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**“More Gruesome a Chick Looks, the More I Respect Her Skills”:  
Toxic Masculinity, Emphasized Femininity, and Media Portrayal/  
Fan Consumption of the Emergence of Women’s Mixed Martial  
Arts through Shayna Baszler, Invicta FC, and Ronda Rousey,  
2003-2013**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Kinesiology

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the early history and media/fan reaction to women in combat sports, specifically Women's Mixed Martial Arts. The study is executed through the lens of three important subjects of consideration: Shayna Baszler, Rhonda Rousey, and the all-women's fighting promotion, Invicta FC, set against the theoretical concepts on masculinity/femininity set forth by the sociologist Raewyn W. Connell. This study's purpose is to examine how the emphasized feminine concepts, derived from R.W. Connell, of compliance with men's desire for titillation, sociability over technical competence, and female fragility, featured in MMA media and online fan discourse during WMMA's emergence (2003-2013)? In this same timeframe, how often did online media and fans make toxic masculine statements, and what caused hegemonic masculine remarks to shift into toxicity? By analyzing articles from major MMA news sites (2003-2013), along with attached fan commentary for the presence of emphasized feminine, toxic masculine, and Virtual Manhood Acts traits, this dissertation strives to answer those questions. Some significant findings include discovering that the male gaze atmosphere was omnipresent amongst MMA media/fans throughout WMMA's emergence, content moderators greatly impacted whether their websites contributed to hegemonic or toxic masculinity and the general absence of sportswriters from toxic masculine discussions. A significant discovery showed how online fans focused on Baszler and Invicta FC contrasted with their dialogue around Rousey. The latter was more harshly criticized (and fans less open to positive sentiments) because she threatened the all-masculine preserve of the UFC, both in terms of combatants and fanbase. Overall, there were four major conclusions. First, while during WMMA's emergence, fans became more willing to acknowledge female technical skill, many toxic dissenters remained. Second, discussions of

female fragility were few and far between, with the latter virtually absent from the analysis. Third, humor was common in transforming hegemonic masculine statements into toxic ones. Most importantly, a sizable portion of the online fanbase felt that women competing in MMA were enough reason to view them as defying emphasized femininity, causing a toxic masculine reaction.

## Summary for Lay Audience

This paper examines how online media and fans reacted to the presence of two female professional mixed martial arts (MMA) fighters, Shayna Baszler and Ronda Rousey, and the emergence of an all-women's MMA promotion, Invicta FC, in the years between 2003 and 2013. By analyzing articles from major MMA news sites and attached fan commentary, this dissertation strives to answer whether traditional concepts of feminine behavior influenced media coverage and fan reactions regarding women in MMA and how often these remarks shifted into toxicity. One important finding was that the fans' "desire for titillation" was omnipresent from the beginning to the end of the study period. Another significant discovery found that the online fans' reactions to Baszler and Invicta FC contrasted with their dialogue around Rousey. The latter was more harshly criticized (and fans less open to positive sentiments) because she threatened the all-masculine preserve of the Ultimate Fighting Championship, i.e., the major leagues of MMA. There were four primary conclusions. First, over the 10-year study period, fans became more willing to acknowledge female technical skill, but many toxic dissenters remained. Second, discussions of female fragility were few and far between. Third, humor was common in transforming hegemonic masculine statements into toxic ones. Most importantly, a sizable portion of the online fanbase felt that women competing in MMA defied traditional feminine roles, resulting in a toxic masculine reaction.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank:

- Dr. Kevin Wamsley, Dr. Alison Lee, Dr. Laura Misener, Dr. Aaron Horton, and Dr. Aleksandra Zecevic for serving on my external examination committee.
- Dr. Ken Kirkwood and Dr. Michael Heine for serving on my internal examination committee.
- Stacey Lorenz for teaching me to tell stories of history and present day through sport.
- Jennifer Plaskett in the Kin Department for helping behind the scenes and when I needed advice within the program.
- Anita Christie, Kin Grad Chair, for helping me across the finish line.
- Linda Miller, SGPS VP, for keeping an eye on me and encouraging my progress.
- B. Duncan McKinlay for many nights of movies and Star Trek over the years.
- Zachary Yundt for putting up with me asking his opinions while writing at the Spoke.
- Porter Lesiv for all the love and support since our first day as neighbors, friends, sisters.
- My cousin, Hayley Benz and Aunt Delane Richardson for their love, support, and helping me celebrate my first official days as Dr. Nagel.
- Aran O'Grady, whose friendship nourished me, invigorated me, and helped me find my trans voice.
- Robert Barney, my supervisor, sage, and friend these past ten years.
- My parents, Geoff and Sharon Nagel for their love, funding, support, and especially patience during this decade of graduate school.
- My cat, T'Pol, whose loyalty and friendship got me through the pandemic.

