Reflexivity: Researcher Biography

I joined Praelia as an MMA fan and sociology novice. This meant I had to cautiously approach my research in regards to my reflexivity. Praelia MMA was the first MMA gym I trained at for more than one year, but it was not the first. I attended other martial arts gyms sporadically over the years, doing monthly stints here and there across various martial art forms such as Judo, Wrestling, BJJ, Ninjitsu, Taido and Muay Thai. The longest I had I trained at an MMA gym before Praelia was just shy of eight months. I started at Praelia as a relatively inexperienced participant, not only in MMA, but sport spaces broadly. I did not have an athletic disposition. I mostly enjoyed sport and exercise for socialising and the physical challenge, but not the rigid competition structure.

I disliked Physical Education (P.E.) and never participated in formal sport outside of school—I was the typical chubby kid getting picked last on the team. My

disdain for P.E. led to ways of avoiding taking part. In the sixth grade a handful of buddies and I convinced the P.E. teacher to let us wrestle on the oval for class—it was something we would do on most lunch breaks. On weekends, I would 'fake' wrestle with cousins or friends on a mattress we laid on the floor. In high school I joined a gym and started weight training with friends of mine. My interest in the body began from a biological, biomechanical and kinesiological lens, which was underpinned by my high-school biology and chemistry classes. After I finished high school my mismatched trials of sport continued, I started ice hockey with a friend for six months. It started becoming too competitive and I lost interest. Then I joined an indoor beach volleyball team with my friends, which also lasted six months. The first MMA gym I joined was previously fitted as a mechanics garage. The instructor moved on and I never followed.

I had never been good at sport. Nothing really stuck, but martial arts and combat sports were the only thing I was consistently interested in. It was not until I joined Praelia that Luke, Tyler and Peter (boxing coach) had referred to me as a "natural" and a "fast learner". The thread of being a natural continued and translated into other martial arts spaces. After three years at Praelia I started training in Taido for five weeks. Taido is a Japanese martial art similar to Karate. In my first class, there were several movements I felt completely uncomfortable and incompetent in. Some movements, like striking, used similar biomechanics to my 'martial habitus' and my 'body pedagogy' translated into this sphere (Brown and Jennings 2013, p. 33).[77]

Immersing myself in the everyday happenings of MMA was only one part in understanding it. Making sure I was not deploying unreflexive reasoning that was informed by my position in the social order was another. Often the social world manifests as arbitrary fictions that define and constitute it, which then legitimises fictions that we experience as natural and self-evident (Desmond and Emirbayer 2015).[78] The organisation of the social world, in which subjectivity is formed through objective structures, leads to experiencing the social world as doxic, that is having a common sense understanding of the world (Bourdieu 2000). Therefore, it is important

[77] Discussed further in chapter 8.

[78] Women are weaker than men, men are naturally violent, and for the far right migrants are ruining the economy.

to be critical of arguments purely based on experience, because they assume a privileged view into knowledge. This has the danger of those who make claims of being part of a particular group or identity to merit a moral backing for one's words and actions (Shilling 1993). Hence, Bourdieu's (1992) three types of biases were useful for building sociological reflexivity in the field.

Firstly the "social origins and coordinates (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.) of the individual researcher", limit what we may or may not see. Second is the "position that the analyst occupies… in the microcosm of the academic field… the objective positions offered… at a given moment… in the field of power" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 39). Like any other cultural producer, the sociologist owes something to their situation in the field, therefore they differentiate and distance themselves to make a point of difference from those they compete against. As social scientists are also situated near the dominated pole of the field of power, they therefore are under the sway and repulsion that bear on all symbolic producers. The third bias is the intellectualist bias and it:

> …entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically, is more profound and more distorting than those rooted in the social origins or location of the analyst in the academic field, because it can lead us to miss entirely the differentia specifica of the logic of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 39).

Life Histories: Wrestling With the Data

Being immersed for as long as possible in a social setting meant I was able to better grasp a practical understanding of MMA. This meant I was able to capture historical trajectories turned into durably inscribed dispositions and move away from frozen attributes used as descriptors to understand participants of MMA (Paulle 2013). The 13 life histories I conducted were semi-structured and captured the personal experiences and biographies of the participants. I used open-ended questions and comments that allowed participants to reflect on their lives and draw on their experiences and deep reflective thoughts (Appendix C) (Atkinson 2011):

> Collecting life histories is one of the oldest research methods in the social sciences. Life histories give rich documentation of personal experience, ideology and subjectivity… But life histories also, paradoxically, document social structures, social movements and institutions… they give rich evidence about impersonal and collective process as well as about subjectivity… the project that is documented in a life-history story is itself the relation between the social conditions that determine practice and the future social world that practice brings into being… life-history method always concerns the making of social life through time (Connell 1995, p. 89).

Using loose structured life history interviews, granted access to a deeper understanding of the narrative accounts and changes occurring in the participants' lives. Life histories can yield better results than traditional semi-structured interviews because "the relationship between interviewer and interviewee builds up over a period of time and the trust that develops between them shapes the life history" (Jackson and Russell 2018, p. 8). However, in relation to violence, loose structured interviews can draw on questions that explore the participants' perspectives and emerge through the ethnography (Given 2012). These guiding questions evolved as a result of observations and experiences in the field, which shaped the ethnography (Spencer 2012a, 2012b). New questions emerged during interviews depending on the answers.

Initially I sectioned my interviews based on participation, sporting background, social aspects of training, and specific questions for coaches and fighters as a general guide (see Appendix C). Such constraints were used out of necessity to manage limited research resources (e.g. funding, time, participant availability, etc.), which could have resulted in a failure to capture a comprehensive understanding of such a multifaceted topic (Tierney and Lanford 2019). Thus the life histories proved useful because in contemporary spaces:

> in which the voices of the marginalized and the underrepresented are under attack by neoliberal reform measures and populist political movements, qualitative methodologies, such as life history, assume even greater significance. For certain topics, life history may, in fact, offer the best avenue

> for examining the effects of policy and public discourse on individual lives over time (Tierney and Lanford 2019, p. 11).

I let participants mostly dictate where the interview went, with some interviews going over two hours. I would redirect the conversations back to their biography, levels of participation, sporting background, training experiences in the gym, their family life, level of social interaction with other members outside the gym and consumption of the sport through various media formats. Participants felt comfortable enough to disclose personal experiences both in and outside of interviews. Developing the interview questions was a combined process of being in the field for over four years, questions that emerged from interviewing participants, and of course engaging with academic materials. Whilst remaining within the scope of the research, interview styles ranged from more open and broad discussions about personal lives, gym life, and MMA.

Before I felt comfortable enough to analyse the interviews I listened to them multiple times. After transcribing, I read the transcripts multiple times whilst listening to them, with as little analysis as possible (Desmond 2016). This was difficult at times, because even when I was not analysing, I was *analysing*. This point became more apparent as I was reading through the interviews and literature jumped out at me (and visa versa when I was reading through literature). I then began to make simple points from each interview, because I was struggling to find definite themes and at times was lost in the spectacle of meanings rather than the logic of practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). After reading and listening countless times to each interview, I felt comfortable in finding themes across them. These were analysed in tandem with my fieldnotes and observations (Roulston 2014). The themes that emerged from the data informed the chapters and sections of the overall ethnography.

In maintaining anonymity I amalgamated the life history interviews into the everyday situations, and multiple days, months and years into one another, to form an ethnographic narrative that best captures a typical outer-suburban Melbourne gym. I am not suggesting that all gyms, or even this gym was like this and will be like this all the time. This is a slice from a very specific viewpoint, time and place as well as my own embodiment and bias, which affect my interpretations, and construction of meanings. It is important to consider that being content with the recording of data as

objective can overlook the question of construction and delimit reality to a single viewpoint (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Ethical Considerations

It was imperative for the participants and I to keep their identities secret. This made them more comfortable in interviews, feeling like they could express more than they would otherwise. They covered sensitive topics in their past, incidents of street confrontations, conflicts with other members, drug use, and other crises in their lives they might not have otherwise felt comfortable revealing. There were a handful of times when participants would ask, "Am I allowed to go into this?" and I would reassure them that they could discuss anything. Because of my relationship with them, they were extremely giving with their answers. I sent them an information sheet they could read prior to their interviews (Appendix B) and confirmed with them that they had a reasonable understanding of the project. After they signed the consent form (Appendix A) I gave them an opportunity to ask any questions and reminded them they can withdraw or skip questions at anytime. At the end of the interview I asked them if they had any questions or additional input.

The following chapter aims to trace the rituals, cultural resources and emotional energy of micro-level interaction in Praelia MMA, to explore how MMA practitioners circumvent CT/F and engage in brutal body-to-body contact. This aims to move away from understanding practitioners of MMA as possessing a propensity toward violence, and sets up the primary focus of section two; stepping onto the MMA mats.

Section 2: Stepping onto the Mats

Chapter Six: "Went all MMA" in the Gym – CT/F, Rituals and Cultural Resources

Praleia was packed again. It's a big space, and there's a specific buzz about it when it feels full. It rarely feels crammed on the mats but there were more than the usual amount of people. 15 people were in wrestling class. About 25 people in boxing, five of which were young women. The BJJ and MMA guys were warming up in the back area. There were five guys lifting weights—some doing squats, and others bench press. There are people constantly rushing from the mats to the bathroom. There was a line of people to sign in at the front desk. The music was loud, Hi Bob by HRRSN was playing, an atmospheric style Hip-Hop beat, a pastiche of J Dilla style instrumentals. Luke must have had the music playing at random. It was a warm November night and the front roller door was left open. There was continuous movement like electrons buzzing around the nucleus, charged particles interacting in an atom. I instantly fell into the energy of the gym. The chatter and laughter, the sound of bodies slamming, gloves hitting pads, cheers of encouragement, and 'jabs' of banter. The scent of rubber mats and oiled leather bags crept slowly into my awareness.

I walked to the boxing bags to start my warm up. Will came over to say hello. I asked him if he wanted to do some light sparring before class started and "keep it technical". I set the tone, like we were playing for points or dancing. Sometimes he'd throw a fancy kick and yell "oh!" I'd fake a punch then overdramatise a technique that followed it, and he'd pretend to get knocked out. Each of us acknowledging if we were sparring hard we would've been hurt. We were entrained in one another's movements and the tone we set made way for playfulness. Nathan walked to the centre of the MMA mats and yelled, "MMA guys, start running!" We always run anti-clockwise around the mats. Always. We did four laps then went into high knees, ankle flicks, rolled our shoulders out, then started doing forward rolls, backward rolls and hip escapes. Then he set us four exercises. Five reps for each exercise, he would randomly call out sprawls, push-ups, sit-ups, or squats. We had to all count out loud, and while we were waiting for him to yell out an exercise, we had to run high knees on the spot. People's feet smashed the floor, everyone was circled up facing one another. People panting louder and louder, some running hard, others 'hardly' running, sometimes I'd catch Mugz's gaze and we'd smile, suffering together. Will, Levent, Bronson and Cameron would look dead at the celling until Nathan called out "push-ups!" then I'd catch them peaking at each other trying to

push their limits. It was competitive between the younger fitter guys. Each one wanted to be the first up from a sprawl, and first one down for a push-up. Sam, Ravi, Mugz and I knew we didn't have a dog in the race, and we relied on our jokes to compensate for our lack of fitness.

After the warm up Nathan set us a series of techniques. We moved forward, and then pivoted, we moved laterally then pivoted. "There are three different styles to do this, but we're focusing on one." Nathan described to us whilst demonstrating how to strike, "notice how I'm moving." Then he pivoted from side to side, no strikes yet. Just demonstrating the mechanics. "There's no power here. The power doesn't come from your arms." He punched the air, his arm was the only thing that moved. The rest of his body remained unused, disjointed from the technique. Then he focused on the correct movement, "I'm always moving my hips", then explained mid movement, "this is why I always say it's so central to shift your weight and pivot while moving around." His feet pivoted, then before extending his arm out to strike he paused and said, "the entire body works together." After practicing the drill, recalling each step, I could to hear his voice. I could feel when my balance was off, but didn't know why. Was it my hips, feet, shoulders? It was time to move on to the final part of the class, Muay Thai sparring for three rounds, then two rounds of *rolling*. Mugz was grappling with one arm because of an injury and managed to submit me. I felt some shame. Any progress I thought I had gained came into question. I started thinking, "no one else got tapped by a one armed guy who was smaller than them". But it didn't last long because it was Mugz. He's beaten me many times. And we've been friends since high school. After MMA I went to the boxing sparring class. I was feeling low. Like I had something to prove.

Hugh and I were set to spar each other for two rounds in the ring. People circled up around us to watch. The timer started and we touched gloves. In the first round I was having fun, throwing punches and moving around. He was coming at me hard, I kept it moving kept him away with my jab, trying to stay light on my feet, like a D grade imitation of Muhammad Ali. Hugh hit me with four or five big punches. After the round was done, he started complaining about my range. So in the second round, I stopped using my jab to maintain distance, and decreased the volume of my punches. I came in close trying to use my head movement, Mike Tyson style. I was bobbing and weaving below his punches, then went to the body. But this advance technique requires thousands of hours of practice and elite level endurance. Mike Tyson was also smaller than the people he fought. Eventually Hugh cracked me

really hard in the nose, my eyes watered and blood started dripping into my mouth. "You fucking idiot! You just got your nose broken." My internal dialog started, frustrated at myself for letting my "ego" get in the way. Now I had to keep sparring. Push through the pain and discomfort of not being able to breath through my nose. I got through the end of the round. We went to the bathroom together, I had to sort my nose out and he had to wipe my blood off of him. Luckily it wasn't broken, just badly swollen. We were both standing in front of the mirror about one foot apart. While he was wiping my blood off his shoulder, he asked me, "Did you start going easy on me in the second round?" I lied, I couldn't bring myself to tell him I was trying to *close the distance* and beat him without using my reach advantage. I told him he got me fair and square. I lost at his game. I didn't want him to use my reach as an excuse for beating him. I wanted to *show him* I knew what I was doing. I clearly didn't.

When I went back to my bag, Sam and Ravi were chatting on the stands. I told them how I tried not to use my range in the second round. Sam replied, "Nah, Hugh is almost your height and he has good range that he always uses against the other guys." Then Sam started spewing his diatribe, "when I was around the ropes, I went all MMA on the boxers. I was telling them you have kicks as well, and you've got grappling. But they all kind of looked at me weird. I've had so much experience sparring you and I know how difficult it is dealing with your range. Then I told them that you're going into their world, if they came into ours, well, let's see how they handle kicks." Sam and Ravi continued on about wrestling as I packed my gear. I couldn't stay any longer. I had been tapped, beaten up and lied to save face, it was time to call it a night.

This chapter aims to explore emotional energy, cultural resources and interaction rituals in Praelia MMA to better capture how CT/F is circumvented, so that participants are able to engage in confrontational interactions of brutal body-to-body contact and the risk of bodily harm. Drawing on my fieldnotes, interviews and Collins' (2004, 2008) micro-dynamics of violence and IR's, I start with laying out how cultural resources are charged up or jolted down in IR's and produce high or low EE. Pivoting briefly, I will describe how rituals prime participants for mutual focus of attention to circumvent CT/F, before outlining a typical MMA class at Praelia. Understanding a typical MMA class is important because it better clarifies between the various situations, IR's and cultural resources—which, rather than allow

participants to thrive—have the potential to produce low EE and lead participants to withdrawal from Praelia.[80] Finally, I briefly hone in on my body (self) in interactions and the fluctuation of value of my cultural resources. I aim to highlight the various resources that come into play as focus of attention shifts with various situations.

He's Gonna Kill Someone: Emotional Energy and Cultural Resources

Looking at the cultural resources or collective symbols in Praelia MMA can illuminate how membership symbols are invested in through interactions (Collins 1993, 2004). For Collins (2004), these symbolic possessions are not only invested in through interactions but are subject to constraints of a market, in which their currency can be devalued in relation to their abundance. Investment opportunities arise by bringing capital into a ritual to potentially leave with more capital than when one started with. Collective symbols are the subject of mutual focus during interactions between members in the gym. They vary from literal symbols (e.g. tattoos, attire, flags, etc.), skills (e.g. fighting techniques, cardiovascular endurance, etc) and forms of knowledge (e.g. history of martial arts, UFC fights, etc.) (Collins 1993). Members must negotiate rituals and practices, in order to gain EE and secure their position within Praelia's hierarchy. In particular, becoming part of the inner sanctum requires a proficiency in overall game, through investing in interactions that charge one's capital with value and meaning. "Powerful persons recreate their power from situation to situation" in order to re-create the energy that makes them popular (Collins 2004, p. 131).

On one evening whilst the class was practicing a boxing combination, the sound of thunderous strikes pierced through the thick noise of the gym and above the music. I peaked over in the midst of my combo to see Tyler holding pads for Levent. Tyler was calling out the combo and encouraging Lev, "Jab, cross, duck, hook! Yes! That's it!" Both Levent and Tyler were fully engrossed in the moment. Mugz, Cameron, Ravi and Will's eyes were darting around to see the commotion. Suddenly, Tyler yelled across the entire gym floor, "Whoo! That's going to kill someone!" We all

[80] Situationally dominating interactions at times outweighed creating group solidarity or emotional solidarity within a group, despite its importance as a primary good in social interactions (Collins 1993).

stopped to look at what was happening. The speed and heavy thud of Lev's strikes left little to the imagination of what kind effect his punches would have on someone being struck by them. Tyler continued, "I'll be proud, but I'll also be sad at the same time. Jesus!"

Tyler was enamoured with excitement, and reinforced the reality of death by adding his sombre feelings towards the victim of Levent's punches. Tyler and Levent were now placed at the centre of attention of the entire gym. And clear boundaries were set with everyone outside their interaction. Tyler created a situation that maximised his gain of EE. The predictability of the combination is one such interaction in which a successful buildup of emotional coordination can occur. Participants can anticipate each other's rhythms as their focus on the interaction becomes progressively attuned, eventually resulting in being 'swept up' and deepening group solidarity (Collins 2004). Once we returned to our partners, the intensity of our own punches grew. "Tsh! Tsh! Tsh, tsh!" The sound of expelled air between the lips and tongue after every punch increased. The shared emotional experience was not entirely ubiquitous. In opposition to the dominant who perpetuate their ability to gain EE through facilitating interactions, the dominated are caught in re-creating the low energy level that subordinates them (Collins 2004).

For example, Cameron gained his purple belt from a gym in his home country of New Zealand. As he explained, after several months of gym hopping after he arrived in Melbourne, he finally joined Praelia because of the high standard of their BJJ. However, he rarely trains in the BJJ class, and mostly attends MMA and less frequently wrestling and boxing classes. Outside the coaches, he is the only purple belt who regularly attends the MMA class. Most members in the MMA class are not even ranked. A purple belt is the equivalent of a four-year undergraduate degree and is the third of five belts. Because of his official ranking, Cam is expected to perform and demonstrate a certain level of mastery in accordance with his belt. This has become the centre of many interactions between him, Tyler and Niko. Because he is unable to demonstrate a level of improvement and coaches rarely—if ever—praise him, Cameron is unable to recreate power from situation to situation in the gym. Cam's avoidance of the BJJ class means he only grapples with less experienced opponents in MMA, which perpetually subordinates him. Status (read as inclusion

into the group) is not only granted to members because of the manoeuvres and techniques they perform, but also whom they are able to perform them on.

This was especially apparent after an MMA class had finished, and we joined the boxing class for sparring in the ring. There was a boost of energy that the MMA members had received just before stepping inside the ring (Paulle 2013). In addition, roughly 20 people surrounded the ring waiting to spar and engaged in the action in the centre. Nath and John entered the ring to spar together. Nathan was dancing around, doing the Ali shuffle, waving one arm in the air then striking with the other. Tyler, Niko, Sam and Will were applauding in encouragement. Caleb was starting to get frustrated because his student was getting out skilled, and proceeded to comment, "oh come on! What's with all the showboating? He's here to learn and you're just showboating around the ring. It's disrespectful". Nathan stopped and looked over, with a perplexed look on his face in the middle of the action and replied, "It's called tactics." The round came to an end. Caleb hung his head in disappointment. Next Cameron and Levent partnered up to spar. Cameron had attended several of Caleb's boxing classes before MMA. This gave Caleb an affinity toward Cam. Lev and Cam were set to spar two three-minute rounds.

The round began and Cam came out at Lev hard. He was stronger, bigger and more muscular than Lev. Lev was bouncing around the ring having fun but after Cam landed three or four hard punches, Lev's face changed. He was still bouncing around, but now when he struck Cam the expression on his face had changed. His eyes squinted, his mouth opened slightly, which scrunched up his entire face. He landed a big punch. Cameron backed off and shook his head then charged Lev and tried to hit him even harder. Everyone started cheering, *it was on*. This escalated the intensity of Lev's flurries. He landed a few big shots before the buzzer went and the first round was over. They had a one-minute break and were being instructed by people in the audience. When round two started Cameron came in a little hesitant but was still punching hard. Levent responded back by escalating the power of his strikes, which hurt Cameron. Cameron was now entrained in Levent's movements to the point where even when Lev would faint (fake) a punch, Cameron would overreact. He would stick both his arms out in front of his face and lift his lead left leg in the air to cover his stomach. Levent was now leading and could predict Cameron's movements. Lev would fake to the head, then drive heavy punches into Cam's body.

Overwhelmed by the pressure, Cameron stopped trying to punch Levent and instead was walking toward him trying to grab a hold of him. It was as if he was in the ocean looking for a buoy to hold onto. Trying not to drown, he clutched onto Levent in an attempt to avoid punishment and injury.

There was little hope and he was "eating everything". Even when they tied up, Levent would strike Cameron with a series of punches to the body and then come over the top with head punches and break away from Cameron. People were still yelling out instructions, "jab!", "counter left!", "move, move, move!" I felt my anxiety growing. Caleb had seen enough and stopped them halfway through the second round. Cameron stepped out of the ring and laid on his back. He covered his face with his hands and was breathing heavily. After a minute, he got up. His face was red from exhaustion and light bruising. His t-shirt was coloured with sweat and his hair was covering his eyes like it had been gelled there. He walked over to me and in a low voice asked, "Do we always spar this hard here?" In the moment I gave him the best answer I could, "Oh, yeah, it depends who you train with. If you want to take it easy just let your partner know." Then Caleb walked towards us. He had this forward tilt in his head, it felt aggressive like a shark moving toward its prey. He started berating Cam in a high-pitched voice and his face red with anger:

> What are you doing? You're walking in with your hands down, trying to close the distance, what do you expect? If you're closing the distance you have to throw punches otherwise what are you think is gonna to happen? I had to stop the fight, what was I meant to do? You were eating everything.

Caleb threw a jab and was weaving his head around while stepping toward Cameron, "that's what you're meant to do." Then Caleb walked off to overlook the next pair sparring. Once Caleb had left Cam turned to me and asked, "What the hell was that about? Why was he yelling at me? I'm the one who got beat up."

Cameron's inability to perform in the expected way resulted in the ultimate punishment of a fair fight, he was forced to stop and suffer further humiliation in front of the rest of his peers (Collins 2008). In this interaction, Cam had tried to maximise his EE by dominating Lev. Just like Nath, Lev was energetically and emotionally charged and was able to maintain his dominance. The escalation of intensity broke the expected engagement of sparring rituals that generally take place

in the gym. This ruptured the bubble that circumvents CT/F. The mutual solidarity, shared mood or common emotion, boundaries and focus of attention in rituals that usually circumvents CT/F, had all at once broken and created an unpredictability in the threshold of violence. The agreed upon limitations of sparring had reprised the tension and fear and sparring turned into confrontational interaction. The mutual agreement of sparring (I hit you, you hit me, just don't seriously hurt me), had failed. Cameron was no longer able to keep his attention away from the CT/F and on the social supports and pressures that encourage a fight to persist.

This situation can also be thought through an Eliasian lens of the double-bind process. The double-bind process is a figuration between two parties that distrust one another (and fear harm), which can cause violence to escalate between them (Elias 1986). This is likely to occur when emotionally driven subjects have a decreased capacity to control the situation they are involved in. When engaging in martial arts and combat sports (MACS) activities, experiencing emotional traits such as pain, fear, shame and pride in a panicked and anxious way can result in a poor negotiation of violence (Sánchez García 2013). The effect can have a negative impact on subjects because as violence escalates past the threshold of acceptable violence, they will lose EE and feel deflated. This does not automatically result in a complete detachment from the MMA class. For Cam, he began to exclusively attend the MMA class, but shifted his strategy of gaining EE within the group through drawing on athletic resources in interactions opposed to martial art skills (which I discuss in the final section of this chapter). I now turn to how, like many others, Cam and Lev were able to step inside the ring to engage in a practice that involves inflicting bodily harm on another person. We now dive into the rituals that create a pathway to violence by circumventing tension and fear.

Rituals: Creating Pathways Around Violence

Confrontations in MACS are made possible through the rituals that focus participant attention on everything aside from the combat itself. The agreed upon rules, the limits of time and space, the starting and stopping points, the initiation of contest with a touch of hands, training alongside peers in the same activity at the same time, the

coaches instructions, continuous music,[81] and other classes running at the same time (Collins 2008). In 'fight training schools', it is exactly the safety of contests and their limitation to a predictable future that remains within the gym that allows students in the space to partake in the activity. The space is also a distinct and sacred one, separate from the world outside. Members focus on acquiring various cultural resources, which are charged through IR's. They are then stratified based on their ability to perform specific techniques and, by virtue of their ability to perform, become a part of a specialised and elite enclave of situational elites. In the gym, situational elites are able to ad lib and improvise in various situations allowing them to dominate rituals and gain EE, which can be used to convene and energise further situations in which they become the centre of attention (Collins 2004).

In Praelia, one's ability to gain EE is constrained by the materiality of bodily ability, including, the various forms of skills borrowed from numerous sports and physical activity practises. There are the functional exercises that require one's body to move in unusual ways, like bear crawling and alligator walking.[82] There are also primary school exercises like cartwheels or jump rope which, outside the gym and in school, were predominantly associated with being "girly". These flow in tandem with the ability to be proficient in several martial art forms and combat styles. For example, someone who is a proficient boxer might lose all their technical knowhow when having to deal with kicks to the head, body and legs, or when faced with grappling on the ground off of their back. The emphasis on particular drills that build up into sparring, continuously work toward building group solidarity and higher EE. Some drills require a team effort. For example, wheelbarrow or sprint based races between two halves of the class. The very structure of an MMA class emphasises the limits of time and space, group solidarity and shared emotion, and the agreed upon rules, which lead to circumventing CT/F. If pathways around CT/F are obstructed,

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[81] The alignment between music and the body often occurs below consciousness and can create bodily entrainment that routinises and rhythmically regulates physiological states such as heart rate, and even temporal parameters such as mood and feeling (DeNora 2000). This can aid in building the shared mood of members in the gym and even synch up movements during running and skipping.

[82] A bear crawl as suggested by the name, requires one to walk on their palms like a bear, whilst an alligator walk starts in a push-up position, and the the opposite arm and leg move at the same time like an alligator or crocodile.

combat activities can cease. This can result in a drain of emotional energy and make participation difficult. Let us turn to the class itself for a deeper layout of these dynamics.

Praelia's MMA Class Structure

MMA classes run twice a week, on Monday's and Wednesday's. Every MMA class starts with a warm-up. Various techniques from BJJ, boxing, wrestling and Muay Thai are borrowed and blended. In addition, gymnastic style manoeuvers such as cartwheels, rolls and flips are used. Warm-ups can be 'hidden' in game like activities. As previously mentioned, in wheelbarrow races we are split into pairs or larger groups and race against each other. Other 'games' simulate techniques such as wrestling takedowns. For example, trying to tap a partner's knee, which symbolises a takedown, and when achieved, the partner must do a sprawl for losing, but also because it is the technique used to defend a takedown. Most warm ups begin with a run around the mat—the rare times it does not, it is substituted with skipping. The warm-up roughly lasts around 15 minutes. Luke (or one of the other coaches) will usually stand in the centre of the mats while the group runs around him. At times he might stand near our bags where he has a clear view of what everyone is doing. Luke can maintain a hierarchical observation, in which he can use to judge and reinforce discipline when necessary (Foucault 1977).

Some sessions will focus on two or three techniques from a single discipline. Other times it will be truly mixed martial arts but without any sparring. These various forms of training are generally referred to as drills and vary in focus. Sometimes training partners can resist slightly, other times the main goal is to practice as many repetitions of the prescribed techniques above all else. There are also situational sparring drills, which start from a specific position and partners compete to gain control. Varying in form they can range from a round robin or king of the hill style exercise. Three or four people will go into the centre of the mats and the rest of the class will compete to take their spot. The winner remains on the mat. Other drills might only focus on speed. For example, moving through several variations of a wrestling takedown. Three people stand in the centre of the mats with a specific style of takedown assigned to them. Participants line up in three separate lines. After

completing one takedown, they move to the next person for a different variation. Participants in the middle do not resist. The emphasis is on repetition, which builds cardiovascular and muscular endurance, and muscle "memory". Pad work and striking drills work in a similar fashion. The aim is to practice a combination of punching, kicking and grappling techniques that have been sequenced together. For example, in the first phase the goal would be to practice a combination of two punches and a kick. This would then progress into another two punches and a takedown. Once on the ground, a submission technique is used.

Sparring and rolling are distinct from drilling because it refers to live action practice. Sparring generally refers to striking, whilst rolling refers to BJJ grappling. Sparring can range from boxing, kickboxing or Thai boxing rules and can be combined with wrestling.[83] Some classes solely focus on sparring. They start with a warm-up, before going through all martial art and combat sport variations and lastly tying it all together with full MMA sparring with MMA gloves.[84] All sparring and rolling has a different pace and limitation. For example, rolling in BJJ generally starts on the ground, which creates opportunities to rest and can end up in stalemate positions. This gives grapplers time to recover while trying to figure out what their next move might be, which has created the colloquial comparison to a game of chess. However in wrestling, partners start standing and have to get one another to the ground. The aim of each move in grappling is to constrain the movements of one's partner until they are pinned down or defenceless. If a wrestler is pinned on their back they lose. If they sit on all fours they lose points, but in practice the coach usually calls the end the round.

Unlike BJJ, there is little room for rest in wrestling. The rules of wrestling create dynamics in which wrestlers must continue to push the pace in order to secure position, with many stop and start points in between. However, boxing, kickboxing or Thai boxing vary. They can be fast paced with a flurry of strikes, or can be slow and

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[83] Boxing is punching only, kickboxing is punching and kicking, and Thai boxing (Muay Thai) is punching and kicking, with light knees but no elbows in practice. When combining wrestling with striking (shoot fighting) boxing gloves are still used. This makes it grappling more difficult, but safer when striking.

[84] MMA gloves have the fingers and thumb free and far less padding. This makes grappling easier, but have a higher risk of injury, for example eye pokes and finger sprains.

technical. Depending on the experience of those involved, newer members can hesitate to strike and can rarely put together a combination of punches. Generally, this eventuates in performing one or two punches before stopping or being countered. Unlike wrestling, there are no stopping points within a round. From the outside looking in, the aesthetic of striking sports look far more violent, but the veil of fear is much the same. Classes end in ritualistic practices that serve to neutralise tensions that may arise over the course of sparring (Spencer 2012b). For example, group cool down and stretching where stories are shared or team exercises that require continuous encouragement from participants.

An activity best exemplifying the latter begins with everyone lining up with their back against the wall. Then the person at the head of the line stands in front of the person second in line, gives a double high five to them and preforms a sprawl or push-up. They then move to the person third in line and repeat the movement, the person second in line follows them. Eye contact is momentarily held, and the physical touch of hands is accompanied with words of encouragement like, "You got this!" or "Smashing it!" Not providing encouraging words during the activity is a punishable offence, and the group will continue several rotations until everyone is encouraging one another. Lastly, every class finishes with everyone lined up (hierarchically ranked based on competence and experience) facing the coach, then we all bow toward the coach, yell "Ous" and shake hands. In placing attention on the techniques, skills, limits of practice, and reestablishing group solidarity, it becomes possible to understand how participating in rituals allow people who have mostly never encountered street violence take part in brutal body-to-body confrontational interactions in Praelia MMA.