## Glossary

**Armbar**- An armlock where the attacker manipulates their opponent's arm such that the elbow joint is hyper-extended.

**Atomweight**- An MMA weight class, solely dedicated to the women's side of the sport, where the limit is 105 pounds.

**Axe**- Musician slang for an electric guitar.

**Bantamweight**- An MMA weight class where the limit is 135 pounds.

**Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ)**- A martial art and combat sport based on ground fighting and submission holds. It focuses on the skill of taking an opponent to the ground, controlling one's opponent, gaining a dominant position, and using a number of techniques to force them into submission via joint locks or chokeholds.

**Catch-as-catch-can wrestling**: Also known as catch wrestling, is an English-created, American-popularized style of submission wrestling, focusing on joint/limb manipulation.

**Catchweight**- It either means a weight class that does not adhere to traditional weight classes in combat sports, or what a bout is declared if one of the fighters misses weight but the other fighter agrees to still fight.

**Clinch**- In MMA, when two standing upright fighters have grabbed hold of one another, trying to gain positional control.

**Co-main event**- The penultimate bout on a fight card.

**Cobra twist**- Another name for the twister submission hold.

**Complicit Masculinity**- the behavior of men who admire or do not challenge hegemonic masculinity, even if they do not fit the stereotypical hegemonic masculine category themselves.

**Corner**- In boxing and MMA, a fighter's coaches and seconds.

**Crucifix**- A ground grappling position that involves being perpendicularly behind the opponent, chest against back, and controlling the opponent's arms.

**Cutman**- A person responsible for preventing and treating physical damage to a fighter during the breaks between rounds of a boxing or MMA contest.

**Decision**- This is the verdict rendered by three cageside judges who determine the winner of an MMA bout once time has expired. If all score the fight for the same person it is considered a unanimous decision.

**Double leg takedown**- a takedown which involves grabbing the opponent with both arms around the opponent's legs while keeping the chest close to the opponent and using this position to force the opponent to the ground.

**Emphasized Femininity**- the pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support at present. According to Connell, these include sociability over technical competence, fragility in mating scenes or needing a male protector, and compliance with men's desire for titillation.

**Fapping**- Internet slang for male masturbation.

**Featherweight**- An MMA weight class where the limit is 145 pounds.

**Female Athlete Triad**: The combination of disordered eating, amenorrhea and osteoporosis, which can lead to loss of bone mineral density and estrogen.

**Figure-four leglock**- A grappling submission where the intertwined legs of the two fighters form the shape of the number 4.

**Fitch/Fitching**: Named after former UFC competitor Jon Fitch, this is when a fighter largely employs lay and pray tactics.

**Flyweight**- An MMA weight class where the limit is 125 pounds.

**Gassed**- When a fighter loses energy and momentum, becomes fatigued.

**Grappling**: a competitive style of wrestling where points are awarded for takedowns and ground control, and victories can be earned by submitting your opponent.

**Ground and pound**- A fundamental ground fighting tactic in which a grappler secures a stable and safe top position and delivers strikes to their opponent.

**Guard**- a grapple position in which a fighter, on their back, uses their legs and hips to control their opponent's movements and prevent them from gaining a dominant pinning position.

**Half-Guard**- A ground grappling position where one combatant is lying on the other, with the bottom combatant having one leg entangled.

**Hammerlock**: A shoulder lock similar to the double wristlock where the opponent's arm is held bent against their back, and their hand forced upwards towards the neck, thereby applying pressure to the shoulder joint.

**Heel**- Professional wrestling parlance for those cast as the bad guys.

**Heel Hook**- A joint lock where the attacker isolates an opponent's leg between his or her own legs, and then twists the opponent's ankle.

**Hegemonic Masculinity**- The title given to the dominant masculine form in society, and the overall cultural negotiation of gender.

**Hypermasculinity**- An exaggerated masculine style, which consists of three variables: (a) calloused sex attitudes towards women, (b) violence as manly, and (c) danger as exciting.

**Journeyman**- In boxing and MMA, a fighter who enjoys a lengthy career, but is never considered a major title contender.



**Lay and Pray-** When a grappler establishes a strong top position but does nothing to finish the fight by improving position, striking, or working towards a submission. The pray aspect refers to praying that the fight goes to a decision.

**Kimura-** An arm lock where the attacker controls their opponent's wrist and grasps the wrist of their own controlling arm with their free hand. Maintaining a 90-degree angle in the opponent's elbow, the attacker twists the arm applying pressure to the elbow and shoulder.

**Kneebar-** Same principle as to how an armbar is applied but performed on an opponent's leg.

**Male Gaze-** the act of depicting women from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that treats women as sexual objects for the pleasure of heterosexual male viewers.

**Mount-** A dominant ground fighting position in which the attack straddles their opponent's torso, with their knees tight against the opponent's sides.

**Mouse-** A swollen bruise caused by a blow to the eye.

**Muay Thai-** A combat sport and martial arts discipline centered around striking created in Thailand. It is known as "the art of eight limbs," which consist of two fists, two shins, two elbows, and two knees.

**Neck Crank-** a spinal lock applied to the cervical spine.

**No-Gi-** A style of BJJ where one does not wear the traditional martial arts Gi.

**North/South Choke-** a chokehold applied from the north/south position (attacker facing forward on their front, opponent facing forward on their back).

**Omoplata-** A submission technique in which the attacking fighter's legs and hips are used to extend an opponent's shoulder joint past its normal range of motion.

**Omni-** Shorthand for Omnitrope, a steroid medication containing human growth hormone.

**Promo:** promo refers to a monologue spoken by a pro wrestler to get fan interest in either their character or an upcoming match.

**Promotion-** Companies in charge of organizing, producing, and promoting MMA events.

**Purse-** The amount paid to an individual fighter for a specific bout.

**Reach-** MMA slang for wingspan. It is measured from the tip of your middle finger on one outstretched arm to the other when your arms are raised parallel to the ground at shoulder height.

**Rear-naked Choke-** is a submission hold involving placing one arm against an opponent's throat, while using the other to pull back on the first for leverage. It is known as such because it is implemented while facing your opponent's back and is done bare-armed (no sleeves) or "naked."

**Renaissance Man/Woman-** A person who is skilled in a wide variety of skills and trades.

**Ring girl-** a woman who, most notably in boxing and MMA, walks on the outside of the ring holding up a card which signifies the number of the round about to start in a match. These women are usually scantily clad.

**Scramble-** In MMA, when someone is trying to get up after being knocked down to the floor. The standing person is trying to keep their opponent on the ground, and the opponent has move quickly to avoid the standing person's attacks and grabs.

**Shred-** Slang term in rock and heavy metal music which refers to technically proficient guitar playing.

**Side control-** A ground grappling position where the top combatant is lying perpendicularly over the face-up bottom combatant in such a way that the legs are free and he or she exerts no control over the combatant on the bottom.

**Spinal lock-** A multiple joint lock applied to the spinal column, which is performed by forcing the spine beyond its normal ranges of motion.

**Stand and Bang-** When two fighters throw fists at each other with little regard for technique or defense.

**Strawweight-** An MMA weight class where the limit is 115 pounds.

**Subordinate Masculinity-** Men who do not conform to hegemonic masculine norms.

**Suplex-** A wrestling throw that involves lifting the opponent and bridging or rolling to slam the opponent on their back.

**Takedown-** a combat sports technique that involves off-balancing an opponent and bringing him or her to the ground with the attacker landing on top.

**Tap-out-** A hand gesture used in both MMA and professional wrestling that signals to the official a competitor is submitting to their opponent. This is performed by patting either the mat or their own body with their hand.

**Toxic Masculinity-** When hegemonic masculinity is taken to excess. Sociologist Terry Kuper described toxic masculinity as “aspects of hegemonic masculinity that are socially destructive, such as misogyny, homophobia, greed, and violent domination; and those that are culturally accepted and valued.”

**Toe hold-** a twisting ankle lock.

**Triangle choke-** a chokehold, in which the attacker traps the opponent’s neck and one of their arms between the attacker’s legs

**Turtling-** Slang for a fighter behaving like a turtle, usually when they stop attacking as well as stop defending an opponent’s striking offence despite not being knocked out i.e., retreat into their shell.