On the Mats: Cultural Resources

Everyone circled up on the mats facing in ward to one another. Tyler nominated four conditioning exercises (push-ups, sprawls, squats and sit-ups) that everyone had to do. He set two rounds of 20 repetitions of each exercise (160 reps). Luke and Tyler were chatting on the mats while everyone was doing their conditioning, Luke suddenly yelled at the class:

> Speed it up! I'm over forty you're all half my age, come on. *Jono*, [doing sprawls] I know *all* the cheats mate. Come on, all the way down, head up looking at the ceiling.

Then Luke sat up on his knees to observe everyone. Most of the class was grunting and struggling to complete their exercises. I felt Luke's eyes watching me. I had to take a break and shifted to doing push ups from my knees. I peered over at Luke in between reps. He had this look on his face. It was as if he had walked by an alleyway dumpster. His face was red, and his mouth was open slightly. His eyes looked cold, almost blank like his was trying to hide what was behind them, the hideous smell of rotting food:

> I feel embarrassed! I've done 300 sprawls after a 2-hour training session. This is nothing. I think this is fair.

He was not talking to everyone, but he was talking to the majority of the class. Levent, Will, Cameron and Bronson were fit, they were not his problem. But even they were continuously pushed. We all were continuously pushed, some pushed to complete exhaustion. This was not unusual and remained in line with the overall notion of self-development and the project of becoming tough. After we finished the drill, were around our bags drinking water. Tyler was talking to us about his early days at Praelia:

> Almost everything I learnt was when I was exhausted, my hands down. When sparring Luke I would think, well he's not gonna stop, so they have to come up eventually. We learnt the hard way, but we learnt well.
>
> Jane: How else are you meant to learn to be tough if you don't do that?
>
> Tyler smiled in agreement.

Toughness, like other cultural resources, is an organising principle in the gym. It is part of the honour code, which is an ideology of stratification. Members of the MMA class are distinguished between those who are tough and those who are not. Toughness is recognised, charged in IR's and desired by participants who attend. Broadly speaking, it is part of the body as a project, which becomes central to self-identity (Shilling 1993, 2008). The logic behind toughness is justified by being

pushed towards achieving the best results for oneself. In this sense, the body is treated like a machine continually progressing toward excellence (Maguire 1991a). In this sense, self-improvement masks the specific logic of the function of toughness, turned ritualised practice. Ignoring the social conditions that produce dispositions which generate the practices and collective definitions which the practical function of toughness serves, obfuscates the historical material conditions to which it is tied.[85] After Shootfighting (wrestling with striking) sparring, Ravi and I were talking while drinking water when Luke approached us. In a soft tone, he began to explain where we were going wrong in our training:

> Sometimes you need that cunt in you to say I want to go there and you go there. It's like when you're doing bench press or weights or anything. You can do 8 and just say I'll stop there, or you can get a mate to help you and push until you're crying on your last one. It's that extra bit.

The frequent and taken-for-granted claim that toughness is valued because it is necessary to perform well covers up the function it serves.[86] Luke draws on toughness as a cultural resource to convene interactions and become the centre of attention. Specific cultural markers like, "I'm over forty…this is nothing…300 sprawls…" re-establish his dominance and position as head coach within Praelia. Luke demarcates members who are an embarrassment to Praelia and those who are not. Luke, like Tyler, Lev, Will, etc… have the cardiovascular capacity to push their bodies to the edge, outcompeting the rest of the class and reproduce the hierarchical order which they gain from. The risks they take that others will not, sets them apart from the banality of other members' lifestyles in the gym.[87] However, being tough as we saw with Cam is not about hurting people. There are nuanced distinctions made between being tough and being a "meathead". Luke continued to explain to Ravi and I:

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[85] In chapter 7 I explore how this is connected to masculinity, which has formed under specific historical economic, political and social conditions.

[86] I am not suggesting that toughness is not important in success or does not serve to support sporting practice, but rather the over-conformity of putting oneself at risk, "crying on your last one", in order to achieve excellence and self-improvement (Hughes and Coakley 1991).

[87] Understood through established-outsider relations, Luke (established) perceives outsiders as status violators and their behaviours are a threat to the social or moral order (Sánchez García 2021).

> Whenever a new guy comes, you have to take him down. You have to let them know that this is your thing. It's your gym. You can't go easy on them, especially when they're like that. He was throwing hard shots, so after a few exchanges, I just took him down.

Luke left, then Ravi turned to me grinning and said, "People keep telling me I'm too nice, even at Krav, I get it all the time." He started laughing. Luke is a situational elite able to dictate the tone of sparring by deescalating the potential for increased bodily harm. His high EE and cultural resources facilitate his ability to force the dominated to shift their attention onto him as the dominant. The loser then adapts to the winners pace because the loser allows a break in the flow of the anticipation of their own activity. This not only requires a technical capacity of combat forms but also interactional techniques (Collins 2004). But not only jolts his own EE upward in this interaction but also ours through reengaging our attention in the group. By providing explanations and adjustments we need to make, he is convening an interaction in which he places us as bearers of belonging in the group, "this is your thing. It's your gym", giving us an upward jolt in our EE (Collins 2004). The mutual attention and the shared mood recovers lost EE as we refocus on hard training.

When agents mutually aim to establish dominance in confrontational interactions—in spite of the potential harm they may encounter or inflict—the EE produced from the IR will be higher. When both participants focus attention on securing a takedown, as if nothing else matters, they become entrained in one another's bodily movements and rhythms. The harder one fights, the harder the other can resist until one person eventually achieves their goal and is rewarded with a higher EE gain, compared to if only one participant was 'trying'. Rituals are necessary to sustain engagement and produce group solidarity but not all interactions are smooth and gaining EE can be contested. This is partly why Hugh did not leave our boxing exchange on as much as a high as he had expected and sensed that our sparring was ingenious. Attuned to my bodily movements and rhythms, he asked if I was "going easy" on him. I now turn my attention to the dynamics of EE contests.

"Fuck! He's Too Strong": Emotional Energy Contests

Lev, Bronson and I were standing on the mats before class catching up after the weekend. Tyler, walked over to us to say hello when he noticed Will in the weight area, "why isn't Will training?" He asked. There was a slight pause before Levent replied, "He's injured." Tyler seemed reluctant to accept this answer. He deepened his voice as he responded, "Well", then his voice returned back to normal, "you're injured and you're training. I'm going to go over there and tell him to stop being a *pussy*." Tyler walked over to Will while he was doing light stretches. The three of us looked over to watch. Tyler started with a stern voice, "Why aren't you training?" Will replied in a straight monotone voice, "I can't, I have an MLC injury and the osteo[path] told me I have to avoid activity for a week." We watched Tyler stand there, nodding before he abruptly walked off to start the MMA class.

This aggressive status contest between Tyler and Will, was representative of how Tyler negotiates losing contests to maintain his high EE. Will had sought official clarification with an osteopath, whose opinion he held in higher esteem in relation to such matters over Tyler. This stifled Tyler's micro-predication of the future and as a result, he did not call Will a "pussy". Tyler had gotten himself into an EE contest he could not win, so he essentially ignored Will by cutting the conversation off. By starting the class, he also broke the micro-rhythm of the interaction. In status contests, order-givers can frustrate the process by not responding to the signals the other person is giving out. Tyler did not wish Will a safe recovery or acknowledge his reply. He essentially started a new activity in order to establish dominance where there were signs of challenge to his control (Collins 2004).

Tyler frequently targets Will in these ways, but Will is mostly able to fend off emotional assaults. In a session when the class was skipping, Tyler approached Will who was focused on his warm up, "we need to teach you how to skip." Tyler said, "You skip like a girl. What's that shit you were doing." Tyler started to imitate Will by jumping really high and looking uncoordinated. Will, remained cool and collected and just smirked at Tyler before replying, "Yeah, girls skip good. They skip like this." Will began to alternate feet while skipping in a technical and proficient way. Again, Tyler changed the topic and started discussing and demonstrating how he used to skip when he first started training. He hopped on one leg to demonstrate his lack of coordination to switch feet. Then Tyler walked off.

Will is a popular social elite outside the gym. He dresses in the latest fashion, is good-looking, athletic and comes from a well off family. This makes him a widely visible focus of attention in the gym (Collins 2008). Although he is still acquiring MMA skills, he is advancing rapidly and has four semi-professional MMA fights on his record. The high EE and cultural resources Will brings into interactions with Tyler create a bodily entrainment that Tyler follows. However, Tyler's position as a coach allows him to shift focus. Hence, Tyler's attempts to drag Will down for entertainment fails on multiple occasions. Tyler convenes interactions constrained by symbolic objects of status guided by a manufactured cultural hierarchy. Homophobic and sexist (and racist) language is used to denigrate and "justify scorning the position of certain individuals" (Collins 2008, p. 482). There is a failure in these interactions to achieve coordination and emotional buildup. Rather than Tyler adapting to Will's micro-behaviour, he makes himself the focus of attention to the rest of the class. Similarly, whilst he attempted to feminise Will, he also attempted to symbolically sexually dominate me during a class demonstration.

> Nathan and Tyler were taking the MMA class together. They set the class a warm-up exercise that required people to partner up. Facing one another, each person places the others ankle beneath their armpit, and both people bounce on one leg. Whilst this was going on, Nathan walked over to me—already laughing—and said, "Everyone has this gay look on their face when they try and avoid eye contact". Nath threw his head back and covered his mouth while he laughed, then in a sentence broken up by laughter he explained, "They feel awkward, because as they're jumping they just have to stare each other in the eye, but no one wants to stare each other in the eye. So you look around and everyone has these gay little smiles."[88] As he said that, Tyler walked over with a deadpan stare. Without any context he demanded me to get down on my knees.
>
> I started laughing. I assumed he was making a joke. He stared at me with a blank face for a second and like a disgruntled teenager he walked off without saying a word. Then Nathan called him back over to explain. But before he could, Tyler with his eyes wide open launched into accusations, "what have you been smoking the…"

[88] Solidarity is expressed in eye contact. When there is intense solidarity (in group triumph or erotic entrainment), mutual gaze is prolonged and steady. However, in situations of low attunement, people lower their eyes and turn away for long periods avoiding eye contact (Collins 2004).

> and gestured smoking a marijuana "joint". I smiled and tried to explain but he cut me off and demanded me to "get down on the floor" again. I obliged him this time and got on all fours. He called the class over to demonstrate the next technique. When everyone had formed a full circle around us, he began to thrust me 'doggystyle'. He used his knee to dig into my hip to clearly show to his audience that his genitals were not near me. Then he grabbed me by my head and thrust it back and forth at the same time he thrust his groin, to act out oral sex. I started making grunting sounds like I was being "fucked" and thrusting my head instead of letting him control it. I wanted to out do him. He did not expect the interaction to unfold in that direction. He laughed, and stood up to distance himself from me. Now towering over me, he began lightly kicking me to refocus attention on him, and signal that he wanted start the demonstration.

Tyler was unable to coordinate an emotional buildup and dominante the situation. His attempt to "make me his bitch" did not build into a situation in which I was subordinated and he was dominant. In this event, Tyler had failed to project a micro-future, thus, shifted the focus of the audience to his visual victory of him standing over me and kicking me. The intention was to resume the class, but also regain his lost emotional energy. EE is a strong and steady emotion that lasts over a long period of time. Members with high EE act with initiative and set the direction of social situations. In this sense, holders of high and low EE stratify interactions in space. As EE exists in a person's bodily sensations, having a strong and steady flow of low EE eventually leads to withdrawal from the gym (Collins 2004). In these examples Will and I were able to disrupt expectations in EE contests. However, members without the resources to do so have difficulty sustaining participation in the gym.

"No One's Payin' Me Enough Attention": Low Emotional Energy

Team rituals that produce group solidarity and facilitate confrontations are so seamless and part of the everyday that they become taken-for-granted. This is exacerbated because they can be short moments periodically repeated; built up throughout the session in a piecemeal fashion; or grand and conclusive as previously mentioned. They are also hidden behind explanations of producing toughness, cardiovascular conditioning and technical muscle memory among other things. These can serve as mechanisms that reinforce the domination and subordination of a

member's position in the gym. Much like schools, ways of behaving such as seeking permission, sitting still and dressing 'properly', contour the acquisition of cultural resources (tastes, abilities and dispositions). This occurs through the disciplined, managed and moving body, as opposed to just the speaking and listening body that emphasises language and the mind. The gym produces particular forms of bodily control and expression which serve to obtain from children and adults forms of consent that the mind could refuse (Shilling 1993). When ritual properties are broken or fail, moral uneasiness is experienced by those present and EE is drained. Social order can be restored through apologies or punishment (Collins 2004).

Some team rituals are obvious and forced, which can make first time attendees become aware of themselves when participating in them. When coaches finish explaining a drill, technique or striking combination, the coach counts to three and then at the same time everyone in the class claps. Jane encapsulates how she felt out of place doing this in her first MMA class:

> The ritual at the end, with the 1, 2, 3 and clap, the first time I was late and the second time I got it right. But then I felt weird because I am doing what they're doing, I'm doing their stuff and I'm not one of them. So, maybe it's like, am I making fun them. I'm not, but do they think I am because I'm doing it with them. Then the last couple of times I purposely did it too late, like I can't do it right. It's so weird.

In the above explanation, Jane's position as an outsider is turned outwardly for group viewing and judgement. She becomes overly concerned with how her actions might be perceived as "making fun" of participants in the class by "doing their stuff", because she is not "one of them". This comes to dominate her conscious presentation of self, precisely at the point that she got the clap "right". She then begins to deliberately miss the timing. This 'body work' is used to maintain specific social roles that people are concerned to act out. Observing the corporeal 'rules' that govern particular outcomes, Jane is able to present a certain appearance for a specific outcome. That is, she is not making fun of anyone, and she just cannot seem to get things right (Shilling 1993).

This becomes a forced ritual for Jane, where her energy is drained and no EE is created. Rather, Jane must give the impression that she is charged up. The mutual entrainment in forced rituals "has an element of deliberation and self-consciousness

rather than a natural flow" (Collins 2004, p. 53). Jane's discomfort demonstrates her aversion to this kind of ritual situation, leading to what appear to be "anti-sociable personalities". Continually needing to invest in these types of rituals can lead to feeling deflated. When this is coupled with cultural resources that are not valued in IR's, being able to perform techniques, and members' who occupy superior positions not jolting EE upward, the Janes and Johns who enter Praelia MMA never return.

Sometimes, the Janes and Johns break the implicit rules of the group, which undermine the coach's control and disrupt the flow of IR's. Praelia is organised and regulated in such a way, that it restricts the use of physical spaces at certain times and controls bodily urges through specific mechanisms (Foucault 1977; Shilling 1991, 1993). This is mostly tied to when one is taking part in a class,[89] for example being on time (means being early), or when one can or cannot use the toilet or leave the mat. Outside of saying hello, people are scorned for talking to people from another class or hanging around the reception area to converse. Drinking water contains implicit and explicit rules. For example, when given a water break the coach will instruct us to be quick, that means jogging to one's bottle, chugging water for about two to three seconds, then jogging back to the centre of the mats. If people do not hurry to their bags to drink, punishment is dealt. An implicit rule around drinking water is doing so without 'permission'.

During one evening of training Tyler and Nathan were coaching the MMA class together.

> There were a lot of beginners in class so we practiced a basic BJJ arm lock technique called the Kimura. Jono had only been training for a few weeks. He was thirsty and exhausted, so he had a drink of water in the middle of the drill. Suddenly, Tyler in an angered voice yelled at all of us, "No drinks unless I say! I'm not gonna say who done it, but I want 20 burpees from everyone, now!" Everyone circled up together facing each other. Will, Lev and Hugh were unbothered by the burpees. But for the already fatigued, it was laborious, demotivating and painful. Shaking arms were placed on the ground and used to push up into a squatting position before

[89] There are however broader exceptions, for example, when members wear their gym branded clothing to parties or events outside of gym related social events, they feel they must uphold a particular social etiquette to respect the gym.

jumping in the air and reaching for the ceiling, one recalcitrant repetition after another.

Not drinking water when given the opportunity becomes a symbolically framed object of physical and mental toughness of the established members (Elias and Scotson 1965; Collins 2004). Often, members will abstain from drinking water until the end of class. Halfway through a hard session, when the class is given a chance to drink water, the dominant elite will stand in the middle of the mat area (at times successfully and at times not convincingly) trying not to look puffed out or fatigued. The scarcity of water breaks can range, typically from one and at most two in an entire hour-long session. Some members will do two consecutive hours only with one water break in between classes. At times, water breaks are also leveraged against fitting more time for training. For example Tyler might offer an illusion of choice when he says, "You can go get a drink of water, if you want, but you don't really need it. We can either have a break or if we push right through we can get an extra round in?" The question is put forward and the class is faced with drinking water or having extra rounds of training. Agency is constricted by the dominant elite who opt for the extra round, and the subordinate majority follow suit. The regulation of water becomes a ritualised mechanism of control that contours behaviour and stratifies members into the subordinate majority and the dominant elite.

Most social action occurs below the level of consciousness because our attention is focused on the collective object of action or on the symbols derived from it, rather than attention being focused on social processes in which we are entrained. Action reduces reflexivity which "induces a belief in the symbols and symbolically framed objects that fill out attention at that moment" (Collins 2004, p. 97). Hugh would often search for reasons to explain the outcome of situations in which he felt like he 'lost'. For example, he would ask me how much I weigh to calculate the discrepancy in weight as a causal factor.[90] Bodyweight becomes a resource in negotiating one's skill deficit, disqualifying the interactional contest, in order to save face, and keep up the impression of reality (Collins 2004). This becomes especially clear when Hugh employed discursive notions of female inferiority to manage impression during a

[90] Weight certainly plays a role, however, within the context of sparring where the goal is not to use full power, and the emphasis is on skill, technique and strategy, it becomes less important.

Muay Thai clinch drill (Shilling 1993). The drill focuses on participants practicing in real time with full resistance, but must remain bound in the clinch position.

> Lilly and Hugh were partnered up, and Lilly was outmanoeuvring Hugh with ease. She landed more knees, maintained control and put him off balance. She was considerably lighter and smaller in stature too and had just done the same thing to me in the previous round. When the round was over, I partnered up with Hugh, in between the round I intentionally probed him out of curiosity, "Did you pick up any techniques from Lilly? She was putting on a *clinic*." He had this deadpan look on his face. Avoiding eye contact with me he responded, "Oh, yeh, umm." Then he looked at me briefly, "Well I could never hit a girl unless she's being a real bitch." I titled my head back squeezing air between my lips, making "pshh" sound, then nodded, and then looked away. Then Hugh turned away and we stood in awkward silence until the beginning of the round. When the round began I was able to control him with ease. He was barley doing anything, and halfway into the round he needed a break because he was exhausted.

Lilly challenged and overcame the expected outcome in this interaction. Through controlling Hugh and the situation, she established her dominance, despite Hugh's clear attempt to do his best not to lose to a '*girl*'. His expectation of the situation did not play out, Lilly continuously shifted her balance when Hugh used his strength to try and bully her. She would quickly strike him, make space between their bodies, pivot and use his body weight and momentum against him and restart the sequence. She built a micro-rhythm and pace, which set the tone for Hugh to take cues from her. Later, in an attempt to recoup lost EE, Hugh attempted to draw on discursive notions of female inferiority as a collective symbol in the centre of our interaction. However, without any union from my end, my reply further jolted his EE downward, and affected him physically. Like other cultural resources and collective symbols, negative discursive gender constructs can constrict women from gaining high EE in IR's, although this was not the case in this interaction. Low EE continued to colour Hugh's experience at Praelia.

One evening after MMA class had finished, Hugh and Sam were in a deep conversation. I caught eyes with Sam and he nodded at me, so I walked over. As one of the oldest members in the MMA class, Sam felt a responsibility to support younger members and was consoling Hugh. "The best thing I ever did when I was going

through a rough time was stop training." Hugh did not agree, he felt his troubles had nothing to do with his life outside of training. He explained to Sam and I that his failures were a result of not having adequate attention paid to him:

> My attendance is being taken for granted. I've been here for two years training everyday for two hours. No one else is doing that. I wanna fight more but at this rate I'll never get there. No one's payin' me enough attention. I do 12 hours a week on top of gym which I do 3 hours, I go home and study. Watch videos on YouTube, all of it.

Framed through the conventions of hard work and meritocracy, Hugh became fraught with dejection and anger when he could no longer avoid recognising the arbitrariness of the social world, that he studiously avoided questioning (Collins 2004). Hugh became increasingly bothered by other member's success. When a coach was complimentary of his training partner and not him, he expressed clear dissatisfaction. He would take aim at other people in the group who were less physically fit than him and attempt to humiliate members in front of the entire class, bullying and feminising younger members with homophoic slurs.[91] No longer able to take initiative in interactions, unable to recoup positive emotional energy from the group, he became withdrawn and eventually left. Members in superior positions in the Praelia also drove his EE down, rather than giving him EE boosts, his cultural resources energised in collective IR's. Unlike Sam who withdrew due to reasons outside the gym, Hugh's withdrawal was tied to his status in Praelia MMA, which he never returned to.[92]

Sam's two-year hiatus from Praelia characterises how low EE can emotionally repulse members from participating in group activities. In Sam's case it was due to a string of tragic and painful events that had occurred in close chronological succession. One evening while he was driving to Praelia he saw a 21-year-old woman get run over by a car. He pulled over and rushed to her. Using basic CPR training, Sam tried to keep her alive until the paramedics arrived at the scene. Tragically, she

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[91] Contrary to popular conceptions, bullying does not occur by the most popular members of groups or people who themselves have been bullied. Rather, bullies occupy ambiguous or middle positions in status hierarchy and target the "weak" with techniques "they have learned through interactions styles that have been negotiated over a chain of encounters" (Collins 2008, p. 186).

[92] Chapter 8 goes into more detail about Hugh's withdrawal from Praelia.

died in his arms. His mother had only recently passed away and he stopped training because he "couldn't handle everything":

> That happened, dramas going on and off at home. I just—I was going to martial arts and I just wasn't into it. I was just turning up, you know what I mean. I was just, yeah... I just needed to give it away for a bit. I needed to stop this…There's no point in me just coming and going through the motions.

The low EE experienced by Sam was carried into a long-term mood of emotional energy. Because high EE gives energy, for example, in taking initiative in social interactions, having enthusiasm during them and taking the lead in setting emotional entrainment (like Sam usually did by supporting and consoling younger members), low EE (sadness or depression) reduces the level of activity, bringing withdrawal. This makes social interaction "passive, footdragging, perfunctory" (Collins 2004, p. 107).

Where I Fit in the Gym

Spaces such as Praelia MMA are not produced autonomously from the structure of social relations, but rather space is a social product of the human body, in which bodies create or produce space (van Ingen 2003). Throughout my time in Praelia MMA I have had to negotiate my body (self) and the body of others in mundane and stressful interactions. Interactions and rituals are essentially bodily which cause fluctuations in value of resources and changes in emotional energy process (Collins 2004). There were many moments and interactions, even in the same night that my cultural resources were boosted up and down. As I became the focus of attention as a natural, clumsy and uncoordinated, possessing an unfair reach advantage, someone who quits too early, someone who will not give up and who is lacking commitment to Praelia. Human bodies are so sensitive to each other, which is why we are "readily caught up in shared attention and emotional entrainment" (Collins 2004, p. 54). Our emotions function within a context of our relationships with other people and "in a wider sense with nature at large" and therefore cannot be understood in isolation (Elias 1987, p. 361). In order to demonstrate the relationship of bodies to one another,

I hone in on my body (self) within IR's. I also flesh out how my cultural resources fluctuated in value the longer I was a part of Praelia.

> I had just finished MMA and was taking off my gloves and mouth guard to get a drink of water from my bag. The BJJ class had started their warm-up. Men dressed in blue, black, and white gi's ran in a circle around the mats. Tyler was running amongst them, then he stopped next to me, "you see this", he pointed at the army of men in gi's, "this is where you need to be. I saw you rolling tonight, you have to start jits [BJJ]." Luke had been coaching us and on his way to the office, Tyler stopped him, "Luke tell him." Luke looked at me, his head leaned to his left shoulder. A smile appeared on his face starting at the left side of his mouth and sloped into a half smile on the right side of his mouth. "Yeah, you're a natural." Tyler was enthused by the reply, "You have to start. You move so well for someone who doesn't do jiu-jitsu." I too had a half smile as I searched for excuses to avoid letting him down. It was not the first time he had asked me. I felt myself recoiling and I was seeing myself through his eyes. I fumbled as I responded, "Yeah, I want to, but I just don't think I'm fit enough." He shut down my response, "there are so many people here that aren't as fit as you. Trust me. You *need* to start." He turned around and rejoined the group as they continued running.
>
> My tone was withdrawn and apathetic. My voice was stumbling. I walked away feeling low. I was not at all convinced that I was a "natural". I developed my MMA skills through the countless hours I spent between the walls of the gym. I also enjoyed watching MMA and BJJ tutorials, which I practiced in class. Luke's smile did not at all clearly signal truthful feelings. I was not entirely sure of what he actually wanted to say, but based on previous interactions it was not too hard to deduce. In Luke's eyes I was a fast learner, but I was too nice, non-athletic and lacked true commitment. One evening in mid-January, after the December break, Luke lined everyone up after the MMA class was finished. Then, from the begging of the line he began pointing to everyone as if he was the Roman emperor Commodus, deciding the fate of Maximus in the *Gladiator* film. One by one he dealt his judgment of our improvement and commitment to Praelia. When he finally landed on me, his face scrunched up, he extended his arm out, as it wavered and he shook his head in a sort of confusion. "Yeah, you're not bad. You're on and off."

The longer I was in Praelia, the more expectation was placed on me. I was expected to commit to training seminars, attend interclub bouts, join the wrestling and BJJ

class, attend other members' fights, be active in the MMA messenger thread, and end of year gatherings. My investment in the space was decreasing. The group solidarity that had given me jolts in EE and previously sustained my emotional mood, was failing. In this interaction Luke brought my EE down. Commitment was often the subject of attention from the coaches. During a boxing class, Caleb exemplified this point well. While we were practicing combinations on the pads he addressed the class:

> I don't want someone who's going to come in here *aerating* [boasting] for a week or two then just never be seen again. You know? I want someone who's committed. I don't want someone who's gonna come in and be good for three or six month's maybe. I want someone I can mould, someone I can shape to be a champion. Who's gonna be a champion? You are! Because none of your mates are here, but you're still coming. So you can do it. We've all got the potential to be champions. You just have to be consistent and work *haaard*.

In contrast to Luke's approach, Caleb boosted the classes EE and group solidarity by making clear that participant's current attendance is what gave them the potential to be *champions*. In IR's, members with high EE convene interactions and bring cultural resources with them, producing group solidarity that leaves members feeling like they are on a high (Collins 2004). In contrast, I lost EE when my athleticism became the subject of attack—which I defended through further self-deprecation.

During a bear crawl race Cameron rushed over to me, as we lined up before the second round of bear crawls, "Oh that was the most uncoordinated bear crawl I have ever seen aye." I laughed it off, and replied, "You should see my cartwheels." Cameron had isolated me as emotionally weaker and convened an interaction in order to dominate me. He had confided in me after Lev pummeled him but had found new ways of boosting his EE and charging his cultural resources in IR's. The following week, Cam and I were chatting on our water break, then as we walked back to the centre of the mats for the next demonstration, I had not noticed that he had a towel he was tightly twirling between his hands. The demonstration was finished and everyone had done the ritual count and clap. Just as we all were about to walk off and partner up, at the exact moment of transition between low emotional entrainment into the higher stakes of live confrontation, Cameron struck me with the towel. It cracked through the air like whip and struck my thigh. He missed my gonads. I did not react

and no one noticed. Then I played it off, “Ohhh you almost got me.” He smirked and said nothing. His attempt to take the centre of attention had failed. Candidly speaking I wanted to punch him in the face, but of course, confrontational interactions do not begin by mere anger alone or retaliation.

My non-athletic background limited me from being able to manipulate and stretch myself with control and poise that comes with a full athletic *habitus*. When I was doing the bear crawl I struggled to get low to the ground, my hamstrings were stiff and not flexible enough to remain straight. My back was rounded because my arms could not reach the floor without bending my knees. My belly hung out and jiggled. When I crawled I would mess up my rhythm. Rather than moving the opposite arm and leg at the same time, I would stutter and move limbs from the same side which slowed me down to an offbeat syncopated timing. I was visually awkward, unstable and disjointed.

Outside of drilling the bear crawl during training; I never practiced it in my own time. Unlike my jab and cross which I have practiced for hundreds of hours both in and outside of Praelia. The value of my cultural resources declined when the focus of attention in interactions emphasised athleticism. In these situations I am ascribed the totem of clumsy, jolting down my EE. For example, Tyler set us an advance omoplata technique, which required us to hold our body weight, and crawl around our partners bodies to their back. We then had to lock their arm in with our leg as we turned their face and belly to the floor. Tyler approached my partner and I to provide feedback. Seeing me struggle, he started to poke fun at me, “You have to be careful training with Jeff. He’ll accidentally injure you because he’s so clumsy.” This contradicts Tyler’s previous enthusiasm. This is because rolling is free flowing movement, in which the techniques used have been gradually moulded to suit play styles of the body.

In free flowing movement the focus is to decrease the mobility of one’s opponent and render them *offenseless*. After a heavy sparring session with Nathan, both of us tired, I had a big smile on my face. Radiating with confidence and elation. He laughed at me and said, “You’re always smiling no matter what we throw at you. I’m on a mission to break you.” I laughed. He continued, “You’re the ever-changing puzzle.” He was referring to my style of sparring. I commented back, “Well now I know how that guy felt in your last fight. You’re like Taz the Devil.” Once flinching

from strikes or fear of being hurt dissolves, one no longer 'thinks' but makes 'intuitive' reads that have come from hundreds of hours practicing techniques.[93] The emphasis is placed on rituals and symbols above all else. Being in the "moment" and flowing continuously results in bodies becoming entrained in each other's movements. These strategies and techniques are internalised and put on display in front of an audience.

> In one evening toward the later end of a session, Will and I were rolling with MMA rules. It was an intense roll and I finally secured mount position. I was struggling to breathe through my nose because I had a build-up of mucus. I had to start breathing through my mouth, because of my mouth guard there was an irregular amount of saliva building up in my mouth. I was trying to throw punches and submit him, while managing not to dribble or drip snot on his face. I wanted to get up to go to the toilet, but I kept thinking of Tyler scorning me for stopping. Then I started thinking about the people on the stands who could probably see me blowing saliva bubbles. I became especially aware of all the people watching us roll. I felt charged up. I let out a flurry of light strikes to Will's head to get him to cover up and I tried to secure an armbar. The timer eventually went off and I hurried to the bathroom.

So far the focus of this chapter has been on the cultural resources in IR's and EE. This has by and large left out of view the specific social history of members in Praelia MMA to focus on interaction dynamics. The aim was to demonstrate how people who practice MMA do not have an innate lust, biological or psychological, for violence. Rather, CT/F makes violence difficult and participants overcome fear of confrontation through focusing on rituals. This in turn provides a gain in EE through group solidarity or EE contests. When certain forms of cultural resources are not valued, participants make strategic shifts (though not necessarily deliberate) to recoup EE with alternative techniques. What made me fit in within the gym was a combination of various resources recognised by members in superior positions. However, this was not a static set of attributes I possessed. Rather, it is the cultural resources I am successfully able to bring into interactions. Capturing the social

[93] This can be understood in the way people go about solving visual problems. For example, spot the difference. This is commonly used in children's activities where two pictures with slight differences are compared. One does not think with words or is aware of the processes in use to deduce that there are green eyes in one picture and the blue eyes in the other.

processes and deepening the specific social contexts in which people are constituted, must be brought to the fore. The cultural resources within the specific social field of Praelia are not equally distributed or equally attainable by anyone. Nor are they eternal. In that regard, I turn to Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, field, cultural capital and practice to compliment the micro-situational dynamics of IR's and demonstrate how social context does matter in shaping what cultural resource are valued or not.

Chapter Seven: "If You Can Handle Yourself You Get Respected" – The Social Field of Praelia MMA

Luke was no stranger to confrontations outside the gym. He had been in many fights since primary school and into adulthood. Sitting in his office chair, he sheepishly looked down whilst fiddling with his toes as if he were a toddler. A smirk parted through his gaze before he looked back up and said, "I've been in a lot of fights. But luckily I've come out on top more times than not. You learn that you have to get them, before they get you. You can kinda see it when someone wants to fight." Luke grew up without his dad around and felt like learning a martial art would serve to replace the protection of his absent father, "I grew up in the commission flats probably the majority of my childhood, like up until, thirteen or fourteen. My parents separated very young. I come from a dysfunctional family so I've moved around a fair bit. I went to a lot of different primary schools and stuff. Probably part of the reason I got into martial arts just so I could handle myself from bullying and stuff. Nothing extreme, I was quite fortunate but when you go to new schools and you're a boy and stuff. And then you've gotta think we're goin' back thirty something years ago, when bullying was swept under the carpet. So you had to sort things out yourself. And yeah, I learnt to fight very young and realised that if you can handle yourself you get respected and you get accepted. It's how it was back then. So I thought, well, martial arts is the go. Fights were mainly at school and sometimes around the flats. There were a few ratbags you'd have to look after yourself around."

He continued, "They'd try'n pinch your bike. But, if you know no different, I guess as a kid you work it out very quickly that this is not a right way to act and the people here, they're not an asset to society. You have a choice to either join them and become a criminal and be a thug and bully or you do completely the opposite. That's what I did. So whatever I've seen I did completely the opposite. I used other people as role models when I've seen successful people and stuff, and I would see what they would do and how they act, that's how martial arts helped me get me out of, yeah, that type of demographic of people. I played a lot of sports as a young kid, so, you know coaches and friend's parents and stuff. So yeah I just used to use all that as, you know, as a good example of how to act and behave and be a good person. Martial arts played a huge role in that."

He reached over to the table and opened up a protein bar. He had just finished training and was in high spirits, “MMA is like a release for me, so it’s like meditation. So maybe people do yoga and stuff like that, when I’m training I’m not really thinking about work or problems at home, I’m just training and keeping fit and learning new skills and how to get better. It’s like therapy for me. Afterwards I always feel good, I feel happy. So there’s a lot of positives, outside of feeling confident that I can look after myself, it’s more just internally, I feel healthy and fitter, I tend to eat better, I don’t tend to drink alcohol that much anymore. So just that healthy lifestyle makes me feel good. And I think it’s a great example for my two young kids to grow up ‘round a gym, people training and keeping fit. You know, like being surrounded by good, like-minded people. You know a lot of our guys here, like I said, are in the police force and stuff. So just being surrounded by good people. I want my kids to grow up around that.” It was time to go. Classes were starting so Luke rushed out. He announced to the class, “Let’s have a hard session, I trained hard, so you’re going to train hard.” The class started the gruelling workout.

Toward the end of the class we merged with the Muay Thai class for a sparring session. Luke jumped in to spar because the numbers were uneven. He partnered up with John. John’s been training for about three years, so he was relatively inexperienced compared to Luke. They exchanged a couple of combos and within 30 seconds of the round beginning, a whelping sound of pain followed the whipping thud of a concussive head kick. John fell to the floor, holding his head in pain. Luke crouched over him and said repeatedly, “I’m sorry,” Caleb came to make sure that John wasn’t seriously injured. “I haven’t sparred in a while, my control is just not there,” Luke told John and Caleb. John sat the remaining round out. Then him and I partnered up to spar. He kept touching his head and blinking, I asked him if he was okay and he replied, with a sense of confusion and anger in his voice, “if he told me we were gonna go hard, then I’d be expecting it.” The he demonstrated with a kick of his own and said, “see how my kick was controlled. But man! Fuck! I have a massive headache. That’s why you tap to let each other know you’re gonna go hard.” Luke seemed unfazed, he found other partners to spar and seemed undisturbed by it. He had one intensity when it came to sparring, like everything else disappeared. After class, it was all John could talk about. Even after most people had left the gym, John, a couple others from the Muay Thai class and I were sitting around and he repeatedly went over the scenario. That was the last time John ever stepped foot in Praelia MMA. The next session I asked Luke what happened,

> "He's always going hard on people, I see him go hard all the time, so I thought, "okay, let's go hard", and when we went hard he got caught, then he wants to complain."

This chapter develops Praelia MMA as a social field and social space, with the aim of bringing the social context back into emotional interactions, to compliment the micro-sociological situations and bring forth the internal logic of the gym as a field. Specifically, I turn to how participants develop a feel for the game in the field. In the field of MMA, it is not necessarily the viewpoints and "ideological" discourse that reproduces the dominant social order. Rather, it is the dominant figures who are perceived to be in *possession* of a certain amount of cultural capital that members *need* to acquire, in the tightly regulated distribution of cultural capital (Eagleton 1991). A field is a competitive social system composed of individuals competing for the same stake. That is, to acquire the most cultural capital (and therefore EE) in order to confer one's legitimacy in the space.[94] For power to become legitimate, it must cease to be recognised for what it is, and it is in this tacit understanding, rather than an explicit one, that it is legitimated (Eagleton 1991).

I draw on interview data and fieldnotes to make sense of how the MMA gym is a specific social field, with species of capital at stake. I trace the social trajectories of members through their social history, to examine how capital and *habitus* are related to overcoming CT/F. Those who possess the specific species of capital and *habitus*—sit in hierarchically dominant positions—can police the space and effectively use techniques to dictate the level of violence within it. Those with established positions within the space embody its cultural capital, and therefore have access to interaction rituals of the MMA power elite (Paulle 2013). I place the body at the heart of interaction because it is both the subject of the conditions in which it was formed and a biological phenomenon that facilitates activity (Shilling 1993). Importantly, the body is inscribed and marked, and turned into a resource in which members can draw from. The specific social conditions that shape the body are embedded within a broader social history that creates a distinction between general members and the enclave of "fighters". On the one hand, accumulated embodied

[94] In the wider field of MMA in Melbourne, it is the gyms that compete for legitimacy rather than just individuals.

knowledge, speaking and gesturing in certain ways, can present presence and composure, toughness and independence as valued species of capital (Paulle 2013). And on the other, for example, the ethnicity of members comes into play in interactions as visible 'deficits' in their national capital. Members who have accumulated a high degree of national belonging have the ability to shape the culture of belonging and forms of valued capital in Praelia (Hage 1998).[95]

The specific *habitus* formed through the social practices of Praelia MMA are not ones that automatically produce violent combatants willing to engage in unarmed combat on the street. It is therefore necessary to synthesise a nuanced understanding of those who may fight outside the gym. Much effort is required to circumvent CT/F outside the rituals of regular training. To avoid the disembodied corporeality created through the treatment of emotions as one dimensional (Shilling 1993), we may conceive CT/F (the dominant emotion in violent confrontations), like other emotions, as a kind of practice shaped by our *habitus* (Shceer 2012). Emotions are contoured by the conditions of everyday life (Horschild 1983; Elias 1986, 1978; Shilling 1993; Paulle 2013), which suggests that individuals come to circumvent CT/F through internal regulatory processes and techniques, because of the thousands of hours in situations in which they find pathways around CT/F.[96] *Habitus* is formed within the various fields we encounter and is our history turned into nature, where durable dispositions generate particular practices that come to make us feel spontaneously disposed to do what our social conditions demand of us. In other words, it is not a conscious obeisance to rules, but acting in accordance with internalised systems (Eagleton 1991).

Structured dispositions give human action a unity and consistency without it becoming conscious intent and as individuals come to occupy the centre position of IR's, they are perpetually energised (Paulle 2013):

> In the very 'spontaneity' of our habitual behaviour, then, we reproduce certain deeply tacit norms and values; and habitus is thus the relay or

[95] This is an ongoing process that is not separate from the world "outside" shaped by the broader political, historical and cultural context.

[96] This does not contradict micro-dynamics of violence, but rather, suggests that stragtagies for committing violence can be learnt e.g. surprise attack, where one acts like everything is normal up until the attack (Collins 2008).

> transmission mechanism by which mental and social structures become incarnate in daily social activity (Eagleton 1991, p. 156).

Another way we can understand this is through Elias's civilising process. As internal self-restraints increasingly become the norm in civilised societies, 'mock' contests and sport come to provide opportunities for controlled decontrolling of emotions that are otherwise absent in other public spheres (Elias and Dunning 1986; Shilling 1993). We can frame those who are perpetually energised at the centre of IR's as providing the civilised body a release and re-charging, which helps agents return into the controlled behavioral norms that have come to dominate society (Shilling 1993).[97]

In understanding social reality through practice, we might better avoid creating a static and deterministic picture of an otherwise dynamic and evolving social life. We can conceive social relations between individuals as a negotiation, whereby each subsequent exchange between individuals builds on the entire series of exchanges. We can then account for the subtle transformation of the meaning of past exchanges (King 2000), whilst accounting for the situational dynamics in interactions (Collins 2004, 2008). There are some examples I provide of participants retelling events that occurred which I must caveat because I was not there as a witness. In some instances I was able to cross-reference their story with other participants, however, in other instances, participants were also told second-hand information. Some explanation can be understood as motive, which for Collins (2008) is a folk category of cognition used as a way to explain the event to oneself for closure. In addition, participants often have trouble recalling specific details about violence, thus their stories do not allow us to get at the heart of the situational dynamics (Collins 2008). To better understand how all this unfolds, I now turn to the MMA space as a social field and the cultural (including physical) and symbolic capital available to its members.

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[97] Collins positions culture and structure as only being valid concepts to the extent they can be derived from the action of individuals (Collins 1993). Played out to its logical conclusion this argument has the potential to ignore the constraints that structures impose—for example class division—by assuming the effects of these structures can be extracted from the action of people. In this sense, should not all exploited workers oppose capitalism? This is certainly not the case, the complex array of processual interactions constrain agency and reinforce it as necessary and natural.

Handling Yourself: Physical Capital in the Social Field

Ayaz was bright eyed and fully animated when he was retelling me his story about how he taught a guy a lesson at the gym:

> So I only roll people I know now. And um and I don't roll for keeps, and this guy, he's doing dirties on all these cunts man, he's 110 kilos, he's exerting his weight you know. [It was] the way he said it, he goes "aye, you wanna roll". I go nah nah nah. While I'm waiting for my mate he's walked around, I was [thinking] fuck man this guy you know he's a big dude, I go [to myself] just roll this fucking guy. And he's walked up [to me] and he goes "aye, you wanna roll," the way he said it, and I go "yeah we'll fucking roll".
>
> He asked me twice… he wanted a shot at the title. I just had a fucking go at my mate saying you don't wanna roll guys like this, now I'm rolling this guy yeah. I sat in the guard and I could see he's rolling for keeps. I sit in the guard because I wanna feel their energy, I can see he's rolling for keeps now. He's doing this he's doing that [motions himself struggling]. This guys heavy, he likes being on top. So I push him away, get the hooks in, it's very simple. Heavy guys yeah, if I stretch the legs out I come to a seated position, I snap his head down, and then I just fucking drive him [to the floor].

Ayaz is a black-belt and has been training in martial arts for 20 years. He is highly knowledgeable and knows the sport intimately on a technical level. He intricately describes how he is able to assess the intensity of his training partner by holding a guard position. In Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, guard is one of the most fundamental techniques which everything else is built from. Using this position, depending on how one's partner attempts to escape, players can gain access into their partner's style. Ayaz recognised in his partner that he was "playing for keeps", in other words a high risk, high speed game where both people were at risk of bodily injury, especially because inexperienced people have less bodily control. Ayaz initially refused to grapple with an outsider. However, after he had grappled and hurt lower ranking members, he was now looking to prove himself against a black belt. Ayaz continued:

> So he sprawled on me, I ducked out, I had his arm so I locked it. He was grabbing my head and he was wrenching it. I was cool with it but, the intent that he was trynna do, you fucking dirty cunt, you wanna rip my head off. So when I rolled him off I grabbed his arm and I locked his arm out. And he made a grunting sound and I'm thinking like nah nah, you're gonna have to tap. So once I heard the grunting sound, I locked his arm out, I was literally trynna break his arm yeah, like fuckin' 'ell man, and I'm pulling his arm, and he's yelling like "argghhh". And then he's like, he couldn't tap because I trapped the other arm, and I'm just cranking, and then he tapped. He got up and I'm like you all good, he's like yeah I'm all good. We start again, I shot in on him and I put him on his back. And um, I think I arm barred him, something happened, I don't know. He tapped straightaway, he's tapping quick now yeah. And now you can see the fear. When I'm on my knees, for a guy who doesn't know nothing about guard, he sits on his ass and I realised now this guy's in fear. And now, I went after him. So he's going crazy in guard, I got double unders and I literally, I fucking grabbed him, you know when you get double unders, if you grab the back of the gi if you stand up you can spin them over and get their back. So I just literally picked this cunt off the mat you know I just stood up and picked him up in the air, and his heads down, and he's looked up and he's gone "oh oh" and I just dropped him yeah. I didn't spin him, I dropped him on his neck, he crumbled down, I jumped on his back and I fucken banged it on him [put him in a submission].

Ayaz has a build up of positive EE as he senses fear in his grappling partner (Collins 2004). He has situational dominance over his opponent, turning the emotional mood to his advantage (Collins 2008), like Luke did to John. But for Ayaz to be able to engage in this level of confrontation, it requires not only an ability to perform the required grappling techniques and physical capital, but also social capital and symbolic capital within the space. Ayaz's students have beaten Ayaz on numerous occasions, however they were unable to overcome the newcomer with their physical capital alone. Homosocial relations and intimacy in the gym are ritualised in regular training and provide confidence between individuals that help them overcome CT/F (Spencer 2012b). However, confidence was thwarted by the newcomer's size, strength, physical presence and irregularity. Ayaz's situational domination had less to do with his physical dominance, than it did his ability to emotionally dominate (Collins 2008; Paulle 2013). In these moments one learns how to manipulate the

tension to their advantage and reify habits of ritual (emotional energy, historically acquired disposition and cultural know-how) (Collins 2008; Paulle 2013).

Ayaz was stirred into a frenzy because he was not only being asked to roll, but his position as a black belt was being challenged, someone wanted "a shot at the title", "the way he said it" was a challenge to Ayaz's status and hence he wanted to teach this guy a lesson. However, his *habitus* was emotionally managing the urges in a balance between external controls and internal self-controls (Sánchez García 2013). Nothing escalated beyond the boundaries of the rules—of the rituals or of the field (Bourdieu 1985; Collins 2008):

> When he backed up I thought you fucking cheeky cunt, you wanna go away now after [you] fucking done it on all these cunts. When I grabbed him, I knew what move I wanted to do, I wanted to show him that, I could. I wasn't doing really good jiu jitsu technique, I was doing power stuff… I wanted to overpower him, I wanted to own him, and I just dropped him. I think a lesson was taught, that you're not the strongest man in the room you know.

Situations such as this do not transgress the rules of the game, and play out in a somewhat "predictable" fashion. The events that transpire maintain the state of power relations within institutionalised long-lasting social statuses, socially recognised between social agents and objectively defined by their positions in these relations (Bourdieu 1985). In other words, beneath the level of consciousness, Ayaz's *habitus* secured the structural power relations by maintaining the subjectively defined aspirations and the objective structures which gave rise to his *habitus* (Eagleton 1991).

The categories of perception of the social world are internalised objective structures of social space. This is internalised as one's sense of position they occupy within a given social space, that is a practical mastery of the social structure as a whole, that "permits" them to act within the limits of their position. This in of itself is marked, kept, respected and expected as a tacit acceptance of one's place, which contributes to maintaining these relations (Bourdieu 1985; King 2000). As much as Ayaz was teaching this guy a lesson, he was defending his position in the field, and

playing for what was at stake.[98] Ayaz has never been in any street fights, despite being a part of a social circle that has. Here, it is clear that the objective system that gave rise to his *habitus*, in which he has little to gain from altercations in the street, discourages him from engaging in fights out of fear. This fear is both physiological in respect to the confrontational tension and fear that arises in confrontations and the fear of losing symbolic capital:

> I never got into fights and stuff like that, I was too afraid man. You know when people say, "oh I want to punch the shit out of this guy". I realised man when we were going out and you're hanging out with your mates… you know when you hear people say, "oh this cunt, I'll slap this cunt, I'll smash this cunt", then I jerried [realised] one day, I couldn't fire a punch if my life depended on it, and what happens if this guy punches me in the face what the fuck could I do? That's when I jerried I better fucking learn something. So when I hear those cunts turn around and say I'll slap this cunt, I go show me how you're gonna slap this cunt, show me how you're gonna punch this cunt. *Show me*, you don't even know how to punch bro. It's fucking hilarious man, fucking hilarious.

Now armed with the cultural capital of combat, Ayaz is able to confront and demoralise those in his social circle who call on the rhetoric of the tough guy despite his open fear and avoidance of violent confrontations growing up. Throughout his 20s Ayaz started going out to nightclubs and witnessed fights unfold, he described these events as having caused a realisation of his inability to defend himself. A transformative effect occurs both in his physical capabilities and the materiality of his acquired skills in the gym (i.e. one's ability to hurt others), and in the mental structures that underpin and secure his physical capital outside of the gym context.

[98] Critiques of Bourdieu claim that this relapses into an objectivism that does not allow for social change in which outcomes are structurally predetermined. This can be overcome through a cultural understanding of meanings within social interactions, which poses that meanings are culturally contextual and in flux in relation to the identities within interactions. Thus, interactions occur in reference to others, which requires an understanding of other individuals. Whilst individuals may reject or ignore interpretation of each other, such interpretations can severely affect social life (King 2000; Collins 2004). However, for Bourdieu (1985) it cannot be forgotten that habitus is generated within a historical labour of social divisions and visions of the world, and therefore, as products of history can be changed. The inscriptions of social structures in bodies can be changed through counter training repeated exercises (Bourdieu 2000).

Ayaz starts out being worried about being hit, to being worried about seriously injuring other people:

> I never got into fights, ah too worried about what will happen, but I'm not worried about myself. I'm worried what may happen to that person. Yes I could get hit whatever but I will defend my family.

Ayaz explained what he meant by defending his family. He had been put in contact with a financial broker who had told him he could seek out information from banks on his behalf for loans. His father had just passed away and he needed to settle some debts. After some time, Ayaz felt that the broker was taking too long and decided to move on. But this caused some friction, "he took my passiveness as weakness, I go look sorry man I'm really sorry I know you're a friend, I'll compensate you." In Ayaz's words the broker was bothered and replied, "It doesn't work like that. I'll take a caveat over the house and I'll send some people over to collect the money." Ayaz had an agitation in his voice as he recalled his reply, "listen bro, I'm not stupid, you can't take a caveat, I go, but these people coming over to the house, I take offense to that yeah." Ayaz started to raise his voice to me, "I don't want people coming to my house [laughs], I said, anyone comes to my house I'm gonna fucking kill 'em on the door step." Emotions were resurfacing as Ayaz was retelling his story, "I'ma come after you now. I've jumped in the car, I was on the couch, and now I'm gonna go find this cunt and beat the fuck out of him." He paused for a moment before he continued:

> I wasn't going to beat the fuck out of him, you know how someone says I'm going to beat the fuck out of him, all I wanted to do was just slap him, overhand slap yeah. You know like your old man does, do you know when your old man slaps you, god rest my father's soul but it never hurt me. When you get slapped like that, it's worse than getting punched bro… I'm not a gangsta, but if you step over the threshold into my house to harm my wife and my son, I'll kill you on the fucking doorstep. I'm not saying that because I want to show I'm a tough guy, it's like no, you're not going to threaten to come to my house, you're not going to threaten to send people to my house. Fuck you, I'm coming to you.

Ayaz went from avoiding confrontations to cultivating a habitus (with a particular cultural and symbolic capital), which when under threat, resulted in a socially contoured emotional response, resorted to threatening physical violence. In the end

there was no physical confrontation, as most attempts of violence are aborted and filled with bolster and bluff because CT/F makes violence socially difficult (Collins 2008). The broker took Ayaz's threat seriously enough to apologise and retract his initial threat to send people to Ayaz's house. It is difficult to conclude if anyone's threat was merely more than that. However, Ayaz was engrossed enough in the emotional dynamics of the situation to get into his car and go looking for the broker. This machismo ritual falls inline with typical dynamics of a culture of boasting and making claims. One in which a stratification splits between the tough guy with their bluster and those who are intimidated by it (Collins 2008). However, this conclusion might ignore a nuanced detail in the corporeal knowledge and know how of conducting oneself—remaining cool in high-pressure situations, knowing what to say and do—that cannot be faked. This can only come as a result of an embodied feel for the game (Paulle 2013). Whilst the characteristics of a person remain outside the cause of violence so that the situational dynamics remain at the core of the analysis, *habitus* and the social field draw on the social context in which one is socialised.

The precarious nature of capital is such that it continually needs to be accumulated, defended, and is perpetually at risk of being devalued or not recognised. In analytical terms, the determination imposed on the occupants within a field is always subject to the structure of distribution of the species of power (capital), and when possessed "commands specific profits that are at stake in the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 97). As the field narrows to the point where it feels like there is nothing else in the world,[99] players are then engaging in the game below the level of consciousness (Wacquant 2004a). Ayaz's threat of violence was below the level of consciousness and the focus of attention was on the symbols. His 'call' to defend his family demonstrates how we can understand the ties (in part) of the macro-institutional organisation of society with micro-socialisation processes in the everyday. From Connell's (2005) perspective, there is a deep entanglement between family values and the role of men in the patriarchal order. Rather than needing an explicit masculine politics, the routine maintenance of institutions such as the state and corporations, often run by heterosexual men, will reinforce and defend the

[99] As Luke put it, "MMA is like a release for me, so it's like meditation… when I'm training I'm not really thinking about work or problems at home" (further explored in Chapter 7).

patriarchal order, through such claims as defending one's family, scientific advancement, benefits of competition, individual freedoms, and so on. A poignant point remains that the threat imposed on Ayaz was economical rather than physical, the threat of losing his house, was not a threat of physical violence. I now turn to Nathan and focus on his experiences with violence outside the gym to capture how CT/F is overcome.

"Luckily I've Won More Than I Lost": Fighting Outside the Gym

> I can watch a stupid street fight, because men are jealous of women; but I'm not going to let anything escalate to the point where someone's going to get legitimately brain damaged or hurt. They're both drunk, they're both out of it; anything beyond this is just excess.

Nathan has been in his fair share of street altercations outside the gym. His scariest was a result of him attempting to stop two young men who were friends with one another from seriously injuring each other. He details the story below:

> They were grabbing bottles and throwing them at each other, trying to glass each other... It was a pretty crazy fight to watch. They were both connecting pretty decently… One guy was on his knees, dazed; the other guy was dazed too, but he had this mentality of finishing him off, and it looked like he was sort of stumbling over for like a big soccer kick, and I was like, "Nah, nah, nah"… so I instinctively just spear tackled the guy, grabbed his back, started choking him. So, full hooks in, rear naked choke, and that was my instinct kicking in, going, "Okay, I've got to stop this guy."

Firstly, what Nathan considers instinct can be viewed as a result of hundreds of hours of participation in repetitive bodily movements that seem intrinsic, instinctual or innate knowhow. Secondly, his decision was an attempt to stop the fight, or deescalate it. He sought to do this through subduing the person he viewed as the aggressor about to potentially cause permanent brain damage. This does not mean CT/F is not present, as heroism is not enough to engage in violent confrontations (Collins 2008, 2012). Lastly, Nathan openly admits that before starting MMA, he had never gotten into any altercations. This last point does not suggest that learning MMA

is the cause for street violence. Understanding the situational dynamics as well as the embodied feel of the game can provide a nuanced understanding:

> I remember vividly being a plus one at a few parties, just simply rocking up, and fights are already going. I'd be happily sitting there going, "You know what, I'm not involved. I represent a gym, I don't want to be associated with this sort of stuff"… [Other times] I'd be casually watching fights and laughing, almost critiquing techniques, going, "Look at these guys." [laughing] It's so silly watching street fights and going, "Man, they don't know how to do shit."

In terms of the species of capital that exist in the field of MMA, those who street fight are not viewed as possessing capital at all. Contrary to popular news and entertainment media, most violent brawls are an incompetent, messy slop (Collins 2008). In fact, notions of men's natural fighting ability are extremely shaky and difficult to argue for, when juxtaposed against the overwhelming amount of footage demonstrating just how unnatural it is. Practising combat sports, as all skilled activities, require thousands of hours of investment into training. It is why Luke can distinguish immediately between people who have trained before and people who have not, it is why when a newcomer enters the gym for the first time and spar they either frantically fire so many punches that miss or they freeze up (Collins 2012). As Nathan explained how he felt during an MMA fight, "I didn't know what was going on. I remember thinking "whoa what, holy shit!" It was like when you're really fucked up driving home, and you're like alright, just stick to the road rules, except it was my techniques, just stick to the basics, because you're fucked right now." Nathan touches on a key factor in circumventing CT/F, trust in one's training. After so many years of training, sticking to the basics—the thousands of hours of practice over so many years—acts as an anchor to overcome the intense daze of a fight (Collins 2012).

Most people who have never practiced striking techniques are bewildered by the many minute and crucial movements required to perform the task. People largely use their arm strength to punch. They pull the fist of their dominant hand past their face as far back as possible and turn their shoulder away. Any trained person would notice it coming (this is often referred to as telegraphing a punch). Then, with little coordination, they launch their entire body into the punch which leads them to lose balance. When striking with the power punch, if you are right handed, your right leg must be behind your left leg in a staggered position roughly shoulder width apart and

knees slightly bent. The right hand should be clenched into a soft fist and must never move from the cheek (with the exception of elite fighters who bend and break rules). As you push your right hand away from your face, your right hip must pivot on your foot, because the power travels from your foot, which must stay grounded at all times, up your leg, through your back and shoulder to the very point of the two large knuckles on the hand. The elbow must never flair out and the wrist can only turn at the last minute as the fist is tightly clenched, the elbow turns out, and the shoulder covers the side of the face to protect the head from vulnerability. Upon making contact the fist should return in a straight line back to the cheek—hardly a natural movement. These modern striking techniques have developed partly due to technologies such as gloves. Through the repeated training and live action sparring MMA participants become proficient in a range of bodily movements.

Returning to CT/F for a moment to better understand how Nathan was able to engage in this confrontation, two important details will setup the analysis. Firstly, Nathan surprised attacked the partygoer who was as he claims was already dazed, and focused on kicking his friend. Secondly, Nathan observed the untrained skills of the partygoer, which is the equivalent to possessing an advantage that would circumvent CT/F in relation to his confidence in his training (Collins 2009). Now, an important underlying point here is that Nathan in no way goes around starting fights, but rather, attempts to deescalate them. There is a certain type of *habitus* that produces the disposition of someone who comes to feel as if they are an authority with the power to decide when a fight has gone too far. There is a practical mastery of threatening encounters that emerge out of thousands of moment-by-moment engagements (Paulle 2013). However, this capital does not translate homogeneously throughout all situations of violent confrontation:

> I learnt a lot about tactical decisions on the streets... You can't always replicate what you learn in the gym on the streets. You have to be extra aware about surroundings, and other people. I was studying jiu-jitsu and tactical MMA. Luke brought in two very good martial artists. We were training with them for maybe a couple of years, and we learnt a lot of street tactical defence, and I did have a lot of incidents, but it was never personal. It was always situational.

Nathan describes his incidents as taking place at house parties, clubs, bars and pubs. The important details missing from all of this might mislead us into believing that

MMA makes participants more likely to fight. Without carefully considering the role of CT/F within violent confrontations, we cannot appropriately analyse how it operates within various violent encounters. This can potentially leave us estranged from a deeper analysis of how one's *habitus* embodies a feel for the game (i.e. within a field). Beneath the level of consciousness, Nathan recognises (in his schemes of perception) an untrained partygoer. Here, he has a tacit understanding of the unequal distribution of physical and symbolic capital between them. If the two friends fighting were trained fighters, Nathan's capital would have been more precarious, and therefore his ability to circumvent CT/F would have required more than just his MMA training.

Stepping out from the encounters of violence to turn our attention to the cultural and symbolic forms of capital within the field, I draw on the popular Australian underworld figure Carl Williams. When Williams was sentenced by Justice King to 35 years in prison, King described Williams as a "killer, and a cowardly one, who employed others to do the actual killing" (Silvester 2010). Justice King unconsciously uses language that in the same breath she condemns killing, she valorises the act of doing 'the actual killing' oneself. Justice King described Williams in a way he and others from the underworld would understand, unintentionally drawing on the saliently understood and implicit notions of violence, it is one thing to be a murderer, it is an entirely different thing to be one that does not do the murdering themselves. We can understand this as a symbolic struggle over the production of commonsense.

The symbolic order is grounded in the monopoly of legitimate naming. In other words, the legitimate vision of the social world produced through agents engaging the symbolic capital they have acquired in previous struggles. This in particular is all the power possessed over instituted taxonomies inscribed in minds or in objectivity (e.g. qualifications, occupations, etc.). Agents seeking to impose their vision of the divisions of the social world and their position within it are located between two extremes: *idios logos* which an individual tries to impose their point of view, and *official nomination* which is the act of symbolic imposition that has behind it all the strength of the collective consensus, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the State, the holder of the *monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1985).

On the one hand, the individual perspective is one that produces the particular, of personal position and self-interested namings (for example of themselves and others such as insults). On the other hand the authorised viewpoint is a legitimate viewpoint of the expert in an official identity and capacity through the State, which produces official classifications (Bourdieu 1985). Understanding this correlation at a given moment cannot be fully understood unless it is seen that classifications implemented in making choices are the product of previous struggles:

> The whole history of the social field is present, at each moment, both in a materialised form—in institutions…and in an embodied form—in the dispositions of the agents who operate these institutions or fight against them… (Bourdieu 1985, p. 738).

By looking at *habitus*, capital and field we can begin to construct a clearer picture of how having a practical mastery and feel for the game, native social agents' (virtuosos) intimate understanding of the object of the game and the kinds of situations it can throw up, grants them a practical flexibility within the field (King 2000). Luke explained the object of the game succinctly, to "get them before they get you", in order to have situational dominance. These social scenes are structures pervaded with confrontational emotions in which the 'violent few' are able to use this emotional field to their advantage (Collins 2008). Therefore, the *habitus* and accumulated capital of the 'actively violent' have developed the techniques to do so. To further establish the space of objective relations between the different positions constituting the MMA field and in particular that of Praelia MMA, I now turn to taste.

Taste in Practice: Classifications of Food, Occupation and Qualification as Capital

In turning to taste, I place bodily practice at the heart of interactions within the field of MMA.[100] Taste is a central process in Bourdieu's concepts in which bodies are formed through its development. Taste is imposed by our class and position in

[100] Interestingly, Spencer (2012b) turns to taste from a sensorial perspective, highlighting how the taste of blood as well as the shock of being struck can trigger signals of the gravity of the chaotic situation of combat.

society, which must become natural in order for social actors to be taken seriously within social life. Importantly, these do not happen primarily as intellectualist properties but are embodied and produce instinctive bodily reactions against those who do not fit our *habituses* (Bourdieu 1984). The physical manifestation of taste and symbolism of the body in social practice illuminates the centrality of corporeality in social life (King 2000). Taste is the appropriate, voluntary choice and preferences of an individual's lifestyle, but is always in actuality rooted in material constraint. People develop preferences—turned practises—that are available to them. Therefore the development of taste can be viewed as a conscious manifestation of *habitus*, which deeply affects people's orientations to their bodies and the world around them (Bourdieu 1984; Shilling 1993).

The restricted availability of cultural capital is such that cultural items that have membership significance are charged up in IR's. Specifically, the circulation of particularistic cultural capital related to prolonged personal membership (Collins 2004). This can be thought of in terms of field—more or less—as a site of overt struggle over the definitions that legitimise the principles of division of the field. For example, Niko, Tyler and Nath are in a struggle over the legitimacy of their position, as they attempt to break from the doxa (or hegemony) of the given order as natural.[101] Within this struggle, mutual focus of attention is placed on particularistic cultural capital within the field. In a social space, the differences between members' cultural capital appears to spontaneously emerge, where in fact, it tends to function symbolically as a space for particular life-styles that are rooted within material constraints, class and social position (Bourdieu 1985; Shilling 1993; King 2000).