**Twister-** A submission hold that is a sideways body bend and neck crank, which involves forcing the head towards the shoulder while controlling the body, hence causing lateral hyperflexion of the cervical spine.

**Undercard-** the list of less important bouts on the same card as a main boxing or MMA fight. In modern times, it refers to the fights that are not part of the PPV portion of a card, usually untelevised.

**Vale Tudos-** Nicknamed after the Brazilian fighting sport, they are compression shorts worn by male MMA fighters.

**Virtual Manhood Acts-** Behavior enacted to maintain a heterosexist environment and to oppress women and others in virtual social spaces.

**Weight-cut-** A fighter's practice of fast weight loss, usually done in the week leading up to a fight. Fights are broken up by weight classes, meaning a fighter is required to weigh in at a specific weight (for example a bantamweight fighter is required to make 126-135 pounds) the day before competing.

**White Knight-** Internet slang for a man who comes to the unsolicited defense of a woman online, in the alleged hopes of romantic or sexual favors.

**Zuffa-** The former longtime company which owned the UFC, from 2001-2016.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“Women fighting is stupid. Beauty contests, porn and all that stuff is great but lets face it. Who . . . cares?” CHARLIE GORDON, posting to *The Underground* MMA fan forum in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

On January 5, 2013, the co-main event of **Invicta Fighting Championship 4**, an all-women’s mixed martial arts event, saw Canadian Alexis “Ally-Gator” Davis take on women’s mixed martial arts (WMMA) pioneer Shayna “Queen of Spades” Baszler in a 3-round contest.<sup>2\*</sup> Halfway through the final round, Davis locked in a rear-naked choke in the center of the cage. Blood spatters littered the mat, both fighters having received broken noses. The camera zoomed in as Davis rolled Baszler onto her back, showing she had the submission firmly established. Baszler struggled to get free. Her face and arms were stained in blood, her hands clutching at the hold around her neck.<sup>3</sup> Being a veteran, she sensed defeat was imminent. When applied correctly, this type of submission generally renders people unconscious in under a minute.<sup>4</sup> Baszler had a quick decision to make: tap out or allow herself to get choked out. The Sioux Falls, South Dakota native chose the latter option, refusing to be a “quitter.” While she did regain consciousness shortly after Davis released the hold, for a few seconds, viewers watching at home saw a woman lying limp on her stomach, motionless and covered in blood.<sup>5</sup> Play-by-play

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\* Author’s Note: Due to the length of the dissertation, there are three grammatical techniques used to help readers keep track throughout the dissertation. Names of promotions which publicly organized competitive MMA contests and events are **bolded**, names of MMA media websites are *italicized*, and fans who commented on online news articles and MMA websites/videos have their usernames typed in ALL CAPS.

<sup>1</sup> Charlie Gordon, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>2</sup> “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs Hyatt,” January 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 3:00:05, <https://www.ufc.tv/video/esparza-vs-hyatt> The “Queen of Spades” nickname came from Baszler’s hobby of sleight of hand magic. Her coach, Josh Barnett, saw her use the Queen of Spades card in a magic trick at the gym, and subsequently gave Baszler the moniker at her next professional fight.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Snowden and Kendall Shields, *The MMA Encyclopedia* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2010), 355.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

announcer and Dutch MMA legend Bas Rutten compared the finish to an Anderson Silva vs. Dan Henderson bout<sup>6</sup> and credited Baszler because “she never stopped fighting.”<sup>7</sup> Livestream fan comments on the website *Bloody Elbow* summarily ignored the blood, focusing instead on congratulating Davis on her submission skill.<sup>8</sup> Simply by competing in the culturally male space of MMA since her 2003 professional debut, Baszler consciously stated this is what fighting women do for almost a decade. By “going out on her shield” in this otherwise unimportant fight, she was simultaneously espousing the characteristics of male fighters, although in a female form, gendering herself as masculine to the viewing audience.



Figure 1 Shayna Baszler, covered in her opponent's blood, is locked in a rear-naked choke against Alexis Davis, January 5, 2013.<sup>9</sup>

Rewinding to 2008 and the MMA landscape at that time, especially for women, offered quite a different picture. Shayna Baszler was only four years into her pro-fighting career and was

<sup>6</sup> “Anderson Silva Vs Dan Henderson,” March 1, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 31:15, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/28845/anderson-silva-vs-dan-henderson-ufc-82>. Silva submitted Henderson with a rear-naked choke in the second round.