For example, qualifications, education and occupation are valued through classificatory schemes that hierarchically position members who possess them within the field, and regulate the scarcity of these cultural resources.[102] The various species

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[101] This can be what food they eat, what ranking belt they carry, how many fights they have had, who wins during sparring, what occupation they have, to how much they weigh and their "body type". As they attempt to legitimise their position "at the top" of the field.

[102] In broader society, classifications and naming is one way to manage material scarcity through the division of groups, particularly through occupational naming, which designates the material and symbolic advantages that are associated with them. Classifications and naming confer on agents positive or negative retributions and distinctive marks as an emblem or stigma (Bourdieu 1985).

of cultural capital varying from fighting style, the various ways of moving the body to the positioning of hand and foot stance; the favoured techniques used in the various martial art forms; to the knowledge about fighters and fights; and what venues one hangs out in, what someone does for work and if they were a 'good' or 'bad' student. Once one enters the field of MMA at Praelia, they may begin to 'make choices' that put them in positions to play for what stakes are up for grabs. This attempts to conceive subjects in social life as live, rather than static. Individuals may maintain and transform their mutually constraining relations through complex interactions over time. Keeping that in mind, I now turn to food, which is often understood and used as a way to fuel highly rationalised bodies for performance, in which the body is treated as a machine (Maguire 1991a, 1993; Shilling 1993; Spencer 2014).

"Eat Real Food"

The consumption of food is a literal (somewhat vulgar) example of how taste affects the body and develops in class-based material locations. Historically, people's taste for food developed contextually (in relative scarcity or surplus) and dominant classes were able to distinguish themselves through their taste for certain foods from the dominated (Shilling 1993). Bourdieu (1984) describes how foods take oppositional qualities associated along class lines (as well as gendered ones). Shilling (1993) captures the former:

> For example, the reason a social group adopts a particular style of dress or diet is connected to the distribution and meanings given to alternative styles of dress or diet, the orientation to the body a style of dress or diet encourages, and to the relationship between the fields of fashion and diet and other social fields (p. 135).

Bodies are therefore developed with symbolic values and attached to particular bodily forms.[103] For example, supplements such as protein powders, are often not associated as necessary with a healthy lifestyle or natural way of participating in MMA, it is

[103] These may represent physically and symbolically political domination or subordination in society (King 2000).

considered to be more for building muscles for aesthetics. Therefore, viewed as unimportant in relation to physical capital in the field and in opposition to the meaning given to fields such as bodybuilding. For example, Sam explains:

> I used to take protein when I used to go to the gym a lot, but now, because I'm doing this [MMA] I don't feel like I need it to be honest, that's what I feel. It was 100 percent to get bigger… I think it persuades you to get bigger, but I don't think it does much. It's just protein, you can have that in chicken as well, so I'm like, nah, just eat…

Bodies in consumer culture have come to promote the 'performing self' and treat the body as a machine, in need of fine-tuning and care, as well as high fibre and protein diets, signifying the real character of people (Shilling 1993). Sam adds that he eats "real" food—food that is not packaged—which requires cultural and economic capital in order to cook and purchase high quality ingredients, have knowledge around nutrition, and the skills to do the preparing and cooking. There is a distinct meaning outside of cooking for a family (domestic feminine task), cooking in a restaurant (public masculine labour) or cooking a fancy meal at a dinner party (Gvion 2011), this cooking is associated with nutritional efficiency:

> There's a lot of shit in proteins and there's a lot of gums and sugars. I try and eat real food as much as I can. So I don't like to eat much stuff that's in a package. I'll cook - and I don't mind cooking, you know, I'm fairly okay cooking stuff like that. So I'll cook steaks and pasta, stuff like that.

This was atypical from other members because most of the younger members were living at home with their parents and will eat what their mum cooks or alternatively, others will eat what their wife or partner makes. Nutrition is seen as something that one must do in order to remain healthy. Sam has become the unofficial nutritionist for Will, Lev, Nath and so on, when they are preparing for their fights. Being natural and eating the right foods carries higher value rather than having "unnatural" benefits, using an aid to boost one's own potential rather than play "fair". Will highlights how taking supplements can become associated with potentially creating a dependency, almost in a drug like fashion:

> Nah, all natural. I don't know, I don't know what to take. I don't know how effective they really are. Just say if I could get on all these supplements and then I run out, am I gonna be dependent on them? 'Cause fighting is about like, can I beat you, can you beat me, not about I'm gonna take all this stuff [to beat you]. So I don't know if that really helps to be honest.

The members of Praelia MMA illustrate how diet as a species of capital is regulated through lifestyle choice and physical form, and part of a wider trend in the commodification of the body, consumer culture and the economic field. In this sense, food consumption becomes a resources which enables individuals to maintain and create projects of the self (Shilling 1993, 2005; Spencer 2014).[104]

"He's Not Just Some Malaka off the Street, He Reads"

Members of Praelia MMA often exemplify the reproduction of inequalities based on social positions and class orientation. The prestige of a university is irrelevant in relation to the occupation one can secure. The most highly regarded occupations in the social milieu of the gym business/finance related roles, exercise/sport related roles, emergency service roles (e.g. police, army, ambulance) and trade qualifications. New Right philosophy and pop psychology are valued in the field of MMA, and propped up by mainstream MMA figures. These might be categorised in the overall backlash towards a left-wing political project that gave rise to workers struggles, racism, women's equality, LGBT rights and so on (Lewontin et al. 1984). Conversations pertaining to explanations of life and society are sympathetic to an androcentric view that values capital and liberalism along the lines of a biological evolutionary worldview. This positions the value of education in relation to the 'real world'. Work too embodies an emphasis on rationalisation, hard work, self-responsibility, individualism and competitiveness (Shilling 2008), which Bronson explains:

[104] In addition, banned and approved substances governed by MMA bodies and organisations such as WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) contribute to the legitimisation of definitions of "good" and "bad" substances in an official legal capacity. The reification of social (often moralised) classifications come to threaten athletes from being able to compete and reproduce forms of domination and subordination (Bourdieu 1985; Collins 2013).

> Pretty much from school my parents said, "Get a job, start saving, start paying for your own things." That's how it's been man, ever since I started working; I have been paying for my training here, everything like that. It's taught me a good lesson man; a lot of kids finish school in year 12 [final year of schooling] without even working, or having a job. It's taught me a good skill, just to be responsible, obviously, you show up and work hard and this is the end result…or I wouldn't be trying at all.

Bronson's dislike and disengagement from education in school exemplifies how taste is formed through what is available to him (due to the material constraints of his social position), which leads to dispositions and practises that seek out what appears to "fit" him. Education which focuses on textual analysis is "irrelevant", whilst education related to "how the body works" is achievable and revenant (Bourdieu 1985, 2001; Eagleton 1991):

> I just do retail at the moment. I'm still a bit unsure what I'm going to do in my self and what I want to do. So, I'm still working there. It's all right, but next year I need to start making some different moves and making some different pathways for myself. I have just been training and working. All round, it hasn't been a bad year… I have got interest in getting into business, even just sports, health and science. Things like that. A lot of physical related stuff, like physio work, I find very interesting, because it's how the body works, a lot of sort of stuff like that. But then, also the business side of things as well.

> Obviously, education is very important, but I believe a certain type of education is important and a lot of the things that interested me weren't covered. I enjoyed business. I did that from year 10-12. But then there's things like English, just doing essay writing. Going into detail of every single word, or aspect of a book, or movie, it just doesn't seem relevant to me. I took skills from schools that relate to the real world, to me, [English] was irrelevant. I enjoyed some parts of school, but a lot of it, just didn't interest me, or I didn't find relevant really. I had a sort of mixed emotion towards it. I passed Year 12, so I put effort into it, but I didn't have a solid understanding of what I wanted to do after school. That's why I am not at uni. Like I said, I passed, but I wasn't incredibly interested in the whole school type thing.

Bronson occupies a precarious position within the field of MMA at Praelia. This is largely reconciled through over-conforming to the commitment of training (Hughes

and Coakley 1991) which has resulted in numerous injuries and social withdrawal (Shilling 2008):

> I'm always working out. I don't talk too much, man. I just want to get in and train all the time. I don't brag about anything, I just wait for my coaches and my team to say, "Hey, you know, good work. I can see there is improvement there." Obviously, top level is the end goal, but yeah, I'm always there. I'm ready to do something different, because every session we learn something else. But at the end of the day, that's where I want to be.

Striving to convert physical capital into economic capital remains partial and transient. Athletes are at risk of injury, and the physical capital they acquire fluctuates in symbolic value. Bronson's ambition to reach the "top-level" makes him vulnerable of accepting and internalising the authority of coaches and overall logic of the field. This instils in him a neoliberal entrepreneurship through which he can interpret success and failure as the direct product of his dedication and talent. This has become a trend in the overall decline in economic opportunities (Besnier, et al. 2018). Casual work now requires full-time availability and opportunism, which shapes attitudes and behaviours of people in precarious positions (Standing 2011).[105] Levent sees his casual employment position as temporary while he builds his career:

> My brother's father in law owns a business and I help him. He just calls me in and I just [work], as much as I can. Whenever he calls me, I'm there. He's a bit of a handyman, doing like lock up fixing, renovations, all that stuff, you know? It's a very physical job. So, it's good on that aspect…And then once I'm done with my course, I can get into a full-time job with that... I'm doing a personal training and coaching course. And the reason why I'm doing it is because, so, it sort of connects with this whole career thing, like, you know I could be teaching someone getting paid for it, but I'm also, at the same time, expanding my own knowledge, coaching

[105] This trend is often discussed at the top level of the UFC. Phrases said by fighters "anytime, anywhere" and reinforced by the UFC, which implements practices that reward fighters who are "always" ready to fight anyone. The UFC is obliged to offer fighters 3 fights a year, regardless if those fights are accepted or not. Dana White masks the neoliberal logic the company reinforces through maintaining that fighters are "free" to do what they wish, and that they do not have to accept fights, while keeping fighters in extremely restrictive contracts that bar them from many other activities in which their physical capital (labour) has been specifically formed.

> other people, learning off myself, learning off other people. So, like, I decided like, this whole career it's, I'm just going to dedicate my life to it, you know? I really do want to take it far like.

Constructing an entrepreneurial, self-reliant and purposeful image of self, comes to resemble neoliberalism in the contemporary capitalist context (Besnier, et al. 2018). His personal training course is a valued species of capital, which serves to further establish and escalate his position in Praelia MMA. Lev holds more cultural and social capital than Bronson and his *habitus* is congruent within the field. This is reflected in his "viewpoint" as he considers the gym a "family". Through IR's Lev has access to a level of interactions that Bronson does not. Here, he is able to gain EE, which perpetually energises him through bodily co-presence, mutual focus of attention and shared moods. Passing from one encounter in the gym to the next, refocusing and recharging "the relevant symbols, fellowship feelings, and fantasy ideals" (Paulle 2013, p. 40):

> With this gym I haven't [hung out with anyone]. Only because the areas a bit far. I have with Will. I've trained with Will outside of the gym. Sometimes we went to like casual gyms here and there just to do a bit of sparring and stuff. But other people not so much. I always keep in contact with all the boys and I think as like, you know, we all start fighting together, I think everyone's going to get closer and closer. Because I always feel like a brotherhood at the gym, like a family you know? That's the way I see it. I don't just go there thinking, oh these are just people I train with, it's not like you go work and, oh these are my co-workers you know? You don't care, "like, whatever". They're like my, like a brotherhood you know? I see everyone, I try shake everyone's hand, try and have a convo (conversation) with everyone you know? Like even when I spar with everyone, I always try and hold back because I don't know how everyone will react to sparring. I don't want to have a bad relationship with anyone because I like everyone at the gym, you know, I see it like a brotherhood type of thing. We're all trying to make each other learn everything so it's all good.

Despite how Levent views the gym as family, he still separates parts of his personal life from other members and maintains sociability (Wacquant 2004a). This can be understood as the outside world being put on hold because the gym is viewed as sacred space separate from it (Collins 2008):

> Everyone knows [my mum has breast cancer]. It's something our whole family's been living with. My close friends know, I haven't told too much people at the gym, not because I don't want to, it's just more like, you never have this opportunity to tell them you know? Like, it's not something you'd be at the gym and you'd just be like hey you know [my mum has breast cancer]… but in this type of moment [during interview] it's good to.

Such forms of interactions do not share mutual focus of attention and can impede on producing high EE in IR's. For a large part of the analysis of the rituals and interactions between members of the gym (Chapter 5), the social backdrop has been removed from the micro-interactions of day-to-day minutiae to focus on situational dynamics. Emotional energy is carried into interactions and the battle to gain more emotional energy, is contoured by the rituals of interaction. Understanding how social trajectories have shaped the *habitus* of agents and play out in situational dynamics provides a nuanced understanding of the sustained activity of members within Praelia MMA.

Lev's reluctance to talk about his personal troubles is an attempt to conserve—rather than modify—the space, as he becomes part of the constituting group, who are organised with a view that has an interest to defend its members (Bourdieu 1985). Levent has formed social bonds in which this voluntary community has become "like family". For Bronson, his ambiguous future prospects make Praelia attractive because it remains a space in which hard work results in tangible rewards (Abramson and Modzelewski 2010). Elias (1987) makes clear that emotions are tied to a material historical reality. That is, in order to make a living and survive, humans engage in changing the world around them. The consequence of this for humans over vast periods of evolution eventually led to an end in biological differentiation. And biological differentiation was superseded by social differentiation, which meant human kind relied on social funds of knowledge for their survival (what food is edible, where to find food, what tastes fine but could be poisonous and so on). Within limits, the social environment shapes the meanings of emotions, and how emotions are experienced can change depending on the social context, within the possibility of the *habitus* (Elias 1987; Scheer 2012). [106]

[106] Understanding emotions within the limits of a bodily hexis can make observable how our biological capacity to cry, translates into a social capacity for 'acting', where actors have the capacity to bring up

According to Collins (2004) sustained periods of low EE resulting from interaction will cause participants to feel drained and lose their attraction to the group. Forms of capital and taste remain key in interactions and therefore, gaining or losing EE within interactions fluctuates in relation to broader social contexts. I now shift my attention to how social backgrounds affect and constrain, through valuing or devaluing actor's cultural resources (capital) that are brought into IR's.

Making Sense of the Field: Interaction Rituals and the Social Field

The slots at the top of the social ladder grant a certain level of access to interactions. These are so scarce that they separate members like Lev and Niko from those like Bronson. If Bronson had the same access to situations that produce relevant learning moments and allow for the right corporeal and cognitive habits to be drilled, he too would have had the opportunity to build the same skills and capital (Paulle 2013). Turning to the interaction dynamics in Praelia, I detail how Niko 'Othered' Caleb in the gym through diminishing his national capital.[107] Niko is an exemplar of members who hold a lot of capital in the space, where their time is split between coaching and training, spending many hours at Praelia and gym related gatherings outside of training hours:

> There will be times where we see each other every weekend, then we don't for a couple of months. But because we spend so much time together, like we're there fucking four or five hours together every night [six days a week], you sort of don't need to see each other out of the gym, yeah. I'm there a lot, yeah. 20 plus [hours], it's like a job. Pretty much, [it's like] I've got a part-time job there.

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emotions and relive it by means of art or in work. Or in this case dealing with vulnerability in private (Hochschild 1983).

[107] The holders of national capital, make this capital extremely valuable and aim to naturalise their hold on it. The struggle is then in making being an 'Aussie' very valuable to possess, so that those who have it are clearly Aussie. Then they struggle to make being an Aussie something that one is 'born with', not something that can be acquired (Hage 1998).

Niko is viewed as arrogant by some, and often told so in the midst of banter. He challenges people to fights in the gym and is very competitive. Even challenging Luke:

> I don't know, apparently I have a big head, an ego, arrogant, cocky in terms of general life, in everything. I think it's carried over [from BJJ/MMA]. I think just through challenging people to fight and all that sort of shit. Like, even today, I was talking shit to Luke, telling him I'd beat him. So, there's that aspect of it. Because I do believe that I'll fucking beat him. You have to have that confidence, like you've got to think you'll beat everyone.

Niko has accumulated forms of capital that allow him to manoeuver through interactions in Praelia in ways that others cannot. Without a fuller relational understanding of the trends that characterise the milieu of the participants, it is difficult to understand the social backdrop in which interactions occur (Mills 1959). Members become part of the group through their accumulation of capital and boosts in EE. This pulls them into the social gravity of the field, which makes them feel energised and buzzed. This shapes, rather than controls, their dispositions in the space. The gravity of groups formed in terms of capital (cultural, economic, etc.) distribution and accumulation are more likely to be stable and durable:

> …while other forms of grouping are always threatened by the splits and oppositions linked to distances in social space. To speak of a social space means that one cannot group just anyone with anyone while ignoring the fundamental differences, particularly economic and cultural ones. But this never entirely excludes the possibility of organising agents in accordance with other principles of division - ethnic or national ones, for example - though it has to be remembered that these are generally linked to the fundamental principles, with ethnic groups themselves being at least roughly hierarchised in the social space… (Bourdieu 1985, p. 726)

"You Look Like Such A T!"

Niko started boxing when he was 13 years old. His dad's friend owned a local gym he attended for two years. When he was 15 he started watching the UFC and decided to do Kung Fu. Before he quit he attained a blue sash, which is the highest of three

novice belts. It was not until he was 20 that he joined Praelia MMA, after doing CrossFit. Before martial arts, Niko played soccer outside of school, but other than that he only engage in formal sport through school. Niko never followed sports other than boxing, kickboxing and MMA. His grandfather got him into boxing, "my grandpa loved boxing, like all old school fucking wogs did." [108] For Niko, socialisation into the world of boxing had a cultural and familial beginning. Niko makes clear that forming friendships, has made his seven years at Praelia "fucking easy":

> Yeah, like a few of my close friends – like, I made close friends with a few of the guys there, so that helps, plus I'm close to Luke and shit, too, so that makes it fucking easy, and yeah, I consider myself friendly to everyone. Like, I talk to pretty much every cunt there, yeah. Just hit seven years at Easter.

Niko is a "natural" fit in Praelia. This is because the formation of his general *habitus* could be transformed into a specific *habitus* through practice (Desmond 2006). Not only was he able to accrue specific species of capital, but was recognised as 'possessing' them by other members and his closest friends. It is precisely the social background in which he is grounded that facilitated finding a group he could gain high EE from.

The principles of divisions create a chasm between the dominant class that holds a higher volume of capital overall, and the dominated class that holds less overall volume of capital (Burawoy 2019). [109] Social class, in Bourdieusian scholarship, is the earliest socially internalised dimension across life paths. It is partly why families move to similar neighbourhoods, eat similar foods, go to the same schools, but is certainly not a predictor for social trajectories in a structuralist sense

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[108] Wog is a pejorative Australian slang term originally used to refer to Southern European migrants. In contemporary usage it refers to migrants in general, and has been adopted by first and second-generation children of migrants to refer to themselves and their family. Despite the word becoming more acceptable within Anglo communities, it continues to carry racist connotations (Allard 2002).

[109] For Bourdieu, classes cannot be reduced to the purely economic and contain a combination of economic and cultural capital. The dominant class has a chasm structure divided between a dominant fraction strong in economic capital and weak in cultural capital, and a dominated fraction in opposition. So too does the middle class. The working class differs because they are weak in both, therefore forced to life governed by material necessity (Burawoy 2019).

(King 2000). As Bourdieu (1985) highlights, in turning to ethnicity, we may conceive it as being linked to fundamental principles. Therefore as Niko explains, his economic position granted him access to spaces that formed an impression in his general *habitus*:

> So, mum's half-Serbian, half-Croatian, but she's Orthodox, and dad's pretty much Bosnian, but his mum is half-Serbian, half-Bosnian, so I guess he's – yeah, so he's a quarter Serbian, I guess, but dad's Muslim, so I just consider myself Serbian, because I'm Orthodox. Like, there would have been three or four Serbian people at [school], nothing ridiculous. Because I was always in, like, private schools, there wasn't that many wogs, I guess, woggy sort of people, whereas if you go to a public school, they're fucking 90 percent wog, especially in [name of suburb] and shit, yeah. I guess it was different going to Aussie [Anglo-Celtic] people's houses, I guess, sometimes, after growing up in a fucking wog household, but yeah, nothing too bad.

Niko's rejection of the Bosnian identity and Islam buttress on his aspirations to form a national body within the Australian Anglo-Christian context. "Nationalism, before being an explicit practice or a mode of classification, is a state of the body. It is a way of imagining one's position within the nation and what one can aspire to as a national" (Hage 1998, p. 45). Being socialised in—what Niko explains as—a largely "Aussie" school, is the specific context in which he internalised behavioural norms to be less "woggy". The body is not only the bearer of value, but shapes how one relates to their body (Elias 1987; Shilling 1993). Niko identifies with his Serbian origins, because his agency is less constrained by the national imagination. On the other hand, Caleb did not possess such forms of capital. Caleb is a Middle-Eastern man of Christian Maronite faith. He drives a 2000 white Daewoo Matiz roughly worth 2 thousand Australian Dollars. On the rear-view mirror he has white boxing gloves and a cross hanging. He has a long thick curly black beard, which he keeps groomed and a buzz cut with the sides faded. One night when Caleb was taking his boxing class, Niko and Tyler were sitting around while the BJJ team was warming up. Niko yelled to Caleb:

> Hey T, what's going on. Caleb you look like *such* a T!
>
> Caleb: What's a T?

A terrorist! You look like a terrorist.

Caleb: Do I look like *darkness*? Brutha, brutha, do I look like darkness?

Caleb turned away and muttered under his breath. In this brief interaction, Niko called upon an ethnic hierarchy, in which he positioned himself in opposition with the ethnic Other. Caleb was an 'ethnic object' to be managed, which both Niko and Tyler felt empowered with the size and power to do so by calling Caleb a terrorist. Like the general human perception of ants, we only come to see them as undesirable or too many once they invade spaces (like in our sugar) where we find their presence harmful (Hage 1998). Caleb was positioned as an 'ethnic other' by Luke, when he explained why Caleb left the gym:

> I think he ended up going back his own way. He's from [names suburb] way, that's the sort of demographic that he feels comfortable with and that was a situation where, I think, we gave it a go but he just wasn't the right person for us. He wasn't the right person and, you know, just different people, different personalities. Yeah, I think it was just better for both parties. I think he never really felt really comfortable here, didn't really mix well with the type of people here but yeah I think that he's happier doing his own thing. He just didn't fit that part. You know, for me, it's about being friendly to everybody, saying hello to everyone, being respectful to everybody not just the right people. And I think his personality wasn't warming to the everyday person. We want to promote a family club. We want parents to bring their kids down. We want, you know, mums, we want, you know, dads.

Luke positions Caleb as not the "right person", someone who did not "really mix well" and "didn't fit the part". Caleb had not accumulated enough national capital to fit within the gym. National capital is paradoxical in that it is both up for grabs, with the potential to be accumulated, but restricted by an aristocratic ideal in which it remains just outside of reach for accumulation. National capital is reified as static objects of representations and cultural forms of capital become an essence one must possess. Luke employs a governmental belonging to the gym as he does to the nation casting a managerial gaze over his home, as a nationalist, in order to manage Caleb (Hage 1998). As Luke earlier explained about the people in the commission flats, "The people here, they're not an asset to society."

Caleb's response back to Niko was an attempt to position himself in opposition of a Black-White binary—"do I look like darkness?"—by attempting to access Whiteness,[110] through emphasising his non-Blackness. A few days prior to this interaction, a man named Hassan Ali was shot dead by Victorian police in Melbourne after he attempted to set his car on fire and stabbed one person to death on a busy street in the CBD, Ali migrated from Somalia (Davey, Naaman, Wahlquist and Knaus 2018). These categories of White-Black are not fixed racial categories, but rather function under an illusion of uniformity, "white skin colour is cumulative and falls under a more or less, rather than an either/or logic", which can be used in order to access privileges associated with race (Hage 1998, p. 58).[111] For example, Middle-Eastern migrants were previously constructed as non-White, and in order to gain entry into Australia under the White Australia policy, they had to struggle to establish their Whiteness (Hage 1998).

The logic of bodies within the MMA space is largely informed by naturalistic views, which emphasise the physical or genetic constitution of the body. The body is then tied to an individual's identity and is underpinned by firstly, a reductionist logic that explains society as being made up by the sum of the individuals within it, whose intentions, actions and potential is made up of one's physical or genetic constitution. Secondly, essential features of people's corporeality are classified into simplistic social categories (such as male/female, black/white, upper/middle/working class), which ignore overlaps in, and stress difference between human bodies, which are then reified as natural phenomena. From a sociological lens, naturalistic views of the body are important in their use by the dominant group in society who have repeatedly made reference to the inferior biological make-up of the dominated (Lewontin et al. 1984; Shilling 1993). In this case the ethnic other who does not fit within White Australia.

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[110] Whiteness is not a static racial category, but rather "an everchanging, composite cultural historical construct" rooted in "European colonisation which universalised a cultural form of White identity as a position of cultural power at the same time the colonised were in the process of being racialised" (Hage 1998, p. 58).

[111] This more or less logic had suddenly become apparent when I started to understand why some of my "White" friends had throughout my life asked, "would you consider yourself white?" or wanted to know why "they call *yous* sand niggas?" At other times I had been 'accepted' as "one of the good ones".

Understanding CT/F, *habitus*, capital, and field requires an intimate understanding of practice. It is within this specific historical, political and cultural context that we can understand how bodies, emotions and interactions are shaped within the field and by practice. The *habitus* and practice allow us to understand how groups form through the distribution of capital, as they gain a sense of the game and play for the stakes involved. The general *habitus* formed grants members a "natural" fit, in which their specific *habitus* is formed where they can gain high amounts of emotional energy. The collective awareness and mutual attention placed on the rituals and symbols within the space, charge individuals and cultural capital. This is, overtime, internalised through a process of socialisation of bodies. Therefore, individuals carry with them into interactions outside Praelia, the capital they have formed, which is symbolically valued and in flux. Historically, these forms of capital have been viewed through an androcentric lens. Until now the role of masculinity has been predominantly left out. However, gender and masculinity are essential socialisation processes that deepen the role MMA plays in participants' lives.

Chapter Eight: "Either I'm knocking someone out or I'm getting knocked out." – Masculinities in Praelia

The MMA class was in a horseshoe formation around Luke in the centre of the mats. Noticing Lilly, who had sustained an injury but was still eager to train, Luke exclaimed, "Injured and still training. I see her head more than most guys. So round of applause" The class, filled with almost only men and teenage boys all clapped. Luke continued, "I see some guys come in here saying how much they can't wait to fight, and how badly they want to be fighters and they last three weeks. But Lilly, you're still here, so I just wanted to congratulate you on your dedication."

"Okay let's start the session. Let's split the class, anyone over 85 kilos on the right, anyone under on the left," Luke paused momentarily, before a smirk grew on his face, "girls be honest." The entire group laughed. The class broke off to practice the drill Luke set. After watching everyone for five minutes he stopped the class. "This is rubbish. I thought you were all better than this. I'm not gonna keep drilling you, but doing just MMA isn't enough. I'll run the drill slowly so you get it. I also offer private lessons." Luke demonstrated the technique carefully. Making sure to pause and explain the purpose of the drill, "you throw your jab then leg kick, maybe two or three times to get your opponent comfortable and thinking about the leg kick. Now what you wanna do is throw the jab, and look at his leg. As he goes to check it you whip through his back leg. This also teaches you to always look straight, never telegraph where you're gonna hit, unless you wanna set someone up. From this technique we're gonna take advantage of a fighter's training. We're always taught to fight back. You never just stand there and take the punches. So what we're gonna do is set up our opponent, get them comfortable and make 'em think we're predictable so they want to time us after our kick, then we land the superman punch."

After the class had started to get comfortable with the drill, Luke yelled out, "don't be lazy during this drill. Don't get sloppy, even though part of the drill is defending punches, you can still throw proper technique. Make this drill work for both of you. Look at my jab, it's strong, my shoulder is protecting my chin, my cross comes in, I'm roaring through with my hip, my back foot is screwing into the ground. Don't worry about your partner getting hit, it's what the drill is for, if they're dumb enough to get hit during the drill, well there's something wrong [with them]. The drill is to defend as much as it is to attack, make it work both ways."

Ravi and Sam were training hard, hitting hard and fast, Luke yelled to Ravi, "you're loving training these days ah? You know I used to want to just yell at people. Tell them to just fuck off if they don't want to train." Luke slapped the topside of his forearm as his face scrunched up to say "fuck off". "But then I thought I better ease up because I won't have any members left in the gym." Ravi looked over to Sam, "finally, that's the first time someone has been impressed with my skills. Usually I'm getting beat." Sam laughed, and then he started ad libbing techniques, countering when he was not meant to, "Sorry, I can't help it. First thing we learnt in Muay Thai is, someone kicks you, you kick them back. Offence is my only defence, either I'm knocking someone out or I'm getting knocked out."

Everyone took a break, had some water and put their mouth guards in. It was time to spar. I partnered up with Lilly. We entered into a flurry of strikes and I felt like I landed a hard punch and I apologised. Lilly dropped her hands and responded, "I'm not made of glass". Then she kicked me hard in the leg and followed it with a speedy kick to my head, which I happened to block. Lilly kept pressuring me with kicks because I had a reach advantage. It was the last round of the class so we pushed the pace and the intensity of our sparring escalated. Then Luke told everyone to line up.

The past couple of sessions, He has made a point to announce upcoming seminars after class, as well as on the members social media group message. "Also tonight's seminar, I expect you all to be there. It's my coach's coach and ex-AFC fighter. There's no point for him coming if we don't get the numbers. It's on after this and only 15 bucks. Also, there's an upcoming grappling seminar with four of the top-wrestling competitors for a 100 bucks. That can be the price of a private lesson and this is over three days. If you're serious about fighting, you have to wrestle. So I highly suggest you come. Even if you don't want to fight, the experience will be great. Okay feet together, hands by your side." In almost perfect synchronisation, everyone bowed and yelled "osu!"

Most of the members walked to their bag. Sam, Ravi and I hung back to chat. Most people went home, except for the dedicated few who remained for the seminar. There were around forty or more people, mostly from the BJJ class, some were even from other clubs.

After detailing how cultural resources (cultural capital) are charged up in IR's and invested in further interactions in chapter 6 to produce high EE, in chapter 7 I

explored how they are constrained as agents compete to accumulate capital legitimised by the logic and practises in the specific social field of Praelia MMA. In this chapter I aim to tease out the link between masculinity and violence through a theoretical lens of the specific *habitus* of participants involved in ritual and practice. I take the position that sport related violence (SRV) is better conceptualised as both part of a socialisation process of gendered identities and socialisation into sport more broadly (Young 2019). By drawing on practises in the field I ground masculinity and violence in relation to its structural and institutional origin and formation, and the physical body over which they are draped. The analysis moves away from unchanging and permanent understandings of men and violence often grounded in biological or psychological explanations. Synthesising a theory of violence and masculinity in MMA cannot return to essentialist explanations that substitute biology and psychology for social taxonomies (Walby 1990; Spencer 2012b). Therefore, masculinity is understood as a process entangled within various fields, in which *habitus* emerges and the body provides a firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of self.

By using a *habitus*-driven approach, and *historicising the habitus*, I examine the personal histories of agents, which are constituted by wider social histories (Desmond 2006). Broadly speaking, the cast of participants in Praelia MMA have been a part of, through imperial conquest, neo-colonialism and systems of power, diverse societies brought in contact with one another and consequently, their gender orders have too been brought into contact with each other. Whilst the gender systems I focus on are local patterns, they "carry the impress of the forces that make a global society" (Connell 2005, p. xxii). The following section focuses on the precarious belonging of members in Praelia MMA, as they defend capital historically tied to masculinity and the male body.

Precarious Masculinities

In light of the transformations caused by neoliberalism—which have affected the "very constitution of personhood in all its manifestations"—precarious masculinities offer a rethinking of issues of masculinity in contemporary culture (Besnier et al. 2018, p. 841). The ambiguity surrounding hegemonic masculinity has led researchers

to depart from Connell's claim of clearly identifiable hierarchies with hegemonic masculinity dominating women and other men (for example Besnier et al. 2018; including research around inclusive masculinity by Anderson 2009).[112] As neoliberalism grew through institutions as political economic practices during the 1970s, the logic it proposed for the wellbeing of humans has become hegemonic in discourse and incorporated into the commonsense practices most people live in, interpret and understand the world. In short, it is understood that the drive toward human advancement can be best achieved through "liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, p. 2). This has resulted in the all too common deregulation, privatisation and withdrawal from the state from areas of social provision, which has led to rapid changes and uncertainty (Harvey 1989, 2005). In Australia from the mid-1980s onward, economic restructuring skewed:

> toward a state based on neoliberal ideas that celebrated individualism and the primacy of the market, while slashing taxes on rich individuals and corporations and cutting support for welfare and education. These shifts continued in subsequent decades, resulting in the dramatic growth of a super-rich class of people, a shrinking middle class and a growing proportion of working poor in the population (Messner 2016, p. 11).

Understanding the marginal and precarious positions of people requires an understanding of the institutional mechanisms that produce, reproduce and transform the network of members within them. The marginal locations and the social webs developed therein are a collective activity rather than an individual attribute of persons (Wacquant 2016b).[113] In this sense, sport has acquired an enormous

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[112] I briefly discus inclusive masculinity in final section of this chapter.

[113] Following the close of the Fordist-Keynesian era, the deindutrialisation of working-class led to neighbourhoods of relegation, in which the *postindustrial precariat* coalesced (Wacquant 2016b). Fordist-Keynesian era (1945-1973) in brief is catagorised by post-world war economic growth. Mass production (and consumption) through technological innovations, which authors suggest led to "a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology…a new kind of rationalised, modernist, and populist democratic society"

importance for fulfilling the future hopes of boys and young men, as well as those who surround them in the increasing uncertainty of social life. The context in which sports hold a global prominence sets the precise domain for their hope for survival. As well, it comes to represent a form of participation in the production of global images of male success and global inclusion. More than other domains, sport has become a way of enacting a productive masculinity (Besnier et al. 2018).[114]

During the rationalisation of society the decline of religious frameworks, which had previously "constructed and sustained existential and ontological certainties residing *outside* the individual", eventually led to the "massive rise of the body in [contemporary] consumer culture as a bearer of symbolic value", and peoples tendency "to place ever more importance on the body as constitutive of the self" (Shilling 1993, p. 3).[115] In this sense, gender became a social embodiment "based on body-reflexive practises where the body is both agent and object of practice" (Connell 2005, p. 248). This conception can illuminate how in the continuously shifting political, economic and social conditions in which MMA (and sport) and masculinity are defined in relation to one another. Gender becomes one solution to the motivation crisis for capitalism produced by the rationalisation of culture and

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(Harvey 1989, p. 126). The years following 1973 have been characterised as a period of "rapid change, flux and uncertainty" (p. 124).

[114] Such issues are often characterised as personal troubles. Mills (1959) makes an important distinction between troubles and issues. Troubles can be thought of as personal and explained through the character of the individual. And individualised solutions are often posed which aim to remedy the potential shortcomings of the moral character of those who deviate from the social norm. Issues however, reflect a failing structure of political and economic institutions. One unemployed person out of 100 thousand might not likely be an issue of opportunity, but for example 15 million unemployed out of 50 million reflects the collapse of the structure of opportunity. A further distinction can be made between solving the problem of a certain milieu, without considering how this might affect an innumerable amount of others. For example, Mills uses the problem of dense cities, which can be overcome for a few by helicopter transport or private flight.

[115] Philosophers attacked tradition, religious authority and proposed that human progress could only come through an application of rational thinking, scientific methods and a pursuit of freedom and equality. This increase of rational thinking was characterised by an unemotional matter of fact attitude, and led to expanding a legal-rational form of capitalism, in particularly, scientific method being applied to the means of production (Giddens and Sutton 2014).

undermined cultural reasons for economic performance and political consent (Connell 1995).

Hegemonic masculinity in Praelia MMA emerges as members on a whole take part in the relations that position women (and other men) as subordinate. Hegemonic masculinity and definitions of masculinity still remain deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures (Connell 1995). Gender is a process that constrains dispositions that have risen out of historic changes in the organisation of social life that bare much influence over the role of genders today:

> Fear that boys would be feminised through too much influence by women… directs us to changes in organisation of domestic life. Pressure from women against gentry masculinity had been part of the historical dynamic that led to a key institution of bourgeois culture, the ideology and practice of 'separate spheres'. This defined a domestic sphere of action for women, contrasted with a sphere of economic and political action for men. This division was supported by an ideology of natural difference between men and women (Connell 1995, p. 195).

These functions of masculine domination continue to be reproduced in the objective structures of social space, which produce dispositions in both men and women. These then become accepted as self-evident, natural and going without saying, arbitrary prescriptions and proscriptions. They are inscribed in the order of things, and then ostensibly imprint themselves in the order of bodies. Eventually these are taken as 'collective expectations', and 'objective potentialities'. The many infinitesimal 'choices' of the unconscious come together to construct a diminished state of women, recorded in the statistics of the weak representation of women in positions of power for example economic and political power but also other public spaces generally held as men's spaces (Bourdieu 2001) like Western science, technology and sport (Connell 1995; Besnier et al. 2018).[116]

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[116] Institutions coordinated, normalised knowledge and centralised power, and formed a 'biopolitics' and 'biopower' that became central in forming more rational mechanisms and disciplinary methods, working at the level of the body (Foucault 2003). As forms of social power were stabilised through institutions, the mobility in power relations become limited and the strategic relations of people rigid

At the heart of the field of MMA is an *illusio* wrapped in forms of capital with an androcentric history, where participants are caught up in defending the interest of the game and the value of the stakes inherent in its membership (Bourdieu 2000). Masculinities shaped by the field of Praelia MMA are bound up in the ability to endure and partake in brutal body-to-body contact. Violence in this sense, leads to a blindness of its existence by way of valour, honour or that which can be defined as "morally righteous" (Coakley 2016, p. 140). These cultural images and meanings that shape and are shaped by the specific *habitus* and practises of members in Praelia are grounded in common-sense understandings tied to a market logic, where 'hard work', 'toughness', 'self-reliance' and 'dedication' are markers of masculinity (Shuttleworth 1990). MMA serves to 'correct' the increasingly changing and insecure realities of the 21st century. The decreased accessibility to meaningful participation in everyday life is overcome by a turn to a productive masculinity which appears more easily attainable than traditional forms of success tied to masculinity. Nathan demonstrates this logic succinctly:

> Yeah…I was thinking, you know, "One day I'm going to make it, and bring home some millions, and look after everyone." [But] yeah. [I'm still] living with [my] parents. Not that [name of company] is a major dream of mine, it's a decent place to work at, but at least I said to myself, "You know what, work's work, but I'm going to make sure it's enjoyable with my other parts of my life, so I can bear it." You know, you've almost got to... In a way, you almost need to validate your suffering in life, to make sure that it's balanced with something else, to explain it. It's like, "You know what, yes, I work at this job; and yeah, it just pays the bills; but I'm having fun at my nights, I'm seeing my jiu-jitsu guys, I'm training, I'm teaching people. It's justified, in a way."

Nathan has been coaching at Praelia for five years. His thousands of hours accumulating physical and social capital are exchanged for a free membership at the gym. Prior to becoming a coach he was a paying member for five years, so he has just broken even on his 'investment'. He has had over 10 amateur and semi-professional MMA fights (he can remember), competed in dozens of boxing and Muay Thai fights

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(Foucault 1997). These formed a ritualisation of conduct and governmentality which then 'define' the conditions of possibility for acting and thinking (Foucault 1991; Besnier et al. 2018).

and several BJJ tournaments. He has no technical qualifications, but was training to become a paramedic before dropping out. He now works full-time as a customer service operator for a telecommunications company. Nathan was born in Melbourne after his mother, father and two siblings migrated to Australia in the 80s during the Lebanese civil war. His UFC dream was never realised but his focus has now shifted to mentoring and helping the younger members realise their UFC potential. In the above quote Nathan is a typical example of gym members under the age of 29 living with their parents—unless they were overseas or regional migrants—and part of the minimum-income workforce (The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey 2019).[117]

Although these men are not marginal in the classical sense, under the neoliberal turn in capitalism, precarity has increased, further eroding the traditional markers of masculinity. Buying a house, working in the same company, or factory for 40 hours a week for 50 weeks a year until 60 and so on (Wacquant 2016b). MMA offers men in milieus that have become increasingly unstable the sacred space of the gym. The feeling of solidarity and group membership, the elation one feels after finishing a hard session, and the acquisition of specific cultural and symbolic forms of capital. In between the walls, a space is forged where one can endure the feelings of despair. Although for the everyday person MMA does not provide them with a living, it provides them with meaning that work no longer provides. Participants can transition into fields in which their capital is recognised and their specific *habitus* is congruent. For example Ravi volunteers for the state emergency service (SES):

> I was looking at volunteering opportunities... I have been [living] here [in Australia for] 10 years and I was looking for something to do with the community, trying to be more engaged. I looked at the council website, looked at Salvo's, Savers all sort of things. It didn't really strike a chord with me…I wasn't that interested in that sort of volunteering…Someone said, "Look at SES, or CFA [country fire authority], one of those two." I really didn't know what they did. I have heard about CFA more, but

[117] Under the age of 29, Will has been 'steered' by his father to become an accountant. One of the few members who has a means of gaining status and success outside of his participation in MMA. His chances of success in the UFC are outweighed by his chances of becoming an accountant. During his final year of school, Luke was firm about not letting him fight because he wanted him to focus on his education, because he does not believe in fighting as a stable future.

> not SES. Then, I just jumped on Google, went on the website, started looking at it…one thing led to the other and… They had an information session, [I] rocked up and then joined it…there is a lot of stuff that SES has done, search and rescue, storm relief—things like that. So, there is still that active part. So, like, for instance, there is a day like this, a tree might be down and it needs to be chopped out, to clear the road. It's still a bit physical and still outdoors, which I love more. Then, let's say, sorting something at the back doors of the Salvos, you know? I thought this sort of volunteering would be great for me. I can help the community and at the same time, learn those skills. So, all my training has been either in science, or martial arts and stuff and sports. But I am not that skilled outdoors; you know, in navigation, first aid, so you learn a lot of skills in SES, navigation, fire safety, things like that.

The figure of success that cures the crisis of masculinity is the man who can handle himself on the streets, protect and provide for his family while navigating the changing political, economic and cultural conditions tied to masculine identities which now prevail. For example individualism, free will, flexibility and mobility have become prominent prerequisites for most careers and celebrated political ideals, and manifest in the dispositions of people in social relations (Butera 2008). In this sense, the *habitus* of ordinary people becomes more regulated as bodies are civilised (Elias 1987, 2000; Mennell 1990; Shilling 1993).

As everyday life grows increasingly mundane and work comes to occupy most of our lives, sport comes to occupy the quest for excitement (Elias and Dunning 1986). For Ayaz, his participation in BJJ and martial arts makes the rest of life "easy":

> Jits [BJJ] for me is more beneficial now mentally. I look at…the way I try to train and… you can apply those things to everyday life. You know about awareness, about understanding…. Don't make the same mistake every time yeah… When you go to work, do you do the same mistakes at work, are you not listening at work… Apply simple principles of jits you know, about awareness, understand that when you're driving on the road, you're aware. You know where to stop, when to indicate, you know. Jits is the same thing, we're teaching you good body mechanics, good understanding, good problem solving you know. Come here, don't repeat the same thing and maybe you know, it projects later on in life... Put yourself under hardship and you realise… everything else is easy. That's one thing I learnt from [Brazilian] jujitsu and wrestling and doing martial arts is that, I have gangsta workouts,

> everything else is easy in life. Because I know the hardest time is gonna come when I go to wrestle that night and do jits. Everything else is easy.

To know the meaning of ritual practice requires restoring its practical necessity that is related to the real conditions of its genesis, rather than the internal logic of symbolism. That means reconstructing the significance of functions that agents in a definite social formation can confer on a determinate practice "given the practical taxonomies which organise their perception" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 114). Looking from the outside and cutting off practises from the real conditions of their existence reproduces an eternal 'mentality' of the alien other—that is, 'men who practice MMA are attracted to violence'. For MMA participants, given the symbolic equipment available for thinking about one's activity, and in particular, one's language which might constantly refer back to specific logics (e.g. the awareness from martial arts translating to other spheres of life), one tends to think about what they are doing in an enchanted and mystified form, which is largely enchanted by a pragmatism.[118] Ignoring specific functions of ritual practises, fails to inquire into the social and economic conditions of the production of the dispositions that generate practises and collective definitions of the practical functions in which they function to serve.[119]

In Praelia, like the Kabyle peasant, members do not "react to "objective conditions" but to the practical interpretation which [they produce] of those conditions, and the principle of which [are] the socially constituted schemes of [their] *habitus*" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 116). Ritual practises are determined by the material conditions of existence and in practice treated by agents who are endowed with the schemes of perception which are determinant and are themselves determined by the material conditions of existence. The particular relationship between the mode of production and the mode of perception in which MMA is defined, is what the ritual

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[118] Nietzsche's pragmatic conception of reality does away with advancing arguments that have been democratically endorsed then tested in practice. Rather, pragmatism is based on activity as revealing and creating truth—truth that operates through coercion and demagogy (Sullivan 1992).

[119] Durkheim recognised how sport could function to recoup lost energy and remake collective life (Rojek 2014). Due to increased alienation from the natural world, from ourselves, from the wider consciousness of humanity, and from other people's labour and object of labour (Mészáros 1970) under capitalism and the neoliberal order (Besnier et al. 2018), the bonds formed in MMA provides its members with at least some resistance to increasing alienation.

apparatus functions to resolve. Nathan explained this as justifying ones "suffering in life".[120] Precarious masculinities are informed by and generate practises, shaped by systems of inseparable cognitive and evaluative structures that organise the vision of the world and accord with the taste and distaste, the senses, sense of beauty, sense of reality, sense of direction and common sense (Bourdieu 1977).

Nothing Manlier Than Standing Over a Man and Hitting Him from Mount: Sexualisation, Heteronormativity and Violence

> The thing about martial arts is you're in such a primal game where... every time you gain a point or you win a certain position, it's a bit deeper than, kicking a ball around someone or stepping someone in rugby. If you pick someone up and put them on their back, it's got a lot more meaning to it... than scoring a goal in soccer… I've always said that the reason that I think I'm drawn to... any sort of combat sport is it's more primal... The only reason a goal in soccer or basketball, means something is because everyone around you says it means something… because there was a game invented with rules.
>
> But if you really take it all the way back to like the real primal ancestry you've only got a select few sports where you're really proving you're better than someone else... that's running, ah weight lifting, javelin, ah you know, throwing sports, and fighting, you know wrestling, boxing, pankration. So it's very deeply rooted in your ancestry and as human beings if you're gonna play a game that's really true to yourself, it's almost, hate to say it, but spiritual, you hit someone in the head, you have physically taken your fist and done something, in effect the idea is to actually hurt that person.
>
> You don't mean it, it's just a game that we play to simulate something that our ancestors were doing thousands of years ago and still are doing to this day... you almost forget about wanting to hurt people, now you just want to improve yourself... you want to, not only improve yourself but you want to prove to yourself that you can get better, and the way I see it is you take something really primal but you add a

[120] As the traditional markers of adulthood have become tenuous, working-class young people have increasingly embraced a model of therapeutic selfhood (preoccupied with emotional and psychic repair) used as a cultural resource to ascribe meaning and order to one's life amidst the uncertainty of a flexible economy (Silva 2012).

> lot of science and technique to it... it's almost like, when I watch fighting sometimes I just think it's like watching a ballet but really primal you know, the movements that we make, it's all around being efficient, it's all around deceiving people, it's all around doing things without other people noticing you're doing things.

Cameron draws on several themes that emerge in martial arts and combat sport research, for example monastic devotion and self-improvement (Wacquant 2004a; Spencer 2012b; Brown and Jennings 2013; Spencer and Sánchez García 2013). I focus my attention on his attempts to naturalise MMA with manly competition, whilst *de-naturalising* other sports broadly. Cam suggests an absolute divide between nature and non-nature and represents people and sets of events in static terms (Elias 1987). Drawing on an imagined history of competition, MMA and other "primal" sports are fetishised as the purest form of "proving you're better than someone else". The scientisation[121] of fighting makes it more than senseless violence and something akin to an art form.[122] Ballet is tied in a 'sort of, but not quite' way, the distinguisher factor being the primitivism of MMA, in this sense translated to brutal body-to-body contact, dominance and submissiveness. The omission of women from his statement "the game we play", meaning not ballet, draws on women's near total absence. Historical analysis of female masculinities and sexuality demonstrate how masculinity was tied to the male body to eliminate female masculinity.[123] The

[121] As the bodies of athletes have become literal laboratory specimens, their structure and potential is measured in precise quantitative terms. The materialistic interpretation of sportive bodies and their machinelike dimension are accessible to rational analysis through skin folds, precise nutrition and training regimes (Maguire 1991a). The UFC PI is a perfect example of this in MMA.

[122] Primitivism as an analytical device has been used in areas of research such as political philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies and art. Its meaning is defined as a position in which the ideal human society is in an original or natural state (Price and Cameron 2010).

[123] Scientists and social theorists of late-Victorian England, drew on the sexual systems of plant classification by Linnaeu (the grandfather of taxonomy), and sought out and extolled biological evidence of sexual divisions of function in all forms of life. A wider shift towards taxonomy of gender occurred and gender differentiation fulfilled ideological roles of autonomy and control in an increasingly changing world. Man was figured as both rational, self-interested actor in full control of his destiny, and also "as a mere cog within the larger machinery of industrial labour". At the same time he was mindless, "he was also being celebrated, in accordance with the ideology of laissez-faire economics…in full control of his own activities in the marketplace, and capable of rising upward through the social ranks solely through the exertion of his own powers" (Shuttleworth 1990, p. 54).

prominence of certain forms of masculinity notably rise to power at the turn of the century when:

> White [upper and] middle-class ideals of manliness were being challenged by working-class men, black men, immigrant men, and even feminist women. This challenge from all sides prompted white middle-class men to attempt to "remake manhood"… "to formulate new ideologies of manhood—ideologies not of 'manliness' but of 'masculinity'"… the new models of masculinity did oppose "excessive femininity" in both men and women, the new models must also have opposed masculinity in women and attempted to tie manhood and manliness and masculinity back to the male body in powerful ways (Halberstam 1998, pp. 49-50).

A better understanding of violence in sport requires a better understanding of gender ideology and issues of masculinity in culture (Lance 2005). As sport generally went from a recreation pleasure to serious pursuit, it became a "metaphor for, and a reflection of, everyday life in capitalist society" and underwent a social amplification due to its win-lose binary (Collins 2013, p. 5).[124] MMA reflects the necessary values used by the dominant social group in order to maintain hegemony, despite most of the participants in Praelia being largely positioned within dominated social groups, and the forms of masculinity they cultivate are far from dominant (Besnier et al. 2018). MMA becomes understood as a natural space for certain men, and women's exclusion is framed around gendered expectations. Ravi explains this point concisely:

> There are great [Olympic and International] female wrestlers, but I don't know. It's very close and personal and it's scary when you just watch it from the outside, that

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Gender differentiation fulfilled the ideological role and allowed the male sex to renew their faith in personal autonomy and control. In this sense, masculinity was (and remains) intimately tied with productivity, in which men's masculinity is called into question when they are unable to remain productive or employed.

[124] Hardes (2019) contends that the survival of boxing was dependant on and championed through its rationalisation as scientific. Similarly, when the UFC was bought by Zuffa, in order to survive bankruptcy it was reintroduced along a "health agenda and the scientific rationale… explicitly emerg[ing] within a liberalising economic context that focused on the production of capital" (Hardes 2019, p. 3).

> might be one reason… But in Krav Maga, it's totally different… ages, nationality, race, genders, things like that—[but] in MMA, I have seen that it's a bit narrow in contact sports.[125]

Many forms of social difference that operate are ideologically reduced to gender differences between men and women (Besnier et al. 2018). For example, patterns of gender described as performative or 'doing gender' (Butler 1990), require a lot of time and effort to allow a person to achieve a masculinisation of the male body and the feminisation of the female body. Rather than gendered identities being an expression of natural differences, they are based on suppressions of bodily similarities and exaggerations of bodily differences (Connell 1987, 1995; Shilling 1993; Bourdieu 2001).[126] Brutal body-to-body contact becomes naturalised with the male body, and something that is scary for "females… looking [at it] from the outside". The production of men and women as unequal social gender categories operates by converting average differences into absolute differences (Connell 1987; Shilling 1993). The differences between women's and men's bodies (e.g. tying men's bodies to violence or brutal contact in sport) are central to the ideological construction of social definitions of gender. The use of a biological logic alone, cannot sustain gender categories which require continued effort to maintain. For example, homosocial rituals such as hazing or aggressive sparring (Nash 2017) can alert one to how they experience their bodies (Connell 1987) and remind women and men that they do not 'belong' at Praelia MMA.

Ideological artefacts of dominant capitalist and neoliberal ideas surround understanding, and operate at the site of the body in dispositions. Competition, efficiency, self-improvement and self-responsibility come to shape the very constitution of personhood—including gender (Besnier et al. 2018). The call to an ancient world in which competition is glorified and violence is viewed as art, is reminiscent of fascist ideals (Brett 2017). There are disturbing parallels between MMA and the worship of power, fetishism of spectacle, dominance and submission

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[125] Krav Maga is a combat system that was formed in the late 1940s and adopted by the Israeli defence force. In the 1960s it was adapted to suit civilian needs and is now used as self-defence against hand-to-hand combat, as well as knives, sticks/poles and guns. Training is always conducted in real-life simulation form (www.kravmaga.com.au).

[126] This is extended into behaviours of men and women too, in for example displays of emotion.

in social relations and so on. Fascism has no separate economic system and is based on "capitalism in a profound state of crisis" (Klein 1993, p. 254).[127]

Heteronormative gender practices permeate the organisation of social space and the dispositions of participants. Everyday rhetoric is unconsciously weaved through interactions and emphasises the importance of male sexual conquest, which not only goes unquestioned and taken-for-granted, but is a heteronormative homogenisation of sexual practice. During a demonstration in class, we were circled up around Nath as he described how to do an effective wrestling takedown. As he explained, he highlighted an imaginary centreline of his partner's fighting stance, which one must step through in order to perform the technique properly. "The most important part of this technique is penetrating," in a completely natural way he continued, "well in this technique and in life as well", he said with a smile. The symbolic importance of penetration is part in parcel of the internalised relations of dominance that prop up the hegemonic masculine practises of our society. By and large, men in Western society understand sex in terms of penetration and orgasm as well as domination and control. Taking control over another mans body and owning their manhood is the ultimate form of domination and feminisation (Bourdieu 2001):

> Tyler was in the centre of the mats wrapping up his hand. He has severely weakened hand strength from years of grappling related injuries, which now require him to always keep his hands and wrist wrapped to slow down continual degradation. Standing in a semi-circle around Tyler were Lev, Will and a few other young members. Tyler was explaining his fighting experiences, "there's nothing more manlier than standing over a man and he can't move and you're just hitting from mount." Laughter ensued as the rest of the class slowly joined the group to start training.

Violence and maleness are maintained as natural through a long process of production and reproduction of certain (gendered) norms, that come to be unconscious, as categories of thought, produced by a collective history (Bourdieu 2000). Tyler completely omits women's participation from MMA in order to accentuate his own manliness and the MMA *habitus* he has formed (through his investment of time and economic capital), which is a relatively useless cultural capital

[127] This is not to make a leap and link MMA to causing fascism in anyway.

in relation to hegemonic masculinity outside the gym. It is no wonder that in the final year of my time at the gym he went from a low paid, insecure retail job at an outdoor clothing store, to becoming a police officer.[128] Violence and domination are exalted as the epitome of manliness, to which nothing comes close, "there's nothing more manlier than standing over a man and he can't move and you're just hitting from mount". For the man underneath being struck, his manliness is 'taken' from him through domination. Gender and *habitus* are linked through a firm anchor at the level of the body, as pure nature (Krais 2006). For example Tyler explains his hot blooded teen urges:

> Tyler had only been back in Australia for a week after a few weeks in the British Isles. He had only visited twice in the last 10 years since moving to Melbourne with his family… Before Tyler left he was practising combat sambo for a year. It wasn't until he arrived in Melbourne that he started practising BJJ at Praelia MMA. He also started playing soccer throughout his teens, but eventually had to stop, because as he explained it, "I was becoming way too violent for it. And as a teen you're hot blooded."

When women have stood over other women who cannot move and struck them into unconsciousness, their femininities were not proven. Despite women embracing the sport ethic, playing with injuries,[129] taking risks and so on, unlike men, they rarely link toughness, physicality and aggression to their gendered identities (Coakley et al 2009). We can say that women and men are not treated in the same way, but this errs on the side of a static and predictable, machine like social world rather than one with agents whose *habitus* are creative and cannot merely be conceived as an internalised program of action. Rather, the socialised individual acts within the horizon of

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[128] There are at least five police officers and other public service men at the gym, in which the cultural capital from an MMA habitus might be valued. When Tyler was accepted into the Victorian police he was telling a group of us how he was excited to "put it on" some of his superiors, who trained in BJJ at the academy. Put it on them is an expression essentially meaning a demonstration of one's skill or dominance over another person.

[129] I sustained numerous injuries, from nagging injuries to some that affected my everyday functioning, however, none were out of the ordinary expectations one would sustain from sport, e.g. my inability to place weight on my toes due to permanent pain from repeated injuries (8 of the members (57%) I interviewed reported no serious injuries such as broken limbs).

possibilities are delimited by the social and historical context within which one lives (Krais 2006). So when women like Lilly show up and train consistently they must be congratulated because they fall outside the collective expectations of their gender. Long after women's inclusion into sport, the social conditions that produced the male-body-as-superior and conflated maleness with violence may continue to live on (Bourdieu 2001). The symbolic order of gender—as a scheme of perception—constructs the body only as a biological reality, which can then be categorised into the division of male and female. The social construction of masculinity and femininity shape the body, define how it is perceived, and form the body's habits and possibilities for expression of the individual's identity (Krais 2006). Bodies are shaped by the historical material forces in which one lives, but this does not make them malleable like clay (Connell 1987). Tess's experience of MMA highlights how biological and social conditions limit and shape opportunity, but strictly speaking do not predict outcomes.

After an MMA session, Niko and I were hanging out with Tess while she was on her shift at reception.[130] We got onto the topic of MMA and I asked why she was not currently training. She explained,

> "I only did one session a few years ago. It wasn't for me. But, also Nathan was creeping me out. He's like my brother and he gets too touchy and close, it just feels wrong". Niko replied, "If I was a girl I wouldn't want to train with Nath either." He turned to me, "Nath is you know, Nath, you know what Nath is like." I replied back, "Yeah, he touches me pretty closely." Then I asked, "What makes it different do you think?" Niko responded, "It's different how you train guys compared to girls. You have to be more careful." Niko replied, without any further explanation.

The internalisation of the body as a sexual object and the sexualisation of touch in homosocial spaces, contrasts between touching amongst men being always seen in heteronormative ways, contrary to men and women touching being interpreted as sexual (Mierzwinski, et al. 2014). There is much difficulty and discomfort in managing these relations and the overwhelming uneasiness influenced Tess's decision to withdraw. The displeasure of the creepy, touchy closeness led to feelings

[130] Luke did not like us doing this because it caused congestion but he especially did not like it when Niko sat behind the desk.

of "this wasn't for me".[131] The internalisation of the body-object, the objectification performed through discourse and gaze, is a structure that exits at the heart of interactions in the form of schemes of perceptions that are inscribed in the bodies of people in interactions. The schemes of perception in which a group embeds itself (e.g. tough/wimp, powerful/weak, fit/unfit, muscly/fat, healthy/unhealthy, ripped/flabby, manly/girly, hot/ugly) are fundamental structures that are interposed between agents and their body. The reactions and representations people give or perceive themselves through are constructed according to these schemes and bodies are evaluated depending on their position in social space. These are naturalised and hierarchically ordered, often the prevailing taxonomies of the dominant oppose those of the dominated (Bourdieu 2001). The experiences of individuals in society are heterogeneous and contradictory. Women encompass practises of independence and receive recognition for their effort, but the opposite is also true in which women (and men) are subordinated by masculine domination (Krais 2006).

The proximity from which symbolic meanings are recognised from the material origin from which they originate is taken-for-granted:

> It was the last drill before class, Nathan asked Sam to help him demonstrate. As Sam was throwing punches and moving forward, he almost hit Nathan in the groin. That's when Will yelled out "Oh! Watch out!" A few people laughed. Most of the class laughed. Two women had been attending Monday night training for about a month. Jane laughed, then Jenny lent over and very quietly said, "I don't get it." Jane didn't explain and continued to observe the drill. …. At the end of the class, everyone bowed to the coach, and then took turns shaking hands with the coach and each other. Jane and Jenny had lined up last and came to shake Nathan's hand. Nath thanked them together, "thank you girls, hope you had fun." For the women it was meant to be fun, but for the men, it seemed to be a serious matter.

There is a risk of being 'outed' when one is less secure in their position within the overall scheme of things. In a previous interaction, Jenny had to take a break from the warm-up. Her face was bloodshot and she was puffing heavily. Once we got a break I

[131] This is by no means the case for all women or men, nor is it the same everywhere. Tess's habitus and physical capital like many other women, led her to boxing opposed to grappling. It is helpful here to view gender not merely as individual attributes or styles but also as collective agency both constrained and enabled by social structures (Messerschmidt and Messner 2018).

asked her if she was okay, she told me she was having issues with her hand. Then Jane chimed in, "she also needs to get an ECG scan, and she hasn't gotten it. And which bitch at the office reminds you everyday?" Jane's momentary pause heightened the suspense, with her exaggerated bodily expressions timed at the precise moment she exclaimed proudly, "this bitch!" Her upper torso bent slightly over her left hip, whilst her legs were still in line with her pelvis and her head bent to the left. Her body formed a K like shape, and she pointed to herself with her right index finger as she emphasised the word bitch. Laughing to herself she said, "sorry, no filters". I chuckled along with her before I noticed some slight discomfort in Jenny's forced smile, she was looking down at the floor and blushing. "All good" I replied, attempting 'smooth over' the conversation.

Jenny was 'outed' on multiple occasions during high stakes interactions. Experiencing shame as a dominated member in this space, she was forced to perceive herself through the eyes of the dominant (Wacquant 2004b). The dominant members within the gym bring into play specific symbolic goods that the dominated are unable to. Those near the apex (like Tyler) defend their own position, while they also defend the symbolic underpinnings of their position (Paulle 2013).[132] The creation of mutual focus surrounding collective symbols produces a higher intensity of EE in the space (Collins 2004). The symbolic goods brought into play were grounded in a logic of healthism, in which bodily anxieties are exacerbated, promoting the individual as the agent responsible for change. Health becomes a matter of personal responsibility and the subject of evaluation of the self and other, and the degree of control in relation to health practises (Kristensen, et al. 2016).

Conversely, Lilly is accepted at Praelia, although atypical it is not unusual broadly speaking, but rather uni-linear (Mierzwinski, et al. 2014). Lilly conforms to the accepted norms of the sport ethic (Hughes and Coakley 1991), taking part in the quest for exciting significance (Maguire 1991b; Mierzwinski, et al. 2014). She exhibits a masculinity that is in distinction to men's masculinity in the space (Halberstam 1998) and a femininity that is unlike the culturally exalted woman. Luke

[132] The unconscious maintenance of invisible structures (and symbolic resources) that create our schemes of perceptions and are embodied below the level of consciousness (in our habitus) and expressed through our dispositions, sees men overwhelmingly overrepresented in violence against women, men and themselves.

is accepting and encouraging, indifferent and discouraging, and contradictory in his approach towards women's participation. A meme he reposted reflects how in the gym he can encourage Lilly, and then situate women in gendered norms surrounded by bodyweight ideals and oppose femininities through a particular cultural zeitgeist.