<sup>7</sup> “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs Hyatt,” January 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 3:00:05, <https://www.ufc.tv/video/esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>8</sup> Lucas Bourdon, January 5, 2013 (11:56 p.m.), comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play,” <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>9</sup> Dave Mandell, “Invicta FC 4- Esparza Vs. Hyatt,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed August 15, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-4-Esparza-vs-Hyatt-26535#/slide/26>.

far from a household name.<sup>10</sup> In those days, there was a sole face of WMMA, fitness model and one of television's titular *American Gladiators*, Gina "Conviction" Carano.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 2 Gina Carano posing for Maxim Magazine in 2008.<sup>12</sup>

Having burst onto the WMMA scene just two years prior, Carano was quite popular with the heterosexual male portion of the sport's fandom.<sup>13</sup> During the nearly four-year window Carano was on top, fans praising WMMA technique and skill, like those watching **Invicta FC 4**, were nowhere to be seen. Baszler and fellow WMMA pioneer Tara LaRosa discussed the lack of touting WMMA fighting prowess, critiquing Carano's impact on the sport, criticisms which they expressed in an ESPN documentary centered around Carano.<sup>14</sup> Baszler said it was

<sup>10</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>11</sup> "Gina Carano." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed August 15, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Gina-Carano-16535>.

<sup>12</sup> Mitch Haaseth, "Gina Carano Maxim Photos," digitalalchemy.tv, Accessed August 15, 2022. <http://www.digitalalchemy.tv/2008/09/gina-carano-maxim-photos.html>.

<sup>13</sup> MMAmania.com, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN episode coming soon," MMAmania.com, May 3, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/05/03/gina-carano-e60-espn-episode-coming-soon>.

<sup>14</sup> "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," sstorm10, February 7, 2010, video, 6:47. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.



frustrating that Gina was the only woman getting attention from the MMA press.<sup>15</sup> LaRosa was more critical, expressing disappointment that Carano had started a trend of WMMA fighters marketing themselves using sexuality. To LaRosa, it disrespected the sport and even expressed that those who similarly conducted themselves to Carano only did so because they lacked the actual technical ability to fight.<sup>16</sup>

As will be shown in this study, Baszler and LaRosa were referred to as “dude looking fighters,”<sup>17</sup> “image(s) of manly testosterone,”<sup>18</sup> and “ugly bitches,” by online fans commenting on the documentary.<sup>19</sup> In addition, several posters presented the narrative that Baszler and LaRosa only criticized Carano because they were jealous that men found the latter attractive. Next to no discourse amongst the fans addressed their criticism at face value, most content to prop up “Conviction” because she appealed to their male gaze while deriding the likes of the “Queen of Spades” for failing to adhere to it.<sup>20</sup> The media was also complicit in it, with writers for *Bloody Elbow* questioning Baszler’s right to say that all WMMA should be covered by the press when she allegedly did not respect the fighter the press had chosen as the sport’s figurehead.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Johnson, 2010, comment on sstorm10, “Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired),” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgvJD05ERel>.

<sup>18</sup> Orthorocco, comment was deleted, comment on sstorm10, “Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired),” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgvJD05ERel>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>19</sup> ToeLock, May 14, 2008 (4:35 am), comment on Iannotti, “Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update).” ToeLock, May 14, 2008 (4:35 am), comment on Iannotti, “Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update).”

<sup>20</sup> ViolentMike, May 14, 2008 (10:59 am), comment on Iannotti, “Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update).”

<sup>21</sup> Brett Jones, July 24, 2008 (11:22 am) Comment on Thomas, “Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women’s MMA.”

Similar sentiments abounded when arguably the most famous and certainly most talked about WMMA fighter, “Rowdy” Ronda Rousey, first burst onto the national stage in late 2010 and then cemented her rising career by winning the **Strikeforce FC** Bantamweight Championship in early 2012.<sup>22</sup> Like Gina Carano, Rousey frequently marketed her sex appeal to improve her popularity amongst the heterosexual male audience, appearing in provocative photoshoots and magazine advertisements.<sup>23</sup> She went one step further, successfully arguing that she deserved a title shot at then **Strikeforce** Bantamweight Champion Miesha Tate, not because of her fighting prowess, but because she felt she was more physically attractive, and therefore more marketable, than number one contender Sarah Kaufman.<sup>24</sup> However, when Rousey was signed by the **Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)** in November of 2012, even her essentially meeting their male gaze was insufficient for the MMA fanbase to appreciate her skills due to their complicit masculine behavior.<sup>25</sup>