Image 9.0

In the above post, Luke begins by agreeing with the meme "100%" then poses the question, "when will women be happy" which he goes on to answer "NEVER". Pictured in the meme is Jordan Peterson. The meme reads, "Peterson completely destroys feminist narrative and dangerous it is." This backlash against feminism assumes women have obtained equal rights or an unfair advantage over men (Birrell 2000) and represents normative femininities as indecisive and nagging, as well as positioning women outside of the intellectual and public domain (Drakett, Ricket, Day and Milnes 2018).[133] Media practices are particularly active sites that reproduce

[133] Peterson is a clinical psychologist who has crossed-over into MMA due to his ties with Joe Rogan who is a commentator on the UFC and the creator of the Joe Rogan Experience, which currently has 8.41 million YouTube subscribers and according to Rogan has he has over 190 million monthly downloads (Koetsier 2020). One night after MMA, Nathan was explaining to me the work of Peterson

and construct masculinist hegemony around sport and emphasised femininity (Birrell 2000; see Messner, Duncan and Jensen 1993; Wensing and Bruce 2003 for detailed outline and Weaving 2013 specifically for an analysis of women in MMA).[134] In particular, Internet memes exist in a wide range of formats and are considered as groups of content because they share common characteristics of content, form or stance; are often created in awareness of each other, and are circulated by many Internet users (see Yoon 2016; Drakett et al. 2018 for a more comprehensive explanation of Internet memes and the emerging body of research). The Internet represents an extension of offline interactions and has become a significant component of people's lives forming part of the fabric of everyday experience (Hine 2012). The caveat on women's success and acceptance is relationally limited to how their femininity is perceived. The structures of gender can be seen in for example Will's description of women in the UFC:

> I hate Nunes… I hate the way she talks…she pulls out [of a fight], saying she doesn't feel good, but then she's cleared to fight. She's a bit weird. She was definitely scared in that Schevchenko fight when she pulled out on the day, like she's medically cleared to fight. No MMA fighter gets to the fight like 100 percent healthy. There's always niggles and stuff. It's about how you fight through these injuries…and I don't feel like she does that…I always like the underdog story…Nunes and Cyborg would be interesting, but they just look like men, obviously respect, hats off to them.

Women's accomplishments as athletes are often represented in trivial and marginalised ways. Depictions of women's participation and involvement in sport are often viewed as ambivalent and tragic. Women are constructed as unnatural athletes and female athletes are constructed as unnatural women (Birrell 2000; Wensing and Bruce 2003). In Western culture "the male/female divide has operated as a crucial site

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who was in Melbourne for a talk he was giving based on his book 12 Rules For Life, which Nathan had read and had purchased tickets to attended, "it speaks about focusing on your family and yourself, focusing on the individual, because often people focus too much on the big things, because they're compassionate and care, but then they can't get a grip on their own life, but once you get a grip on yourself, then you can fix society and everything like that." These neoliberal ideals fit nicely within the logic of the rationalised MMA space.

[134] Social media is considered a new media form.

for ideological deployment… it has been articulated through a fairly constant set of interrelated oppositions, most notably those of mind/body and culture/nature, its formulations are never stable" (Shuttleworth 1990, p. 52). This perpetuates the dominant ideological projections of female weakness and their subordination to their body. This comes into form in the everyday interactions between agents at Praelia, as manliness and heteronormativity become structuring structures in the schemes of perceptions between the factory walls of the gym. Commonsense or the self-evidences shared by all within the limits of a particular social universe ensure a consensus about the meaning of the world, but also make confrontation, dialogue, competition and conflict possible against the oppositions structuring of perception (Bourdieu 2000). The collective symbols (or cultural capital) are the symbolic possessions and valued objects in rituals of the gym, which reinforce or elevate the position of those who value the same collective symbol, thus making it easy to evoke it in an interaction in order to achieve a high degree of focus around it (Collins 2012). Rather than attributing cultural capital to the 'qualities' of an individual, they might be better understood as attributes of positions within varying types of ritual chains of a micro-level interaction order (Paulle 2013).

The Final Round

So far I have attempted to demonstrate that the relations of gender reproduced in the gym are at times unequal and hierarchical. MMA on its own cannot reproduce hegemony, however because it is grounded in mass culture, media, politics and economy, it assists in maintaining the values of a neoliberal capitalist society, in which individualisation, healthism, rationalisation and work ethic come to be valued as cultural capital or collective symbols in the gym and are inculcated in the bodies of members. Cultural capital is at the fore in (re)producing a hierarchy within Praelia. By and large cultural capital is central to the gelling of participants engaged in MMA. The attributes of positions (e.g. physical ability, age, ethnicity, class and gender) act upon agents as processes that constrain and limit dispositions. Hegemonic institutions and the people within them who stand to gain the most, tie broad political and economic interests, such as state reforms and decrease of social provisions with for example nationalism, which then emerge within the everyday minutiae of social

interaction. Structures that produce dispositions of male superiority are rendered invisible and ripple through all spheres of social life.[135] Women in the gym find themselves needing to balance a unique set of dispositions that may constrict or limit their potential to remain committed to training in such a heavily male dominated space. By merely engaging in MMA, we are unable to breakaway from the power relations impressed and reproduced at the site of the body and at the level of the institution. Creating conditions in the gym that shift focus from forms of capital that are based on androcentric games—which certain masculinities and femininities are traditionally unable to take part in—is not an endeavour of the individual alone.

Male dominated institutions are developed around bodily restrictions. The structural origins of modern sport were organised for boys and men developing a muscular version of masculinity, and tied into war and health of the nation. PE remains the most segregated subject in schools, its organisation continues to be embedded within gender ideologies of male bodily expression and female bodily restriction (Shilling 1993; Collins 2013). If we look to solve these issues as individuals merely acting to resist practice, then we will repeatedly arrive at the same conclusion:

> The potential conflicts between different concepts of order and ways of behaving generate—for the female agent—questions as to the 'naturalness' of established practices. In these experiences of conflict, doxa will either be transformed into orthodoxy or yield to rebellion and conscious confrontation. It is here that social practice allows space for resistance and change. However, the individual's conscious awareness of the doxa of the gender order does not by itself lead to fundamental social change… that simply writing against the gender order, and also performing individual acts of deviant behaviour, would be enough to overthrow it… Above all, however, when arguing in the framework of Bourdieu's social theory, profound social change results not from a revolt of the great individual, but from the political action of many individuals: from *social movements* (Krais 2006, p. 131 original emphasis).

[135] Like the diminished state of women in public life and waged labour in poor-paid segments of the workforce (Birrell 2000).

Under certain conditions, the MMA (and sports) space may be a site for contestation against commonsense understandings and reproduction of unequal gender relations, in which marginalised and subordinated masculinities, and femininities may resist the socially qualified gender norms, as capital accumulating subjects (Crews & Lennox 2019). However the extent this capital is recognised is relational (Bourdieu 1998). Sport is a terrain which makes possible a development of critical and theoretical discourses as well as understanding body-based knowledge that has the potential to destabilise and counter dominant concepts of gendered identity and domination (Brown 2006). These spaces can be both oppressive and enabling, where discriminatory practices (like racism, sexism and homophobia) can occur and marginalisation is produced and enforced. They can also become countrespaces for diverse, resistant and oppositional practices (van Ingen 2003).[136]

Whilst I appreciate the burgeoning field of alternative masculinities studies that attempt to capture the complexity of social life and gender *in situ*, there needs to be more done to understand how adequate change can be made. I am resistant to explanations of hegemonic masculinity (whilst acknowledging its flaws) as too structural and therefore not *useful*. Anderson (2009) suggests the co-existence of inclusive and dominant masculinity undermines the existence of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is at times framed as being produced by a simplified form of hegemony that is defined as men "looking up the hierarchy" (p. 94). On one hand gender is better conceptualised to sit within relations of power (not maintained through coercion) and reproduced through ideological dominance that serves the interest of dominant groups taken up as "societal common sense even by those who are disempowered by them" (Birrell 2000, p. 9). But this is only one side of the issue. Hegemony can be understood in simplified Bourdieusian terms as those who are the predominant demographic continuing to elect into positions of authority

[136] MMA can also foster well-being at different levels through various forms of cultivation; self-cultivation, shared cultivation, social cultivation and ecological cultivation. These are based on long-term and even lifelong development of human beings individually or within groups, in which the goal is to: cultivate mind-body relationships and development of character; belonging, sense of care towards others and solidarity within diverse communities; transmission of cultural values and symbolic meanings within local community and broad society; and sow seeds that create an awareness with nature and environmental awareness and embodied practises (Pedrini and Jennings 2021).

those who possess the species of capital they lack (Wacquant 2004b) which does not merely exist at the site of ideological reproduction but the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities (Gramsci 1971). In this sense, understanding the context that inclusive masculinities arise—that is, the complex relationship of social, biological, psychological processes affecting and affected by one another within political and economic conditions (Elias 1978, 1987; Connell 1987, 1995; Maguire 1991a, 1991b, 1993).

Anderson (2009) suggests that inclusive masculinities are mutually exclusive from hegemonic masculinity. However, the existence of inclusive masculinities does not necessarily mean that hegemonic masculinity or that gender ideology is a thing of the past. Hegemony has two faces, one face is domination bound up with the state and civil society and the other to designate a historical phase in which a given group has moved on beyond the position of defending its economic position and aspires into a position of leadership in the political and social arena (Gramsci 1973). The somatised social relationship of social law that is converted into an embodied law cannot be suspended by a simple effort of will founded on an awakening of consciousness (Bourdieu 2001).[137] Thus, understanding gender and masculinity through theories of practice better capture how gender operates in sport (and broader institutions). With the aim of opening up where we might look for answers and change harmful practises and institutions within civil society and the State (Gramsci 1973; Burawoy 2019). I now want to turn to the next chapter in which I will document setting foot in Praelia as novitiate and becoming a native. The chronological order is secondary and I place the narrative at the heart of the chapter to best capture my own gendered subjectivity, practises of capital accumulation and adherence to the doxa of the field.

[137] For a more comprehensive discussion on the divergence and similarities between Bourdieu and Gramsci see Burawoy (2019). Where Gramsci (like Marx and Feminist scholars) place emphasis on consciousness raising practice, opposed to Bourdieu who emphasises an embodied *habitus* counter training.

Chapter Nine: A Homage to the French Hammer

On a typical afternoon before MMA training I would rush home from the PhD office, have a quick body shower, get into my training clothes, fill my water bottle up, and get into my car. If I was feeling low, I'd start *tuning up* for training with a search for music, I mostly go for up-tempo stuff. Sometimes Techno or Acid with thumping bass that hits on four quarter notes at over 120 beats per minute—other times I'd listen to hard 90s Hip-Hop like Big L. This time it was Rage Against the Machine—Down Rodeo Drive. On my way to the gym I'd start thinking about who might be there, and who I might spar. I would think about sparring Will, Ravi and Lev. Sometimes while waiting at a red light I'd practice a combo I've created and punch to the timing of the music. I would feel ridiculous doing it and laugh at myself as I thought about 90s fitness instructional videos. Being in the car for 45 minutes and in traffic could turn me loopy. The factory was surrounded by typical Australiana suburban scenery—dying yellow grass and flat plains. Gum trees were planted on the nature strip and there were vast expanses of unused farming land. Other industrial factories surrounded the suburb. Old Paul's milk trucks from the 70s sat in the factory nearby. Car repairs and a bus depot up the road. People mostly drove utes, modified Holdens or Japanese imports from the late 90s and early 2000s. There were a lot of suburban four-wheel drives too. When I arrived and made my way up the driveway toward the factory roller shutter, and the music would get louder and my nerves would build. I can generally tell who's in charge of the music depending on what's playing. 1990s Pop House music that reminded me of Paul Johnson's 'Get Get Down' was likely to be Luke. Whereas U.S. West Coast gangster rap like Daz and Kurupt from the Dogg Pound was likely to be Caleb.

As I made my way to reception to sign-in, Tess and Niko were there as usual. I entered halfway through their conversation. Niko was hunched over the counter, and Tess was standing about arms length away from him with her arms crossed listening intently. Idol gossip as usual. When Tess asked me how I was, I replied with a wide eyed expression and enunciated certain portions of my sentence in order to make her laugh and distract her from the

unease I felt about how I was feeling. Partly because I know I have a hard session to come, and partly from nerves. On my way out of the reception I like to take in the décor. This predominantly working class MMA gym best resembles its ethos in the gigantic posters that hang over its walls. The famous photo of Muhammad Ali standing over Sonny Liston sprawled out on his back is hanging on the wall over the boxing ring. This image is certainly not unique. It can probably be found in most boxing and MMA gyms. Not for Ali's political stances against the Vietnam War or his civil rights activism, but as a static, apolitical symbol of athletic greatness. Only metres away from Ali, a poem is hung by the Victorian Era poet, William Henley: *Out of the night that covers me…I thank whatever gods may be, For my unconquerable soul…I have not winced nor cried aloud…My head is bloody, but unbowed…I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul*. Praelia is covered in posters of past UFC and MMA fighters who are all currently retired. They peaked during the mid to late 2000s. The posters were hung back in 2009 when most of the fighters were still competing in the UFC.

By the time I get on the mats I'm good—nerves cleared, energy high. The transition from my music in the car to the music and environment of the gym get me most the way there. Whilst I'm warming up, I'm moving to the beat of the song. I coach myself, punching 1, 2, 3 and kick. Make sure my elbow is pointed up when I throw my jab, my fist clenches at the last minute before hitting the bag, my chin is tucked safely behind my shoulder, then I rip my left arm back to my chin, pivot on my left foot, swing my right arm down and launched my awkward right body kick onto the bag. Then attempt to return to a balanced position that gives me options to pivot away from strikes. All the things that I don't have time to think about in the heat of sparring.

Depending on who's there on the night my warm-up might only last for ten minutes and I end up chatting until the session starts. Other times I get lost in the warm-up only to snap me out of it when Nath, Tyler or Luke yell. This night's warm-up was spent in the thick of conversation. We were focusing on sparring anyway. We gathered in the middle of the mats. Niko asked Nath to wrap his hands and we all stood around talking. Mugz and Niko got into an

argument about what to call Cameron. Mugz said he should be referred to as "Singaporean Cam" because he was born in Singapore. Niko said he should be called "Asian Cam". Then Niko said to Mugz, "and what do you mean he's Singaporean Cam, he's Chinese." They then turned to Cam and asked him where he was born, he started going off on a rant, his face reddened, and voice loudened, "my daddy was a sailor, and my mumma was a mermaid…" he started pacing, his arms flailing in a marching fashion, then he turned his back to everyone and walked away. He continued talking but it was indistinct and vague. Mugz stood with a confused look. Then he scrunched face and smirked before tilting his head back and asked, "what?" Niko replied nonchalantly through the veil of confusion, "I don't know, I zoned out. I wasn't listening." They ignored him and continued to talk. No one understood the reference he made. Perhaps an all too familiar feeling emerged from his years of being bullied for being the "fat Asian kid" at school. His 'difference' was the subject of a conversation he was excluded from.

Then Niko came up to me, "roll your shorts up, why do you want them up to your knees? Just roll them like girls roll up their skirt in school." He pulled up my t-shirt and rolled them up for me like a dad would his son. Everyone kept commenting on my Muay Thai shorts. I had bought them 10 years ago from Thailand, and had no idea why people were so vested in them. I'm not sure what the joke was. Will kept saying that he loved my shorts. Mugz was teasingly asking if I was "sponsored by redbull bro?" There were two bulls going head to head pasted on the crotch of my shorts. We started off with 3 rounds of skipping with push-ups and leg raises in between rounds. It was on Nath's count. At one point during the exercise he stopped counting to see if people were paying attention to the count and waited for everyone to stop and hold their position until he started counting again. We drilled striking techniques before sparring. Nath told everyone not to punch each other's gloves and to go for one another's chin or face to warm up the neck before sparring. "When you're sparring or in a fight and there are punches coming at you, it's a lot different from when you're on the bag or doing mits [pad

work]". Earlier in the day he had posted a similar picture in the group message thread reiterating this point.

We started off sparring boxing only. I was sparring Niko, he hit me with hard shots. Every shot he landed was heavy and hurt. He kept head hunting me. He wasn't fast or fit, but hit hard. He disguised his punches well and I couldn't see them coming. When our round finished he had a face of disappointment, I asked him, "you all good?" he replied, "yeah I just feel like shit because I used to be so good." He wasn't bad, he wasn't super technical but he had good range, timing and kept walking forward. During the break between sparring, Tyler had turned up late and was telling all of us how he's the fastest quick draw in his class on the force. "I got the fastest time. The teachers love me." He didn't say much more, neither did anyone else, we kind of nodded along. Then he and I were about to start rolling. We bumped fists and away we went. He secured guard tremendously quickly then began punching the shit out of me. Hard shots to the head and body to soften me up. "There aren't many people that can do to you what I can do to you", he told me in between punches. Then he transitioned into a more dominant position and continued to strike me. I exploded out in a desperate attempt to free myself from the increasingly claustrophobic feeling, I was suffocating from the pressure of his body and strikes. As I moved he caught me in a (triangle) choke and I tapped "early", "why are you tapping so quick" he asked disappointedly. I was exhausted and battered. The round ended and I partnered up with Niko. He punched me even harder than Tyler did. Then he got me in an armbar, "don't tap so quick, I'm not gonna hurt you."

We took a break before it was time to spar MMA. I partnered up with Nath. I'm not sure when it was that he hit me but my nose started bleeding. He struck my glove loose, so I stopped to fix it. I noticed droplets of blood dripping and then the sudden taste of iron overwhelmed my mouth. At this point Nath started helping me put my glove on. Then I went to the stands to wipe my nose with a tissue. He asked me if I wanted to stop. I asked him if he minds the blood. He replied he's used to having Sam's blood all over him. So we continued sparring, my face was covered in blood as well as my

gloves, and I could feel it dripping, affecting my breathing. At rounds end we hugged and he laughed and put his arm around me.

He walked me over to Tyler, "look who has joined the club." Tyler looked and didn't say anything. Maybe more concerned because of the amount of blood. "You look like the baddest mother fucker right now. Dude you look like a massacre. Great sparring man, really good technique. I could never get my footing and you had great range." At the time I hardly had time to register what was happening, I replied automatically, "thanks man. I learnt so much from you, always pushing me and helping me out with my footwork." After I went to spar Cameron, he looked at me in a slight horror and said, "dude I don't think you realise how much blood there is everywhere." He didn't want to spar me with all the blood on me. He waited while I wiped my face clean and my nose had stopped bleeding, then he took the tissue from me and wiped my face for me. Then we started sparring.

In this chapter I aim to explore the process of becoming an MMA native at the level of everyday participation. The formation of my specific *habitus* in the field takes centre stage in relation to the emotional energy that facilitates everyday interaction. I tease out the "trained capacities and patterned propensities to think, feel and act in determinate ways", which guide "creative responses to the constraints and solicitations" of the extant milieus within Praelia MMA (Wacquant (2016, p. 65). With the aim of bringing to light the subtle emotional energy, often ignored as emotion but facilitates human interactions (Collins 2004). Furthermore, this eventually led me to develop a proficiency in the tunnel of violence under specific conditions in Praelia, which under alternative conditions (a different gym, sport, time and stakes) this may not have been possible. Firstly my entry, commitment and investment in the space helped me form relationships that eventually led to my 'ability' to withstand pain and injury within the context of MMA. My social capital was the foundation in which I built my physical capital within the space. I use this chapter as an opportunity to write an ethnographic account that moves away from strict academic parlance. Inspired by the ethnographic work of Wacquant (2004a), Paulle (2013) and Desmond (2016) I shift to a free writing form, which buttresses on the theoretical framework established in the previous chapters and I embed references

within footnotes for a less disruptive writing style. I position myself in the social world as a way to subject my reflexive reasoning and unconscious bias to critique. I outline the formative months of my time at Praelia MMA, as I formed bonds with the coaches and those higher up in the social hierarchy by attending fights, and through my relationship with, and introduction to Praelia by Mugz. This builds toward taking part in an inter club bout where I explore how a change in the rituals, when entering into a tunnel of violence—albeit ritualised—affected my proficiency in deploying trained techniques. The proficiency I gained in creative expression and control of abilities and techniques, were developed through everyday brutal body-to-body confrontational interactions in the gym and sparring in gym wars, with mostly familiar people.[138] In my inter-club bout I had little control over my ability to moderate physiological bodily processes such as heart rate, in order to be effective in fighting. With that being said I now turn to the first fight I attended within the first few months of joining Praelia MMA.

[138] This is a colloquial expression for a sparring match without restricting the power of your punches and kicks, like a 'real' fight. Spencer (2012b) discusses confidence in homosocial relations in MMA helping to overcome CT/F.

A photo of me training elbow techniques that was posted on Praelia's social media page.

The Fight at Club Sicilia

I arrived at Club Sicilia around 7:30 pm. It was a 70s style building in all beige rendered cladding and faded maroon red trimming. The place was a faint amalgam of the various wedding receptions I remember attending as a child. As it turns out, the place was a multifunction bistro and wedding reception. It threw out allsorts of imagined assumptions in my head. I had never been to a live boxing or MMA fight before. As I walked toward the main doors I heard music and clanking of cutlery and plates coming from the bistro on my left. I asked the bouncer where the fights were and he pointed to a darkish stairwell to my right. This seemed truer to how I imagined it. Walking down the steps eagerly, yet carefully, I could hear the cacophony of hundreds of voices talking over one another. I finally reached the bottom of the stairs and opened the double doors. I was engulfed by an all-consuming sound of coaches instructing their fighters, audience chatter and cheer, and the thuds of feet bouncing

around the canvas of the ring.[139] Heading towards the end of the hall I walked past Luke, Tyler, Hugh and Sam in the dressing room. Hugh was warming up and they stopped to greet me. They were surprised to see me. I sat down in the dressing room and watched Hugh warm up. For the past two months I had been helping Hugh get ready for this fight. I wasn't sparing with him, but we had put in a countless number of hours in grappling and physical conditioning. Luke turned to me and asked me if I purchased a ticket and then suggested I buy one. For the past four weeks after every class, Luke had reminded everyone about Hugh's upcoming fight. Being a newbie, I didn't know I had to purchase tickets from the gym office—it's how the fighters make their money. As I went to leave to buy a ticket, he stopped me. He changed his mind and gave me one he had reserved for someone who never showed up.

Tyler started helping Hugh on the pads. They were working a basic combination; one Hugh had drilled at least a thousand times over the past two months. A staff member came in and told everyone there was about five minutes before the fight. He checked over Hugh's gloves and shin guards. It was an amateur fight, which meant they fought with shin guards and 8-ounce MMA gloves. The official left and Hugh took in a breath. Then all together we walked out the doors into the main room and straight to the ring. I was fucking nervous. I was going ringside for my first live MMA fight. I could feel Hugh's nerves too. Before he climbed up the steps, Luke stopped him, "remember, stick to your strengths and keep it standing." Hugh nodded silently. Luke gave him a tap on his shoulder, the rest of us gave him a fist bump and he went up the steps and in between the ropes. There was no big announcement, just a brief formal process between the fighters and the referee in the centre of the ring. The bell sounded and both fighters met at the centre. Hugh was the aggressor. He opened up with the combination he had just been practising. It was a striking fundamental; a jab, cross, leg kick. His opponent was circling away and backing up. Hugh was bouncing around. He looked slower than he did in training and was very cautious. His opponent tried to jab him before rushing him and tying him up in a clinch. Hugh was able to wrestle out of it. Even though they were fighting at the same weight, physically Hugh looked bigger and stronger than his lanky opponent. Hugh kept chopping his legs with powerful kicks, then dropped him with a nice

[139] Cage fights weren't legal in Victoria at the time.

combination and stood over him trying to strike him from mount position—ground and pound. The round ended before Hugh could effectively land a strike.

Hugh walked back to the corner. Luke and Tyler were happy because he had clearly won the first round. He was breathing heavily, more than usual. I see how hard he trains during the week and that was only three minutes. He usually trains for three hours, an hour of sparring, wrestling, and MMA. Luke was giving Hugh advice while Tyler was wiping his face: "keep doin' what you're doin'. Keep it standin', don't let him take it to the ground." They knew that Hugh's jiu-jitsu wasn't great and that he was fighting a blue-belt.[140] The round started, he was taking in big gulps of air through his mouth, his hands were down by his side, and he was walking flat-footed with no bounce. They exchanged shots in the middle of the ring, and then Hugh sluggishly took his opponent down and his opponent let it happen. Hugh had the dominant position, but his arms were on the floor. His opponent isolated one arm and trapped the other beneath his shoulder. Before we knew it, he trapped Hugh in an armbar submission and made him tap in about five seconds. Just like that the fight was over. Luke and Tyler hung their heads. I whispered under my breath, "damn". Everyone was disappointed. We walked back to the locker room. There was a real sense of loss and a deep somberness. Something I had never experienced through sport.

Hugh had started the first stage of grieving. He was unable to accept what had happened and began ruminating in the locker room, "If only I didn't take him down", "It was because I was gassed", "I would of won. I was beating him up on his feet. I don't know why I went for the takedown". Finally Luke stepped in and replied, "you can't think like that. I know telling you that isn't going to do anything, I've been there. You go through every scenario thinking what you could of done different. But the only thing you can do is get back in the gym and keep training. We know where we went wrong. That's it." The room fell silent. Hugh then said, "I was so tired", and in typical novice fashion I asked, "Could you have done more cardio?" Tyler perked up and raised his chin, "nah, nah, it was an adrenaline dump. He's conditioning was great throughout camp." I quickly realised I had said something 'offensive'. Luke looked at all of us before asking with a crack of uncertainty in his voice, "Do you

[140] In BJJ a blue-belt can defend him or herself against an untrained stronger and larger opponent.

want to stay for the fights or should we go?" Hugh responded with an assertive tone "Let's get out of here".

They decided on The Sporting Globe—a franchised sporting bar around various locations in Melbourne and regional Victoria. It was a two-story venue with television screens in every corner. With the most popular sports on every screen. I arrived separately; Tyler drove everyone else. I headed straight for the bar and ordered a pint of beer. Hugh stood next to me at the bar, then the bartender placed my pint of beer in front of me and Hugh rejoiced, "good man". Then he ordered a pint of his own. We were the only two actually enjoying a drink. Luke and Sam had little pots of beer and were sipping really slowly. We predominately spoke about fighters, fights, the UFC and Australian Rules football. I could hold my own when talking fights, but when the conversation shifted to footy I was a fish out of water. Then Luke saved me and asked, "Jeff, what else do you do?" I replied, "At the moment my focus is still on my MMA research but I also run Hip-Hop music workshops with migrant youth." As usual there was no deep interest in my research. Luke just wanted to know more about my workshops. He was completely immersed in a mythical idea that I was 'saving' children by teaching them how to make music. "It's great giving back and really helping," he replied. Hugh was interested as a fan of hip-hop. Then the conversation slowly shifted back to training and then women. The conversation turned to training women and how you come to know when someone finds someone attractive. Luke started, "Nath is shifty. You always know when he likes someone. He picks out hot women to train. He's a bit sleigh." Tyler laughed and nodded his head. It was getting late and we parted ways. Luke and Hugh thanked me for coming.

It would be several months before I saw Hugh again—he had grown depressed from his loss. He would come in on and off and detail his gluttony, like eating a two-litre tub of ice cream before training. He had grown more authoritarian over people's effort in training. He was unable to advance his skills. During a sparring session between him and I, I engaged him in a striking battle and I was winning. He engaged me in wrestling, and I beat him there too. Tyler walked over and was very impressed but Hugh did not share the same enthusiasm. Even the younger members had surpassed him in skill. His commitment continued to dwindle and became increasingly sporadic before he finally quit the gym. Hugh worked full-time as an armed security personal for a currency lending management service. A

year after he quit, Mugz received word that he had been involved in an incident with a co-worker and was let go. I couldn't validate the story nor get hold of the details of the incident, however Hugh's eventual withdrawal from Praelia propelled him further out of social orbit. His social capital and position in the hierarchy at Praelia had diminished, his already precarious position in life outside of the gym in low-income employment (minimal social mobility, few to no fringe benefits, little potential for skill acquisition and expendable work status) sentencing him to despair.[141] He had not only lost a fight, but the thread that gave meaning to a world he was alienated from was cut. The investment of energy into MMA no longer gave him more than he put in.[142] Nathan could supplement his desires of making it into the UFC by training a 'new crop' of fighters. Despite his new orientation he eventually stopped coaching when Luke employed a UFC rostered fighter. When Tyler lost his fourth professional fight it only stopped him from pursuing a career in elite MMA. His position as a coach and success in BJJ continued to provide him with social and cultural capital within Praelia. While Hugh's loss in an official fight led to his departure, for Jono, it was the growing pressure and expectations, which culminated in a session that became too much.

Making Fighters Then Breaking Them on the Factory Floor

After my inter-club bout I took a five-week break from the gym. The first night I returned the gym had changed again. The boxing ring had been moved to the far back corner of the gym and the entire space had been covered in grappling mats. I felt like I was gone for a lifetime. The wrestling class was packed with old and new faces. I felt out of place, and I hadn't even been gone that long. I started doing some bag work, Caleb saw me from across the gym, "Welcome back *habibi*!" he said with a smile. While I was warming up, Lev walked up to me, he still had his hand wraps on

[141] Deaths by despair are deaths due to alcohol related illness, drug overdoses and suicide. The death rate of men living in Australia related to deaths by despair are 34-37 per 100 000. Suicide for example related to socioeconomic position was twice as high in the most disadvantaged compared to the least disadvantaged (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). Hugh's conditions highlight the potential onset of precarious people joining these cruel, yet preventable statistics.

[142] Collins 2004.

and he was dripping with sweat. “Welcome back bro!” he said with a wide faced grin. “I haven’t seen you in ages” he came in for a handshake and gave me a one arm hug. We got chatting about training, he had just finished sparring with Nath, and he was telling me how eager he is to fight this year. Lev is only 18 and has been at Praelia for two years but has been training in martial arts since he was 14. As we’re chatting I hear an extended “Heyyy”, and I turn around to see Nathan also dripping with sweat holding his boxing gloves and shin pads. “I saw you lookin’ all confused when you walked in. Now we can do takedowns anywhere.” He said with a look that appeared to be filled with excitement. I laughed slightly too loud, his excitement rubbed off on me. Lev went to freshen up for the MMA class. Will had just finished wrestling and walked over to me, “Hey, it’s been a while,” he said then quickly launched into telling me the news, “I’m fighting in two weeks!”

“That’s great. What day? What promotion? Who’s cornering you?” I eagerly asked, as I fought off internally the deeper fear and anxiety about his future fight. “I’m fighting on Path to Hex.”[143] Sam tapped me on the shoulder to say hello. I had seen him a little more recently when I interviewed him a week prior. Soon as I saw him for the interview he had a wide grinned smile “I’ve missed you! Where have you been?” I laughed, and told him I’ve been on a break. Then Luke walked over to talk to Will to discuss the details of the fight. At first he didn’t notice me. When he did he shook my hand and placed his left hand on my arm above the elbow. As he turned to Will his arm lingered there for a few seconds as he explained who’d be cornering Will for his fight. Then I started the round of greetings. I walked over to Ravi who was chatting to Sam near the bags. On my way to greet Lev, Cam and Bronson who were resting against the mat covered walls I passed some new guys who I said hello to. Not far from them was Niko, Tyler and Jono in the centre of the mats. Niko and Jono were drenched in sweat from their hour-long wrestling class. When Niko saw

[143] Path to Hex is a premier sub promotion of a larger Melbourne based MMA promoter Hex Fight Series. If fighters are able to string a series of impressive victories, they have a chance to compete in the Hex Fight Series, which mainly comprises of Australian fighters, however there are international fighters from Thailand, Buam, Ireland, New Zealand, England, United States, Malaysia, Iran, Brazil, Spain, France, Philippines and Japan. Once fighters can secure victories in Hex Fight Series, the next highest promotion is arguably the Australasian Fighting Championship (AFC –was previously known as the Australian Fighting Championship but have made efforts to penetrate the Asian MMA market). The AFC is ranked the second highest Australasian MMA promotion.

me he smiled, then pleasantly greeted me with a rhetorical question, “Bro, where have you *fucken* been?”

Then Tyler started on a diatribe about Jono, “As long as he listens, stays disciplined, and works hard, he’ll become an animal. I can’t wait for him to start fighting, he’ll be even more of an animal.” Tyler was extremely excited about his protégé. When Tyler spoke to people his bright blue eyes pierced through them. His head was routinely shaved to the skin and he had several prominent tattoos. On the right side of his chest he had a stencil of a lion, like the type you see on a coat of arms. On the back of his left shoulder was a Japanese style graphic. Jono had his first fight booked and had been in training camp the past couple of weeks. Little did I know, that night would be the last night I would see Jono at Praelia ever again. He was around 14 years old when he joined Praelia and 16 when he quit. We really put Jono through his paces that night. Tyler had us all *go in* on him, round after round of intense sparring, wrestling and ground grappling with striking. While we were resting and recovering, he had no time to catch his breath. He was done after the first half-hour but Tyler had other plans. “Let’s finish off with MMA grappling”, Tyler sternly demanded. Everyone circled up around Jono in the centre of the mats. He had to start on his back. Then one by one we grappled him. His face was bloodshot, his arms shaking every time he put weight on them. I could feel how little he had left in him and I started going easy on him. I could see that the others were also not pushing, some would immediately submit him and let the next guy in. Then with 10 minutes to go, Tyler jumped in. The cheer erupted, “Go Jono! Push! Push! Come on!” Everyone yelled and cheered the beaten down kid. The entire gym stopped to look over. Tyler was fresh, he was quick and he was punishingly disciplinary. Every mistake made had a receipt attached, a well-timed punch to the face or body.

Jono had nothing in him but he mustered the will to start rolling desperately trying to avoid the suffocating pressure and relentless pace Tyler maintained. The cheers continued, so did the punches and the submissions. At one point everything fell dead silent. A break from the chants led to the sounds of heavy breathing, exhales and grimaces of pain. Then as if everyone was in synch, instructional murmurs began, “Defend your neck, then roll out.” But that only got Jono into a worse position. Now Tyler was riding his back and striking him, shot after shot at will. The buzzer went off and the 10 minutes was up. Jono rolled over, and everyone cheered. He stood up,

threw his gloves off and went to the bathroom. I sat next to his dad who had been watching. I was taking my gear off and having a drink of water. “Tough kid”, I said. He nodded, and without making eye contact he replied, “at least now I don’t have to set him straight at home”. Then Jono came over, “You did alright out there. But you don’t have enough of a gas tank”, his dad said. Jono nodded and they both left. That was the last time I saw him at Praelia. The fight was called off.

When it came to training Jono, Tyler wanted to teach him the same way he was taught. He often reminisced about the early years at Praelia. There were only coaches there who would train on their days off or after they finished teaching their classes. There weren’t many everyday people wanting to train. He’d often say to whoever was listening, “You have to remember, these were the days before the UFC was mainstream”. Nathan was the only other person his age and with his level of experience. Tyler back then had not yet acclimated to the rigours of training and hadn’t calloused his body.[144] He hadn’t been hardened by the ‘never stop’ training ethos he now enforces in his classes; he had yet to learn that dropping your hands could get you seriously hurt; and flinching from punches “hurts twice as bad”. Tyler also started training when he was 14. Before starting BJJ and MMA at Praelia, he trained for a year in combat Sambo and played soccer until he was 17. In his final year of schooling he fought five times. Tyler was proud to come to school with black-eyed badges of honour, cuts on his nose and marks on his face that affirmed his place as a fighter. He fought 16 times as an amateur and 4 times as a professional. He only lost once in his fourth professional fight and “learned the hard way” to keep his hands up at all costs. Two years ago Tyler still had hopes of fighting again. He was a BJJ purple belt and had always said that he’d start fighting once he got his brown belt. As he reached his black belt and the UFC dream seemed further and further away and he had no plans to return to fighting. All that energy went into his coaching. Day in and day out people step onto the mat covered factory floor. Some break and never return. The ones that return, might return to a different place they became accustomed, drastically changing and leaving them behind.

Most people stepping onto the mats don’t do so with the intention of competing (let alone fighting in the UFC). In fact, very few people at Praelia ever

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[144] Spencer (2009).

really consider it, at least out loud to begin with. But through enduring the demands of training, one enters into a process of 'becoming'.[145] The MMA curriculum is largely void of any martial arts tradition. The seamlessness of sparring creates a mimetic tension more akin to real life, as opposed to kata-based martial arts. Along the way, coaches suggest entering into competitions, sometimes they gently push, and other times they shove. I stopped noting the amount of times over the years coaches had asked me if I was interested in competing. I also lost count of how many people I asked the same question. The logic of practice behind why people take part in MMA is often dressed under the utilitarian guise of fitness, innate nature, the UFC dream, desire for competition and knowing how to take care of oneself on the street. None of which draw us a clearer picture of the processes at work in which the UFC and MMA fill a market of precarious masculinities. One can easily get swallowed up and swept away by the intensity and mimesis of interaction and action in the gym. After many months of asking, Caleb finally convinced me to sign up for an inter-club event.

Becoming Acquainted With Gym Folks

The gym had a little extra buzz tonight. The Gladiator fitness class was in full swing. The music was fast paced and everyone was breaking a sweat. During the better months of the year they start the class with a run outside and have a circuit set up: kettle bells, a weighted sled and truck tires. The tires are used for full body exercise by being flipped over or smashed with a sledgehammer. Caleb was about to train his 5:30 p.m. client. He was looking around for the boxing timer remote. There are two timers in the gym. There's only one remote left and often it's misplaced or with the jiu-jitsu crew. The timer on the boxing side can be reached by a single person on their tippy toes, but the timer on the MMA/BJJ side requires two people, one person to hoist and another to turn it on. Nath had moved the remote in his previous class and caused Caleb to start a verbal flurry, "When you use the remote, put it back where

[145] A distinction can be made between 'being' and 'becoming', where one enters a gym relatively untrained, with very little social and physical capital, and through undertaking training, enters into 'being'. Now possessing social and physical capital within (and at times outside of) the MMA space. This 'being' is not final and must continually be accumulated and defended, and eventually, 'being' is passed out of (Pavlidis 2010).

you found it. You used it last. PUT. IT. BAAACK". Nath lightly defended himself in jest. Putting on a loud caricatured Aussie accent, he strutted around with his shoulders lifted above his chin: "Yeah, yeah! No worries mate!" he yelled without ever making eye contact.

I was working the heavy bag and enjoying the banter unfolding. It wasn't personal like it was with Tyler and Niko. Caleb told his client to warm up on a hot red coloured Jim Bradley bag that had a large coil spring attached to the bottom of it. The spring was about the size of a shock absorber and looked like it had been ripped out of a hatchback. The bag was new and Caleb wanted to let everyone know it was his invention. The spring was actually from an old punching dummy that had been dumped in the storage room of the gym. He put old tires around the spring to stop it from moving around so insanely and bolted the hot red Jim Bradley bag on top. He yelled to Nath, "This bag is 100 percent Australian made mate! I took these tires that have been sitting there for years. Pure ozzie engineering!", Nath was erratically replying to Caleb as if he had just had three shots of espresso, "I know bro, they've been here since I've been here at the gym years ago." As a few of the BJJ crew started to roll into the gym Nath went to warm up. Caleb went back to his client who was practising on another bag near me, then Caleb turned his attention to me, "So are you gonna fight? You've got good technique, come sparring on Saturdays".

I had told him the session before that I don't want to fight. I insisted that being out of shape it would take at least a year before I'd be fit enough for fighting condition. He looked at me; his dark beady eyes opened with shock and disappointment. Had he opened them any further he would've needed to peel his forehead skin back. His long curly, black haired beard, which had obviously been manicured by a barber, only added to his intensity. Then he let out a sigh. It was the kind of sigh an old Middle Eastern man would make at a child if they said something bizarre or strayed from the conventions and traditions of thought.

He hung his head, then peered back up before beginning his lecture, "You know it's changed these days, you know. Used to be back when I came up, through boxing anyway, used to be that you had to impress the trainer, you had to. Now days… the trainer has to impress the student. Used to be like, I have a class, prove to me why I should teach you, let you in on my knowledge. But now it's like I have the knowledge and you just have to pay for it you know. So it's different now."

I smiled at him, “you’re right man. Why do you think that is?” Right then, he responded in the obscurest of directions, not obscure for Caleb, he’d do this sort of thing a lot of the time, but obscure in the context of the question. He replied as if he had decided what he was going to say before I asked, “Yeah, well. These days, Arabs, middle-eastern people, they don’t help each other. You know, ‘cause they’re too worried about what sect this person is from or what religion they are or what Middle Eastern country they’re from. You know they don’t help each other. And I was telling a guy this, and then he got angry. He was Palestinian. And I was like I didn’t know. That’s his family came here, from the war, you know.”

Then the timer went off and he had to attend to his client. Then he came back over to me. He noticed my t-shirt. It was an old Coke-a-Cola t-shirt that said, have a coke and smile. Caleb read it out loud, “Have a coke and a smile. Why are you wearing that? You’re a druggie ahh? That’s a druggie shirt.” He started laughing, “I’m joking man. I’m joking.” I replied back to him, “it’s okay man, I know you’re joking. Only a druggie would get upset at that.” Then I sniffed really hard through my nostrils and widened my eyes as if I had just done a line of coke. He started laughing profusely. I didn’t think it was going to be that funny.

Then the MMA class started rolling in. Sam was taking the first five minutes of the class. Warm-ups change up in the sweltering heat. The class only did a few laps around the mat. Then Luke came in and told us all to get skipping ropes. He didn’t put on the timer. Everyone was skipping as an unengaged Luke was trying to figure out why the fan wasn’t working, albeit for the benefit of his class. The blades would hit the cover when it was powered on. He looked at Sam,

“This is one of your fans isn’t it?”

Sam replied, “Yeh, but ours wouldn’t wreck that fast. They last forever.”

Luke was investigating the fan, looking around, and trying to see what the problem was. Then suddenly realising what had happened. He replied, “Oh I know what might’ve happened, maybe I put the wrong cover on when we changed them. Yeh, see. It’s a bit smaller.” The heat was compiling as the group exhaled their hot breath into the factory. It was one of those days in late December that can kill you if you’re not careful. The kind of day that immobilises you. Tess wouldn’t even move from the desk because she wanted to stay behind the only air conditioner. All the doors stay closed but it doesn’t take long for the sun to heat the metal. Especially because the

gym opens in the early evening and the sun stays out until 8:30 pm. The class seemed to skip for a generous amount of time as the conversation took place. Eventually Sam couldn't hold the conversation anymore without panting. Five or so minutes of skipping can be a long time for the everyday person. When Luke decided, he told everyone to start doing push ups. Again not designate an amount. They were gruelling. The class panted and sweat littered the mats. Outlines of people's were hands printed on the floor. He'd yell out a new exercise when he wanted.

"Okay, sit-ups." The switch into sit-ups was a welcomed change that didn't last long.

"Sprawls!" The grunts intensified after every sprawl. Some guys would do two and stop. Some six in a row before stopping, with few who didn't stop at all.

"Okay, stop! Gonna start again because John isn't doing it properly. This is how a lot of you are doing them." He slowly got down, with sloppy and laboured technique.

"This is how I want them." He exploded up and down, with his hips slamming the mat with ferocity. The drills weren't about technique as much as they were about moving. Quick executions of skills designed to get used to performing a sequence of submissions, escapes or transitions. Sometimes all three. Not a lot of time was spent on this, but because it was rapid, it was physically taxing. Especially before sparring. Usually when we sparred we had timers. Not this time. Full contact MMA sparring and no time limit. Tyler, Will, Bronson, Lev, Cam, and me to a lesser extent, continued moving around to new partners as people grew too exhausted to continue. Mugz sat out. Sam laid on the mats splayed out. His stomach pushed through his rash guard that tightly wrapped around his thin body. John was desperately gasping for air to the point I was imagining his navel almost touching his spine.

Luke appeared like he had achieved a sense of joy. The class was pushing hard and his top guys were not quitting. The chaos created from removing the timer drained all but the elite few. Eventually it was time to wrap up. Lev, Will and I were the only people from the MMA class to join the boxing sparring session. But I was so exhausted that I couldn't finish all the rounds like I was usually able to. I could feel the pressure from Caleb. I took a break in between rounds. Caleb looked at me funny and asked, "What's wrong?"

I replied in between taking breaths, "I'm…just, tired". I recovered slightly and got back in to continue sparring. But then I had to stop mid round. My chest was burning, I could taste iron in my mouth but I wasn't bleeding and it felt like my lungs

were going to break out of my chest. I was sparring one of Caleb's more experienced students—his brother—and as soon as we continued sparring he hit me with a hard right hook to my head. It was like a switch went off and I just walked through it, I wanted to get him twice as bad. But in a split second when I got the opportunity I didn't hit him that hard. It was like I came to. Also, I was bigger than him and didn't want to be seen as a bully. Plus, we actually got along as people. Then he accidently hit me 'below the belt' and I had to stop. Caleb repeatedly asked me if I was okay. I replied, "yeah bro, I'm as okay as I can be". Then Sam who had been watching translated for me and said, "I think that means, I'm not, but I'll keep fighting." And he started laughing. I took another break and Caleb was looking over at the MMA guys doing BJJ and he was lightly punching the heavy bag he was standing next to. Then he asked rhetorically, "What's wrong with these guys? How come they don't spar? Are they scared?" Then he asked seriously, "What's it like sparring these guys in boxin' compared to those guys in MMA." I took his question seriously and replied, "Its different things you have to worry about. Takedowns and ground stuff. You should try one day."

He replied, "Nah", then he leant down "I'd just do this", and he ducked toward his right hip, spun his upper torso 360 degrees and landed a thunderous elbow on the bag. Then replied, "they don't know this", then he did some faints, and delivered a heavy kick to the bag. "If they try and take me down", he took a step back then lunged his knee into the bag and exhaled hard, "That's what I'd do". Sparring came to an end and everyone from class started filtering out. Caleb and I continued talking as the BJJ class continued. He was searching through his music and I suggested he play Acid Arab—Stil. Suddenly the entire mood and vibe of the gym shifted. The music pumped from the speakers. Middle-Eastern drums blended with modern analogue synthesisers and drum machines filled the air, layered over by raspy Turkish vocals. "*A-wah!*" I yelled out in Arabic. Caleb began dancing around the empty boxing area, his face lit with joy. I began shimmying my hands, until Luke had told Tess to let us know it was time to finish up, he had heard enough.

Path to Hex

Nathan was the first member from Praelia to fight on a Path to Hex card. I bought my ticket for 50 bucks from Tess at reception a few days before the fight. On the Saturday of the fight, a few of the guys from the gym were organising how to get to the fight. Nath was planning on driving himself there, so Will offered to drive him instead. I went on my own because no one was passing through my neighbourhood except for Cam. But he wasn't in the chat. When I got there it was dark. The parking spaces nearest to the venue were full. I had to park 150 metres away, which built my anticipation. The fight was at a bistro and gambling venue not far from the beach in the outer suburbs municipality of Kingston. It felt like a desert oasis with an all in one venue that had something for everyone. Families with children, couples meeting friends, singles looking for a break from the weekly grind and seniors spending their pension in the pokies. They were all brought together by food, alcohol, sport and gambling.[146] The venue was a single story building and at its centre was the main atrium glass dome. This encased the food court where I entered, which had two four metre palm trees inside. I passed through all the commotion, waiters bringing out trays of beer and food, the smell of chicken parmigiana, and beer stained carpet was heavy in the air. I walked into the *gaming* room where people were gambling and watching sports. I was looking around, completely lost. Then I took a random door and I accidently walked into the fighter's dressing room. Every one fighting on the card and their team was crowded in this one room. There were 17 fights on, which meant 34 fighters. Some were warming up and hitting pads, others were sitting down talking or getting their hands wrapped, coaches talking to other coaches.

Luke and Nath were both seated while Luke wrapped Nath's hands. Tyler, Niko and Will were hanging around them talking 'shit'. Nath was quiet, smiling and nodding at the chatter. I didn't want to disrupt the flow of events so after about 5 minutes I made my way out. I saw a couple in their late 20s, maybe early 30s, walk out the door holding their tickets so I followed them. The door led back outside, I turned the corner only to see a line of about 200 people all waiting to get in. Friends,

[146] 20 percent of weekly household income in Chealsea Heights where the pub was located was below 650 Australian dollars. This was four percent higher than Melbourne as a whole, but four percent lower compared to neighbouring suburbs. About 33 percent of the population owned their homes, and 26 percent of those owners were paying monthly mortgage repayments between 2600-3999 Australian dollars (Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage 2016).

family and fans. The line was in shambles because each gym had sold a certain amount of tickets which they had to report back to the promoters, because that's how the fighters got paid. When I finally got in there, it was packed. Nath was the fourth fight on the card so I had time. When I entered, I headed straight to the bar. On my way I noticed Cam, Lev, Bronson and more. Then Caleb showed up. He was wearing his big puffy jacket and a hoodie with his team Khouri logo printed on it. He had three quarter green camo leggings on and high length white socks, and full white Adidas trainers. He was with his brother and his brother-in-law. He was low, quiet, not overly joyful, we all started chatting. The first fight was about to start. The production value was high quality. It had come a long way since Hugh's fight at Club Sicillia. There was a ramp fighters walked in on. A full sized cage, their names were announced and there were even lights with some pyrotechnic displays. The room was almost pitch black except for the cage. All the focus and attention was placed on the ring in the centre of the room. People cheered, the excitement built. We were all anticipating Nath's fight. The quality of skill was relatively high. For 50 bucks you get the works. After each fight, the winning fighters got a medal and they took pictures with the ring girls. Tyler's ex-partner who used to train with us was working as a ring girl that night. Will made a point to mention it.

It was finally Nath's fight. His music played and he walked down with Luke and Tyler, who were in his corner. Our gym cheered. Then their fighter walked out and their gym cheered. Then when both fighters were standing across from each other, our gym cheered, their gym cheered, our gym tried to cheer louder. Niko was sitting in VIP with a few others, later I'd hear him scream above the entire crowd. The cheering competition seemed to get Will kind of skittish. He turned to us and said something like, "Oh if it goes off it's gonna be on". He was clenching his fists and biting down on his lip. I'm sure with all of us there he felt tough. The bell rang, Nath and his opponent touched gloves in the centre of the cage. His opponent was tall, muscular, had a six-pack and *looked* like a fighter. Nath was shorter, didn't have any abs and was pudgy. He was only fighting in the weight class because he was 'overweight'.

It was only a few seconds in the round when Nath got hit with a crushing haymaker. He stepped back like he had just woken up. It took him a bit of time to collect himself in the first round. He was hit with one big punch after another. We

were all screaming, nervous, and unsure. We were all completely enthralled in the action. Nath wasn't being very offensive, but he was weaving, rolling with the punches and protecting himself. Now his experience was showing, he looked calm the entire time. The bell rang and the first round ended. Luke and Tyler were coaching him on the stool. Then the second round started. This round was a bit more balanced until Nath started gaining more dominance and control. He started dictating where the fight was going. Nice clean and efficient strikes. We were yelling at every one of his punches, it was an automatic conditioned response. It was now the third round and it was anyone's fight. Then Nath got hit with a punch but he just walked through it. His opponent was starting to fatigue and Nathan knew it. Jab, jab, cross, leg kick. Faint, pivot, leg kick. Nath was finding his rhythm and openings to fire off shots. Until Nath saw an opening for a knee to the stomach. He landed one, he landed another, no response from his opponent, he landed a third then a fourth before the final uppercut that dropped his opponent. Then Nath stood over him striking until the ref removed him. The team went crazy. We all erupted in celebration. Nath ran around the ring, received his medal, had his picture taken and all the rest of it. Our spirits were high and we all went to the back to congratulate him. We stood around him as he told us what ran through his head. He mostly was in a daze, then he turned and said, "I know this is gonna sound bad, but at one point I thought, fuck. I really want a burger". We all started laughing. Nath went over to talk to his opponent, they chatted and took a photo together. Then in the corner I noticed an ex-Praelia member warming on the pads before his fight. The "you made it worse for the next guy", guy was fighting on the card. Then we left Nath and headed back to the fights.

You Wanna Go Hard?

I was about two weeks out from my inter-club bout and sparring had intensified. I was partnered up with Nath, we touched gloves and we went off. I was trying to *stick and move*, punch him or kick him lightly then move out of his range. Kind of like when a mosquito bites you and by the time you realise it's too late. But sometimes, you catch the mosquito and squash it, and the blood it just took from you sprays everywhere. That's how Nath hit me, with a really hard and frustrated punch to the head. It was a real "ha! I gottcha" moment, which made me immediately abandoned

my rhythm and lightness. I charged forward trying to return the favour. I connected a few times and just clung onto him, cut him off and cornered him. He punched me back the hardest he's hit me. We expended our energy and started slowing down. The round ended. Nath looked at me and said, "that look you had, that's how you know you're ready." After a gruelling hour of MMA I started sparring Hugh. Caleb was adamant we wear headgear to get used to it for our upcoming bout.

When the round started I was moving slowly. Everything was an effort. Hugh was light and fast, he hit me with a hard punch that spun my headgear. I dropped my hands, and in an agitated voice I asked him twice, "You wanna go hard? You wanna go hard?" Hugh seemed caught off guard, and immediately replied "I wasn't trynna go hard. I was just goin' normal". Caleb walked over to me and started fixing my head gear, while he was adjusting it back he said, "You got a bit of fight in you that's good, just make sure you have it on the day." We started tagging each other. We didn't pull our punches but we weren't trying to knock each other out. After sparring finished Hugh walked up to me, "Did I upset you? I was worried I upset you," I replied, "I just thought you wanted to go hard because we had a bout coming up." He responded, "I thought, I didn't want to upset big Jeffy he's nice." I was upset. I had gone through hard sparring with Nathan that had depleted me energetically. Rather than escalating the situation by hitting Hugh hard and hurting him, I broke the conventions of sparring by dropping my hands by my side and asking him if he wanted to "go hard". I broke the fourth wall by implying that I was actually going to fight him.[147] Truth was I wouldn't have been able to actually "go hard" because I was depleted. So I set the pace in a way which protected my capital whilst in a vulnerable situation. Alternatively I could have asked him to take it easy, however I was engulfed in the minutia of the moment-to-moment exchanges in energy, and I bolstered my emotional energy and cultural capital in a androcentric socialised response, to protect and reinforce my position hierarchically through engaging in a gym war. Steadily overtime I had come to negotiate the rituals in the space through a creative response constrained by my specific *habitus*. As ppposed to engaging in a whack-a-mole gym war, I used the logic of the space in such a way that would

[147] In other words, I broke the veil of ritual that circumvented the CT/F which allowed it to creep back in.

simultaneously protect my capital and boost my emotional energy. On my drive home I was taken back by my own actions. I kept asking myself, "What the fuck was that?"

The Inter-club Bout

The inter-club bout was promoted as a sparring day for people to gain experience before they move up into amateur fights. It was also a lucrative financial stream for the promoter and was held monthly. Spectators paid 15 dollars entry and participants paid 30 dollars. There were 35 boxing and 30 Muay Thai fights, roughly equaling to 130 fighters. On participants alone, the promoter made roughly 3900 dollars, minus a handful of participants that fought twice. And because the promoter owned the gym, there was no added overhead cost. I didn't count every spectator there, but it was hard to walk around and there was a minimum five-minute wait to use the toilets. I estimate 200-300 people. Plus an additional revenue stream came from the sausage sizzle barbeque and soft drinks outside.

The event was held from 9:00 am until 5:30 pm and the weigh-ins started at 9:30 am for boxing up until 10:15 am. Fighters were matched on the day based on weight and fight experience. I weighed in. I had never been so nervous about stepping on a scale. My weight was announced and I was matched with a random name from the sea of fighters. I had no idea who he was or what he looked like. I had two hours before I was up. Before the first bout the head of the gym announced some ground rules, "you can cheer for your fighters, but just remember this day is about having fun." There was a lot of discrepancy between the intensity allowed between the fighters depending on the referee. In the women's fights the referee was far more controlling. Of the 65 fights there were only four women's fights. The only fight that was stopped was in the women's bout because there were two knockdowns and the ref called a stop to the bout. As I watched on I found myself wondering who I was fighting. I continued looking at the clock. I walked around and spoke to Caleb. Will came down to watch, but other than that there were few familiar faces. Caleb's brother was there and he was asking how I was feeling. I replied, "pretty nervous man. But what can you do. It'll be over soon." He replied back, "I know the feeling. I lost my first three fights because I was so nervous. But once I got the experience, I

started winning." Seemingly out of nowhere my fight was coming up. I ran to the back to find Caleb to warm-up. He had forgotten my fight was next.

He wrapped my hands, put my gloves on, I hit the pads for a minute and then my name was called. My heart was smacking against my chest and pulsating up into the back of my throat. Caleb and Will were in my corner, I climbed the stairs and in between the ropes. Will said to me, "You'll be right, just use your reach." I finally saw who I was fighting but it had no noticeable effect on how I was feeling. The referee called us to the centre of the ring and gave us our instructions. We touched gloves and walked back to our corners. The bell rang and we both marched forward. I had my hands high, I could hear my breathing, more laboured than usual. I wanted to set the tone so I threw the first punch. It landed and then suddenly I felt like I had been training for an hour. I was exhausted. Then I realised and thought to myself, "Oh fuck! Adrenaline dump". My arms felt like they were carrying 20 litre barrels of water. I was in a dissociated state between what I was trying to do and what I was actually able to do. I had to tell myself to punch; I had to tell myself to block. Every time I tried to move I felt like I had jelly legs and I was walking in chest high water in the ocean. I got hit a lot and my head snapped back. So I played defence, by sticking my jab in my opponent's face, coming behind it with a cross and then used my clinch and wrestling to hold on to him so I could rest. All the while I could hear my corner yelling at me, "jab, jab! Move, come on!" Their frustration was growing, especially Caleb. I wasn't myself. Turns out I didn't have the fight in me when I needed it. I started landing to the body, trying to tire him out.

The bell sounded and I returned to my corner. Caleb was stern, "where's your movement. You're just standing there. Jab, jab, throw your cross and get out of there. Wake up." I was nodding my head the entire time, I was slowly waking up, but it was too little too late. In the second my opponent came out even faster, after I thought I had slowed him down with shots to the body. I slowly started getting a bit of bounce back in my legs. I tried moving, staying out of his reach and jabing, but then he'd hit me and I'd go in trying to hit him back. It was a solid back and forth. I ended up etching out a draw. We both got our hands raised and were handed a trophy. We shook hands but didn't hug. Will went up to my opponent and said, "oh he's awkward to fight isn't he, he's always in your face." But I don't remember doing

that.[148] I went back to the locker room. Caleb was disappointed. “Do you think you did your best out there?” He asked me in a stern voice. “No. But what can you do?” I replied, now that it was over I didn’t care. He replied, “Yeah, that’s okay, you need to do a few different things for the next one.”

The chaos of the day disrupts participant’s usual routine and ritual. For example, time to warm-up, say hello to familiar faces, catch up on the weekend and so on. The inter-club event had many unfamiliar practises that increased the stakes. There were far more people in attendance, there was an official weigh-in, only one fight at a time occurred, there was a referee and the ring was elevated with seating all around it. Headgear was worn and the opponent was unfamiliar and their face was hardly visible. Like Hugh, I had experienced an *adrenaline dump* after an explosive use of adrenaline production had ceased. However, not all participants experience this new and unfamiliar territory in the same way. For some, the thrill and anxiety propels them into focus and they can take advantage of the emotional mood. Throughout the day I watched on as people stood across the ring from one another before engaging in unarmed combat sports. For some it was a progressive step through competition on their way to professional combat. For others, the test, excitement and experience of capturing what seemed to always be just out of reach—status, recognition and achievement—was enough.

[148] Will sent me the video he captured which was a complete distortion from how I experienced the bout. As I watched the fight from the outside, there were moments that looked far more violent than I had experienced them.

In the locker room with one of my coaches after I received a participation trophy.

Last Days at Praelia

Six months had passed since I competed in the inter-club event and Praelia continued undergoing change. Some aesthetic like the mats, others more personal like Caleb leaving. Because Caleb taught boxing and Muay Thai he had to be replaced by two coaches. The new Muay Thai coach brought in was an old school authoritarian who thought he owned everyone participating in his class. He'd walk by and kick me in my ribs while I was trying to do push-ups; punch us in the stomach while we did sit-ups; and during demonstrations he'd use far too much force in his techniques. He had it in for the MMA members that attended his class. He'd call us fat, slow, weak and clowns. He'd criticise our technique and deliberately use us in demonstrations and hurt us. This was who Luke thought 'fit in' with Praelia's family environment. The

new boxing coach was the opposite. He was relaxed, humble and took the time to introduce himself to people. Luke sought to increase the gym's level of coaching talent to cater for fighters. He brought in a well-known Thai fighter on visa from Thailand and a UFC prospect to teach the MMA classes. In order to maintain the survival of the gym, or rather Luke's, Praelia had to turn like well oiled machinery with little regard for loyalty, to keep up with the changing demands of the market it existed within. Nath had lost interest in coaching because he was now in direct competition with a UFC fighter for coaching status so he quit. After he quit, he and Mugz got together and Nath was explaining that his mental health was declining because of pressures from work and taking care of his ageing parents. He had reached out to me but I lost contact with him after he deleted all his social media. But at Praelia, the conveyor belt of new members was on full rotation. Luke made it mandatory to now train in MMA branded gear that we either had to buy from the gym or an official MMA store. We had to look *legit*, he announced to the class, "Like a footy team have a uniform, you'll need to wear MMA gear, okay. Otherwise, not immediately, but in the next month, if you're not in the right gear, you won't be allowed to train."

I was partnered up with a Johnny who had started training a month ago. He was wearing casual gym shorts and a blank black t-shirt. He gave me his spiel about how he's been following the sport for ages, and how he was going to start last year, but that he had other things to do, before finally telling, "I was kind of talked out of it… my parents didn't want me to do it. But when I turned 18, they couldn't really say anything." I nodded and continued listening as he anxiously felt the need to explain himself, "I've been used to it because in India, there's a wrestling sport—that's kinda similar."

"Did you used to do it?" I asked, "No, but you know…" His pause filled the space between us with uncertainty. He was attaching himself to a sport he had never done because it gave him a sense of connection to MMA beyond being a casual fan. He was not this random new guy, he knew about the sport, and plus, in the country his parents were born, they wrestle. I could relate to this desire to fit in, to latch onto forms of capital that solidified one's position within an apparently natural and preordained hierarchy, which ultimately, we were unworthy of being a part of because we lacked the qualities and attributes that made up the *men* within it. This

capital gave us an ability to boost our emotional energy. Johnny was being perceived by male eyes, through an androcentric view of male attributes, in which one must possess attributes of power which is culturally demarcated by sex and in distinction from being female.[149] But cultural capital can't be faked or bought. People recognise it *in us* and perceive it as something we naturally possess. This became clear when I began practicing Taido[150] and I was viewed as a "natural".

One day at Victoria University I was walking through the sea of advertising stalls for clubs and events for newly starting students. In the midst of bodies moving through the campus, I noticed a group of people gathered near a poster all wearing traditional martial art gi's. I cautiously reconnoitred their stall from a few metres away trying to see who and what they were offering. Thinking I was inconspicuously hiding amongst the crowd, I was a little less hidden than I thought. One of the sensei's noticed me and waved me over. At first I thought I was standing in front of a group of Aikido practitioners but they were in fact Taido martial artists. The sensei was really friendly and was articulate in her explanation of Taido. I decided to join.

When I arrived at the first class there were six people who were friends outside of their training. In the first class there were several movements I felt completely uncomfortable with, and incompetent performing. Twisting, jumping and spinning kicks; dynamic footwork with constant shifting of stance; and complex kata based movements performed in front of a mirror. The martial habitus and body pedagogy I formed in MMA had a limited, yet, perceivable transferability to techniques taught in Taido.[151] At the end of the first class the head sensei was getting to know me before breaking down my technique, "you were moving quite naturally, doing things that other beginners don't do." I replied to him, "It's probably my previous experience in martial arts". He immediately shut down the idea as plausible, making concrete how the *natural* is perceived.

The structures that create the natural become invisible in the sport practitioners dedicate so much time to.[152] And if we were to replace sport with family

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[149] Bourdieu (2001).

[150] A traditional Japanese martial art similar to Karate. Taido means a way of the body and is a relatively recent break away from Okinawan Karate, founded by Seiken Shukumine (Taido.net).

[151] Brown and Jennings (2013).

[152] Wacquant (2004a).

structure for example, one might come to see how the naturalised and hierarchical gender order becomes sedimented in our way of being, as the economic structures that shaped families also themselves become invisible. Men learn through thousands of hours of practice how to hide their emotions, become self-responsible and productive individuals.[153] Likewise, naturalness is inscribed onto the bodies of athletes, and the failures they face are explained as a lack of discipline and hard work, arising from their preoccupation with things outside of sport or for being too soft. This rationale is used to explain away external social and institutional factors that limit athletes of a particular milieu and social class.[154] Thousands of hours of learning to walk a certain way, speak with particular inflections, making specific hand gestures and facial expressions, thousands of hours in sparring, learning to stay calm, learning how to fake a punch then transition into a takedown that the opponent doesn't see coming, is accumulated but perceived as being natural.[155]

In the market of symbolic goods, Johnny had a low physical capital he attempted to bolster with other forms of cultural capital despite their low valuation. One can easily assess a person's martial arts experience through their technical ability or physical capital. Their uncoordinated, imprecise and uncontrolled strikes are most obvious. I had accumulated enough cultural (physical) and social capital to coach Johnny,

"Focus on your technique. Same leg you kick with, that arm goes down for balance and momentum, opposite arm protects your chin."

Johnny smiled and replied, "Okay." I continued to give him instructions helping him with his technique. But after two or three combinations, he'd revert back to rushing, attempting to hit hard and fast, as if he was an action hero or UFC fighter on TV. Luke then partnered me up with another new face for grappling drills. He couldn't have been older than 14. It was his first session and I was helping him as much as

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[153] Hochschild (1983); Shuttleworth (1990); Shilling (1993); Collins (2013).

[154] For example, because blackness is taken to guarantee athletic success and natural talent, it also becomes a site for masculine failure, in particular because people of colour have historically been framed as "lazy" (Thangaraj 2015, p. 137). Oppressive historical conditions that come constrain decisions, feelings, ways of perceiving and acting, etc. dissolve into essentialist understandings of taxonomies of gender, race/ethnicity, class and so on.

[155] Paulle (2013).

possible. I began giving him instructions as we were rolling while encouraging him gently. He tried to submit me a few times so I let him. Then I got into full mount and showed him how to get out of it. At one point he was trying to put pressure on me and pin me down with his arms. He had three problems to contend with, my technique, but also the size and strength difference. I could easily strike his arm away, and then reverse him. But I'd point things out to him instead.

"Keep tight on me with your body, you need tight body pressure." He was confused and didn't know what I meant. When the round ended I rolled him over and explained by pinning him down with all my weight. He tried to refrain from grunting, trying not to show me he was in pain. He was already aware of implicit *rules* in the field, I got off him and patted him on the back and he went on to roll with someone new in the final round before the end of class.

We lined up in our usual way, the most experienced to least experienced. I was second in the line. All together we yelled "OUS!" and bowed toward Luke at the front of the class. The nerves had built up knowing this was going to be the last class. I said goodbye to everyone I knew and told them it'd be a while before I'd return. I went to cancel my membership at the desk with Tess. We shared a legitimate moment of sadness together. Then on my way out I saw Luke, he was sitting on a truck tire talking to one of his BJJ purple belts. Then came the new boxing coach that was taking over Caleb's boxing hours. He was seeking feedback, their conversation was brief the boxing coach asked, "how'd I do?",

Luke replied, "you did everything well." Then the coach bounced to the next question, "Did I push them too hard?"

"You just have to read the class. Sometimes you can be getting all into it and then you look up and they're all dying dripping with sweat like this," Luke dropped his jaw, to look like he was in a bad way, "Then just give them a water break."

With almost no pause in between, the coach asked Luke, "How many breaks do you give them? Because you remember how it was. You had to die just to get a little sip back in the day." Luke responded casually, "Yeah look, I usually give them just two water breaks. Sometimes we're doin' a session and I look, and I'm like hang on a minute, these guys aren't even sweating, then I'll just smash them at the end."

"Okay great, thanks."

"Other than that, the music's loud, so just talk a little bit louder."

“Alright, I’m just gonna go write some notes down.”
“No worries.” Luke replied.

Then Luke picked up a set of dumbbells, to do a set of squats. As he started his set he asked, “how can I help you Jeff?” I responded insecurely, “I just wanted to say goodbye. I’m leaving the gym.” He replied back, “Oh mate,” He put his dumbbells down, “Well, don’t look at it like you’ll be gone for a year, look at it more as you’ll visit from time to time.” I was politely nodding but actually confused that he had set a time limit on how long I was leaving for. He continued, “It’s sad to see you go because you’ve been here for so long. It’s always sad to see someone go when they’ve been a part of the gym, you get used to them.” My reply affirmed his sentiment. We shook hands and I left.

Section 3: Ous!

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

> I've been wanting to do [MMA] for a while, since I was thirteen and I really got into [watching] the UFC and sort of had that passion. So, after a few years of just being a bit lazy, I just thought, why not give it a go? See what it's all about, sort of just learn a bit more and I think I sort of calmed myself down a bit, just...when you're out with your mates sometimes, you have a few drinks and you get a bit worked up kind of thing... we'd always have a laugh at each other and we'd get into a fight but then after it was like...when I started [MMA]...I was like there's no need...so I didn't think about any of that. Then when I thought about [fighting] and I started training, that's when I sort of realised...there's no need...[for] any of that… [When I first started MMA] I was just a bit nervous going in there but now I'm just a bit more relaxed and just like going to work. You know, sort of like, oh yeah got training, or got work… [Now I] feel pretty good after [training], like yeah, I've done the class, and I worked hard and that, I just feel relaxed now.

> I think it was just sort of being new. A bit newer and getting to know everyone and sort of being at the bottom. Sort of got to slowly work your way up. So you know you are going to go in there and just pretty much lose to everyone. You always get a bit nervous that you don't want to do anything stupid or anything like you don't want to accidentally hurt someone… I was rolling with Will and he's like, "I'm going to go easy on you" and I said, just go hard on me for, like, ten seconds. I just want to feel, you know...and he rolled me over and it was just a bit awkward on my shoulder and then I ended up injuring it… So injuries are...you sort of think that...am I going to get injured...everyone gets injured I guess so it's not the biggest deal.

This thesis set out with the aims of developing a deeper understanding of the practise of MMA and its relationship with violence. The role MMA plays in the formation and reproduction of gendered identities is complex and not strictly rooted in hegemonic relations. On the surface, being able to perform lethal bodily techniques appears to accord with popular notions of masculinities attracted to violence. However, beneath the surface, having a space for belonging, where one's value aligns with broader conceptions of productive masculinity, holds more significance than mere enactments of violence. This should not downplay subjects' reinforced sense of self through cultivating forms of cultural and physical capital, which align with broader conceptions of masculinity, which remains intimately tied with being able to

defend oneself and family. Participants' continue to engage in an activity that produces the emotions of excitement as 'real' danger and they negotiate confrontational tensions and fear in interactions in the gym, which does not automatically translate to the 'outside' world. In the above quote, practising MMA resulted in distancing from confrontations outside the gym space. Thus, the potential effects of the rituals and practices in MMA on the *habitus* and embodied qualities of personhood in everyday life have been shaped by the kinds of dynamics inside Praelia. In this sense, the conditions in which MMA does not produce violent bodies can be understood through a form of cultivating a masculinity as capital accumulating subjects.

This thesis addresses significant societal questions which appear to span across several areas of social life outside of sport and MMA. This ethnographic project was theoretically informed by Bourdieu, Collins, Connell and Elias and put into practice the various tensions that people who practice MMA contend with. Importantly, people's gender, class and ethnicity were not static predictors of behaviour, but rather, processes that shape and constrain the dispositions of agents within the space. More broadly, Praelia is situated within Melbourne's outer suburbs which is characterised by distinct socio-economic and demographic features, which historically have political and economical significance. These have come to be reflected in people's *habitus* and are brought into interactions as symbolically and socially valued forms of cultural resources that shape, relate and enact violence. The global expansion of the UFC has led to more accessible MMA gyms, which has piggybacked from broader public consumption of body projects.

Previous research investigating masculinity and violence has tended to have an essentialist understanding of this relationship and considered the two mutually inclusive (Spencer 2012b; Young 2019). My findings suggest that the men and women who prospered in Praelia came to value particular ways of performing masculinity, which became ritualised and natural over time. Adopting the *doxa* of the field meant that members benefited socially within the space, and in the wider community of their milieu. The field is shaped by androcentric forms of capital which men and women compete to acquire, and fight to defend. Capital is invested in interactions to boost emotional energy in the form of group solidarity. This has an effect on the emotions and *habitus* of participants and shapes their relationship with

their bodies. The patterns of personalities and behaviours in Praelia share similarities across various local, national and global levels. Hegemonic institutional practices not only affect the minutiae of the everyday but also constrain people's lives along a social gradient. This is not a universal law, but instead reflects the issues that arise from failing economic, political and social systems.

Why MMA matters

The findings from my study revealed how ritualised practises constrain and shape the outcome of interactions within the gym. Broadly speaking, the curriculum taught in the gym is subject to adopting the practical tools for victory at the highest level of MMA—the UFC. As members form social bonds and begin to form an MMA *habitus*, they increasingly become proficient in turning the emotional moods of situations to their advantage. Repeated over several years, there are implications of how these changes affect people's relationship to their emotions, bodies, gendered identity and so on (Hochschild 1983). This provides us with a double edge sword in which a *habitus* counter training can occur (Bourdieu 2000). These findings attempt to present participants' within a nuanced position of the two media depictions that sit at opposite ends of the continuum. In this vein, MMA provides positive social change for people at Praelia, whilst also posing potential risks to health, which while I argue might have particularities, is largely no different to other contact sports that are accepted in society.

The potential for MMA as a vehicle for change is limited by motives for profit and market logic. Just as the UFC alters its rules to balance the threshold of repugnance, members resist, accept or consent to the threshold of confrontational interactions. Members' lament the fact they have had to "soften" the gym, and continue to glorify the "old days". Praelia must continue to balance the quest for excitement in providing members' with the emotions of real danger, without exceeding the limits to the point that Luke loses all his members' and has to shut down. In this sense, the MMA gym becomes a small-scale civilising workshop in its own right (Wacquant 2005; Sánchez García 2013), and members push the boundaries and at times exceed them into dangerous territory. However, during my time, these

never went outside the boundaries of the accepted norms in sport. Presented below are the main findings:

In **Chapter six** the interactions and situations were at the centre of analysis and focused on how those who hold more cultural resources can turn the emotional mood into an advantage against those who they compete with. Over time, the continued loss of emotional energy leads to dejection and eventual ejection from the space. This was at times gradual and repeated over a duration of several years steaming from various interactions within Praelia. Other times it was due to an event which snowballed into an all-encompassing emotional dynamic like losing a fight or being seriously hurt in sparring. Members with higher EE and cultural resources were also able to jolt members EE up or down, by valuing or devaluing their cultural resources in interactions. Valuing cultural resources of members sustained their commitment to the space and reinforced feelings of group solidarity within the MMA class at Praelia. This is not necessarily a deliberate or individual act, but rather, it is indicative of the social gravity and attention of focus placed on valued symbols, that occur below the level of consciousness. Thus imbuing the dynamics of interactions with subtle blends of change and continuity over time.

My findings in **Chapter seven** showed how the forms of capital members bring into interaction are historically tied to their social locations and contain multiple meanings within and outside of Praelia MMA. The results that emerged primarily demonstrated how situations and interactions occur within a specific social field. Further, this outlines how forms of valued capital are invested into interactions in order to capitalise on the emotional mood of situations. After countless interactions in similar situations participants' *habitus* are impressed with a feel for the game, which enables them to creatively adapt and respond. This meant that forms of capital and relationships in Praelia were at times formed around problematic conceptions surrounding ethnicity/race and played out against people viewed as not belonging. Such problematic relations limit and constrict the ability of the ethnic Other (or femininities and marginalised masculinities) to thrive in such an environment. The centrality of bodies becomes increasingly pertinent in visible ways under this context. The way people look, move, their capabilities, how one dresses, conforms or deviates from the accepted norms, etc., plays out in interactions in complex and varying ways.

In **Chapter eight** I explored how masculinity comes to shape Praelia, as MMA serves to supplement the increasing alienation and exclusion from traditional markers of masculinity. Opposed to conceiving of masculinity and gender as static categories, I attempted to demonstrate how gendered practises and rituals guide and shape members within the space. Firstly, the practises and rituals invested in are placed within narratives that are naturalised and inscribed onto the bodies of men. Secondly, through the implicit and unconscious acceptance of the doxa which is engulfed by the *illusio* of the field, members defend the forms of capital which provide an answer to the precarious forms of masculinity they can access. This means that forms of capital can change to reflect broader social trends which infiltrate the lives of everyday people.

Chapter nine used my four and a half years of training at Praelia to outline the various changes and experiences I went through which changed my relationship to the space, sustained my commitment and provided me with a new set of technical proficiencies I did not have previously (Spencer 2012b). This was not an exhaustive list of everything that contributed to these changes. Wacquant (2004a) made clear that to undertake such a task would require presenting an analysis of every detail and change within the fieldnotes of the researcher. Instead, I attempted to provide a condensed version of changes which were subjected to a reflexive analysis of my biases and the specific logic of practice within the space. Laying out my social origins, and concrete issues within Praelia and MMA provide practical solutions rather than a set of significations to be interpreted (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This chapter brought together the theoretical depth of the previous chapters into practice to demonstrate how situations, *habitus*, emotions and bodies are all at once engaged in complex micro-dynamics of the here and now and situated within social structures and processes.

Contribution to Knowledge

The findings from this research contribute to the growing body of knowledge on MMA. This thesis starts by treating SRV as inseparable from the sport process and society at large (Young 2019), by taking seriously both the micro- and macro-level, opposed to giving primacy of one over the other. By drawing on process-sociology, I

shed light on how the historical context that has shaped how people 'make a living', becomes habituated practises over time (Elias 1978, 1987; Elias and Dunning 1986). Sedimented in the *habitus* of participants in Praelia, the forms of capital 'gamers' compete for in the field, occur below the level of consciousness and are symbolic of past struggles (Bourdieu 1977, 1998, 2000, 2001). The history of sport has been shaped by an androcentric worldview. As such men who have come to prosper have influence in shaping the hegemony of institutions in order to maintain power (Mills 1959; Gramsci 1971, 1973; Connell 1987, 1995). Therefore, through IR's in Praelia, members are able to deal with confrontations and circumvent CT/F (Collins 2008). However, through the embodied repetition of practice, within specific limits, the elite enclave of members are better equipped to translate their cultural capital in similar interactions outside the limits of gym walls. The extent to which this is possible continues to remain a complex and dynamic process, and we can return to various techniques used within interactions to further establish the potential outcomes, which are not limited to people who practice MMA. Mastery is not a finite and static attribute attainable once and for all. Rather, it exists on a spectrum embedded within broad and local contexts of varying forms of cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital. Thus, returning to the structural dynamics of interactions, opposed to frozen attributes owned by individuals (Collins 2004, 2008; Paulle 2013).

"This is my inside view. They are the outsiders."

Growing concerns over increasing violence in society are far from black and white. On the one hand, trends in violent crime (e.g. homicide) in Australia tell a different story through decreasing numbers. This is contrasted by increased numbers of sexual assaults against women and violence against minorities since the 1990s (Bricknell 2008; Walby 2012). Violence is not easy. In fact, the strong emotional barriers of confrontational tension and fear require much effort to circumvent it in order for violence to occur. Understanding the structural characteristics and specific situational dynamics that facilitate violence shed light on specific tools for intervention, and moves away from the notion that violence is inevitable and eternal (Collins 2008). MMA provides a piece of the puzzle, but remains the tip of the iceberg of deeper dynamics structuring dispositions, emotions, and personalities of people in a given

society (Mills 1959). The research questions and findings that emerged from a long-term ethnography provided a deep examination of the experiences of people who participate in Praelia MMA. To expand further, future research could take place across multiple gyms and in multiple contexts of participants' lives. For example in social events outside of gym gatherings such as nightclubs, or informal training sessions at weight training gyms outside Praelia. Researchers could explore the deeper effects of participation on embodiment outside of gym settings. Furthermore, using video recording technology of interactions and confrontational situations could provide a deeper analysis of micro-dynamics that happen *in situ*. This could potentially be merged with a broader analysis of MMA organisations in Australia and the UFC.

Current neoliberal practises that have characterised work places in the late 20th and 21st century mean that athletes must be willing to take work anytime, anywhere (Besnier et al. 2018). Perhaps none more explicit than the UFC which rewards and valorises these practises and have increasingly become conflated with fighter identities and their value to the company over recent years. For example, taking fights on 3 days notice or fighting twice within 11 days. The working conditions of fighters—including their pay—has in recent history increasingly become a public and legal debate (Smith 2008; Eidelson 2020; Bloomberg Quicktake 2021). This was not answered within the scope of this thesis, but has important implications broadly affecting institutions outside of sport.

On a global scale, the UFC and MMA continues to sit at the cusp of socially acceptable violence and as the UFC/MMA has continued to grow in popularity and as it has become increasingly regulated, it has led to a proliferation of various and potentially less regulated forms of combat-based sports, for example, the resurgence of bareknuckle boxing and bareknuckle MMA. Combat sports and MMA will undoubtedly continue to raise issues along moral lines and societies trajectory especially when reported deaths in combat sports make news headlines, and continue to result in calls for all combat sports to be banned. Lastly, research could focus more explicitly on sexuality, transgender experiences, women's participation, and experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse people within MMA. This could for example contribute to the literature surrounding the construction of gender and female masculinity, Queer scholarship and belonging within sport. The general

absence of women and near symbolic annihilation of queer identities (in particular masculinities) in Praelia MMA can shed insight into the process and empowering effects of capital accumulating subjects.

Should we be worried about MMA?

The MMA gym may reproduce problematic dispositions in its members while at the same time, create a space for belonging in an increasingly alienating world, in which marginalisation and precarity are on the rise. The extent to which this is possible is tied to broader political, economic and social processes. In this sense, the MMA gym is simultaneously a place of belonging, community, shared experience, friendship and solidarity, and a site for violence, forms of vilification, danger, risk, and the production of aggressive individualism. It is these contradictions that make the MMA space, the local gym, the community of practise, worthy of research. They are hierarchical social fields that operate under tacit rules and forms of social action that often run the fine line between control and respect, and outright violence and harm. The masculinities developed here are built upon previous masculinities shaped by ethnicity, class, and previous bodily experiences (to name a few).

Thus, more research into MMA needs to be conducted in order to continue to understand this relationship, in order to facilitate change. Other locations, social contexts and cultural meanings will deepen our understanding of how MMA practise shapes the dispositions of people. In relation to violence, research into links between MMA participants' and other forms of violence could be examined and understood, for example, will we discover greater incidence of problematic behaviours like self-harm in MMA participants' compared to the general population or other contact sports? Are cases of domestic violence higher in MMA participants' than the general populations or other contact sports? Will we see increasing incidents come to light in relation to gender and brain injury, in the stark research related to the punch-drunk boxer and battered woman syndrome (Casper and O'Donnell 2020).

Broadly speaking, it remains an important task as we research and study sites such as Praelia, that we do not cause harm through *redescription* and symbolic violence towards people in marginal or precarious social positions by labeling their

activities as useless, barbaric savagery (Burke 1998; Matthews and Channon 2016, 2017).

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Appendix A

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:
We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into mixed martial arts experiences in Victoria

In this project we hope to engage with members of the local mixed martial arts community in interviews discussing participants' experiences of MMA In particular the interviews will concentrate on the history of individuals to:
- Gauge an overall history of the participants' life
- Understand the role mixed martial arts plays in one's life
- Investigate why the participant practices martial arts more broadly

**Please be aware that it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to report any unlawful violence, if brought to their attention.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I,

of

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:
Violent Bodies?: An Ethnographic Examination of a Mixed Martial Arts Club being conducted at Victoria University by:
Jeffrey Bishara and supervised by Brent McDonald and Fiona Mclachlan

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Jeffrey Bishara

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Participation in an interview that will be digitally recorded
- To be available for follow up questions if necessary

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

Jeffrey Bishara
0413 313 489
Victoria University
jeffrey.bishara@live.vu.edu.au

Supervisors

Brent McDonald
03 9919 4656
brent.mcdonald@vu.edu.au

Fiona McLachlan
03 9919 4225
fiona.mclachlan@vu.edu.au

If any participants would like to speak to psychologist regarding their time during this study, Dr Romana Morda will be available for counselling and can be contacted on
romana.morda@vu.edu.au or (03) 9919 5223.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix B

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Violent Bodies?: An Ethnographic Examination of a Mixed Martial Arts Club.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher Jeffrey Bishara as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Brent McDonald and Dr. Fiona McLachlan from the college Sport and Exercise Science.

Project explanation

In light of all the recent controversy surrounding MMA in the media, public perceptions of the UFC and MMA have rarely been positive. Public perceptions of people who train in MMA are heavily influenced by the media's representation of the sport. This research aims to investigate at the everyday level, the experiences of people who train, coach or occupy the MMA gym space.

What will I be asked to do?

To be a part of this research you must be over 18 and train at the gym. You are not required to be a part of the MMA class to be a part of the research. Your experiences from the gym and participating in a combat sport are valuable to the project. The process is a 30-minute to 60-minute interview. The interview will focus on your training history and your participation in combat sports. The interview will be recorded (voice only).

What will I gain from participating?

Your participation in the research will contribute in a number of ways. Firstly you will have the chance to discuss your training experiences; and secondly you will be contributing to expanding the perceptions and understandings of public conceptions of MMA.

How will the information I give be used?

All information will be anonymous, confidential and your data will not be identifiable. The information you give will be used to make sense of the experiences in MMA. After the interview is finished, a written copy of the interview [transcript] will be sent to you. This is to make sure you are okay with the information you have provided to be used in the research, and also if you wish to further discuss some points in the research.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There is no risk to you participating in the interview. At any time through the interview if you feel uncomfortable, you can stop. You do not need to answer any question you do not want to. In any such instances that may require some debriefing Dr. Romana Morda will be available for counselling and can be contacted on romana.morda@vu.edu.au or (03) 9919 5223.

How will this project be conducted?

I will be training with you in the gym. I will also take some notes about the training we do and the everyday things happening in the gym, as well as some interesting conversations we have, which we can discuss in the interview. Nothing we speak about that is confidential will be used in the research.

Who is conducting the study?

If you have any questions about the project or if you would like to be involved please feel free to contact me using the details on the bottom, or say hello in person.

Jeffrey Bishara
Mobile: 0413 313 489
Email: Jeffrey.Bishara@live.vu.edu.au

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.
If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Participation/Life History

- What is your training history? Why did you start training?
- How long have you been training?
- How often do you train?
- Do you specialize in anything?
- When did you first become interested in MMA? Watching/Training
- How did you locate this gym?
- Why do you train at this gym?
- Do you live around here?
- Who do you live with?
- Do you have a partner?
- Have you trained at other gyms before?
- Have you competed?
- Do you want to compete?
- What have you competed in?
- What is your highest level of competition in MMA or other sports?
- What interests you most about MMA
- How do you fund your training?
- How did you get into that line of work?
- Do you practice pure disciplines of martial arts that you use in MMA?
- Do you practice any other martial arts discipline?
- How would you describe your perfect training session? (Temperature, music, training partners, intensity, training style, duration, etc...)
- What is your favourite part of training?
- Do you enjoy sparring? How do you feel when you spar?
- Do you reflect on your performance in training during or after class?
- To you keep track of how you progress?
- What about physically –do you measure muscles, weight, heart rate, etc…?
- How do you feel after training?
- Do you have a controlled diet?
- Do you consume alcohol? How often?
- Do you smoke? Explain
- Do you use any other drugs?
- Do you moderate how hard you go depending on who you train with?
- Do you ever think about brain trauma associated with fighting or sparring?
- Do you get scared of being injured? Do you get scared about other things?
- Have you had many training experiences with women?
- Have you ever been injured in sparring?
- Have you ever injured someone in sparring?
- How well did you know the person?
- How long have you know them?
- Have you sparred with them extensively?
- How do you feel about blood when sparring?

Sporting Background/School

- Did you play sport at school?

- Did you play sport after high school, or were you a part of a sport outside of school P.E.?
- Where did you got to school?
- What was that like?
- Where did you grow up?
- What other sporting experiences have you had previously?
- How long did you train for?
- Did you enjoy those sports?
- Have you stopped?
- Why did you stop?

The Gym/Fighting

- Do you know/care about the affiliations or the lineage of the gym?
- Have you ever had a street fight?
- Was it before starting MMA?
- Did you use anything you learnt from MMA class?
- Do you have friends that follow MMA?
- Do you think there is any tension between disciplines?
- Have you ever thought about testing someone in another discipline?
- Has anyone in your family trained?
- Have you noticed if they spar differently with other people?
- Do you have any future hopes for your MMA training?

Social Aspect of Training

- What is your social circle outside of MMA?
- Do you spend time with people from MMA?
- Have you made friends from MMA or the gym?
- Do you have friends that practice MMA?
- Has anyone in your family trained?
- Do you talk to people about MMA who don't practice or know what it is?
- What do you get most from training in MMA?

Consumption

- Do you follow MMA?
- Which MMA organisations/events do you watch?
- How often do you watch MMA events?
- Do you purchase pay per view events?
- Where/how do you watch pay per view events?
- Do you follow other martial arts?
- Do you watch YouTube videos of MMA (boxing, BJJ, Muay Thai, wrestling), for techniques or training purposes?
- Do you watch MMA news on YouTube?
- Do you follow any MMA news on social media?
- Do you follow fighters on social media?
- Do you have friends that follow MMA?
- Do you watch MMA with your friends?
- Do you watch MMA with your MMA friends?
- Do you think some fighters are better than others?

- Do you have a favourite fighter?
- Do you think you have to have an obsession to win?
- Is it like a religion? Are you religious in anyway?
- Do you follow women's fights?
- Do you watch women's fights more than men's?
- Where do you buy you MMA gear?
- How do you choose your MMA gear?
- Do you or have you used any supplements?
- Which brands do you use and why?
- Do you have any favourite fighters?
- Do you follow fighters on social media?
- Do you follow fighter's salary and wages?
- Do you know how much fighters get paid?
- Was that ever something you were interested in?
- Have you traced the history of MMA/UFC/BJJ or other martial arts?

Coaching/Fighting

- Do you plan your sessions?
- Have you done any formal training for coaching?
- How do you book fights?
- Do you get paid?
- How do you get paid?
- Do you have certain people you work with to book fights?
- How do you book who your fighter fights?
- How much notice to you get?
- Do you manage your fighters?
- Do you have any aspirations for people becoming fighters?
- Is there a particular level?
- When did women's only BJJ get introduced? Why?
- Is there still women's self defense classes or is that BJJ?
- Who takes the women's self defense classes?
- Is there different things being taught?
- How do you assess who is ready to fight?
- Do you think there are better fighters in the gym than others?
- Do you give people who fight more time, even if they don't have an upcoming fight?
- If someone new starts are you selective with how much time you give them?

Appendix D

Image 1.0

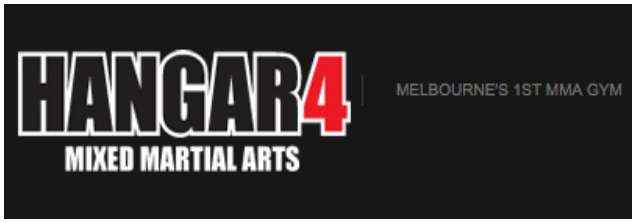

Image 2.0

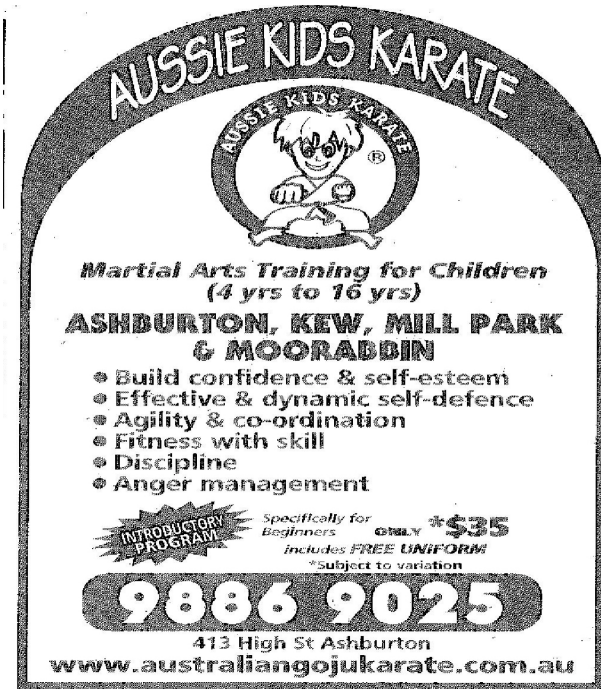

Image 3.0

Image 4.0

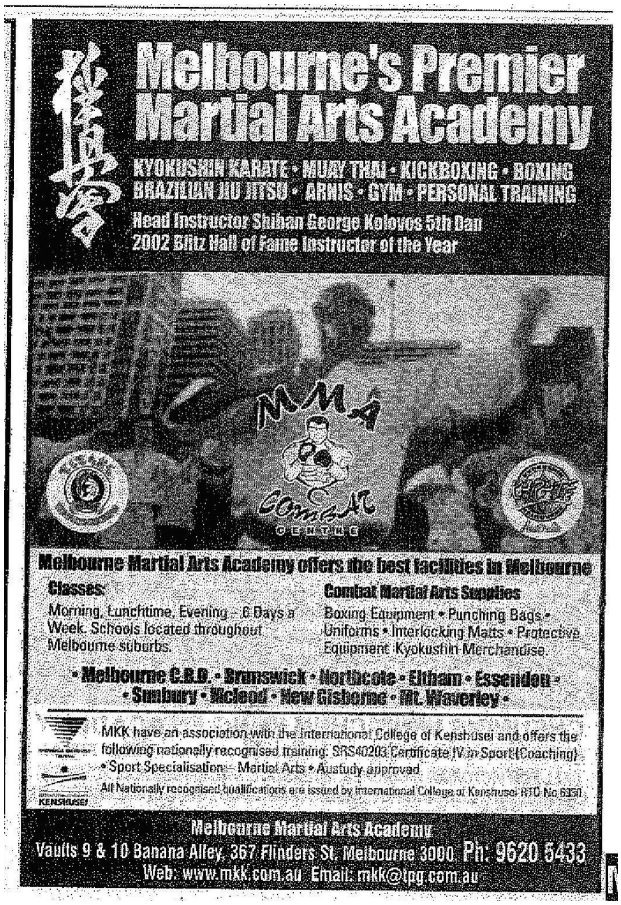

Image 5.0

Image 6.0

Bully-proof, safe and fun

Looking for a dynamic way for your child to stay active and develop new skills? Extreme MMA's Kids' Martial Arts programs are perfect for keeping the little ones away from their gadgets and embracing a healthy lifestyle.

From ages 3 to 12, our juniors enjoy a comprehensive timetable that includes Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai and Wrestling. Led by a team of engaging, skilled and professional coaches, these classes go beyond teaching self defence and fitness. Extreme Kids develop listening and social skills, team work, confidence and respect.

A typical class will include warm up drills, games, self-defence techniques and partner work. Through consistent training and attendance, you can expect to see improvements in your child's behaviour, resilience, and willingness to be involved in school and extra-curricular activities.

Image 7.0

SELF DEFENCE

Absolute MMA's Self Defence classes aim to develop your ability to respond to potentially threatening situations. The classes predominantly utilise Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu techniques and strategies that are developed to keep students safe in combative scenarios.

Accessible to everyone, the class is taught in a safe and friendly environment to ensure that students can focus on learning. This is not a class where we will cover a multitude of alternatives for a single situation, but rather a reduced set of techniques that you will be able to utilise without delay should the need arise.

A key element of this training will be the development of self-confidence and an awareness of others.

- Combat-proven self-defence
- Learn to protect yourself and your loved ones from danger
- Accessible to all fitness and skill levels. No experience required
- Develop confidence
- Develop power, speed and agility
- Build muscle and lose fat while learning valuable skills

Image 8.0


Luke Samson shared a post
Yesterday at 6:00 PM
100% ... when will women be happy NEVER.
Peterson completely destroys feminist narrative
and dangerous it is
100k
21 Comments 10 Shares
Like
Share
View more 2 Comments
Write a comment...

Image 9.0