Fan comments on online news articles regarding the “big leagues” of the sport signing their first ever female fighter primarily focused upon three significant tenets of emphasized femininity, as proposed by Australian sociologist R.W. Connell, regarding her overall gender theorem of hegemonic masculinity: complying with men’s desire for titillation, sociability over technical competence, and female fragility.<sup>26</sup> Many comments even contained elements of toxic masculinity, a gender theorem first posed by American psychiatrist Terry Kupers, which

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<sup>22</sup> “Ronda Rousey.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>23</sup> Pam R. Sailors and Charlene Weaving, “Foucault and the Glamazon: The Autonomy of Ronda Rousey,” *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy* 11, no. 4 (2017), 428-439, 432.

<sup>24</sup> L.A. Jennings, *She’s A Knockout!: A History of Women in Fighting Sports* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), 144-145.

<sup>25</sup> ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter,” BloodyElbow.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/11/8/3620524/report-ronda-rousey-to-become-first-female-ufc-fighter-wmma>.

<sup>26</sup> R.W Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Oxford, UK: Polity Press, 1987), 187.

contains: “aspects of hegemonic masculinity that foster domination of others and are, thus, socially destructive.”<sup>27</sup> The general fan consensus was that women were not athletically talented or powerful enough to put on entertaining fights, especially when shown side by side against male MMA matchups featured on the same **UFC** cards, and that Rousey was nothing more than a novelty act.<sup>28</sup> Many readers treated “women as inferior athletes compared to their male counterparts” as an objective truth and were fervently against WMMA taking spots on **UFC** cards away from male fighters.<sup>29</sup> Several readers of the website *MMA Mania* thought that Rousey must have performed sexual acts for the president of the **UFC**, Dana White, to persuade him to create a women’s division, as sex was the only way a woman could find herself a career in an exclusively male preserve.<sup>30</sup> Other readers explicitly argued that the only thing women were useful for was sex, with one commenter stating that while WMMA sucks, women have vaginas and breasts, which are both positive attributes in meeting the male gaze often found amongst *MMA Mania*’s audience.<sup>31</sup> Crass comments like these reflect a startling trend of hegemonic masculine sexism transforming into toxic masculine rhetoric. The final emphasized feminine tenet, female fragility, was not as focused upon as the first two were but still featured in the post-Rousey signing discourse. On *Bloody Elbow*, a handful of fans commented that WMMA was aesthetically displeasing, explicitly seeing a woman getting punched in the face.<sup>32</sup> There

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<sup>27</sup> Terry A. Kupers, “Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61, no. 6 (2005), 713-724, 716.

<sup>28</sup> Bigweeze, November 8, 2012 (9:44pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>29</sup> Dishonest Abe, November 8, 2012 (11:19pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>30</sup> Str8\_right, November 9, 2012 (10:44am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>31</sup> Str8\_right, November 9, 2012 (10:43am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>32</sup> Superfkmario\_, July 26, 2012 (9:52pm) Comment on Helwani, “Genesis of Invicta FC.”

were some positive commentaries from online fans regarding Rousey individually<sup>33</sup> and WMMA collectively. However, a minority did not express hegemonic masculinity behavior and its complicit masculinity/emphasized femininity components.<sup>34</sup> In addition, some of the loudest voices amongst these online fans spoke toxic masculine dialogue, which featured: “the stigmatization and subjugation of women, gays, and men who exhibit feminine characteristics.”

### **Objectives and Purpose of Study**

The objective of this study is to examine how MMA news websites treated pre-UFC WMMA (also known as WMMA’s emergence) along with their respective fan readerships concerning Connell’s theorems of hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, emphasized femininity, as well as the resulting excess creation of online toxic masculinities using criteria defined by Terry Kupers. This objective is important because online sports media and a rabid online following helped increase MMA/UFC’s popularity, so the tone and nature of their discussions regarding women participating in the sport’s professional ranks are of prime research value. The study is laid out chronologically from 2002 through early 2013, through the lenses of MMA media and online fans via three specific “topics of conversation”: Shayna Baszler, **Invicta FC**, and Ronda Rousey. Baszler, the central focus for most of the dissertation, is highlighted for her lengthy career, which determines the study period’s timeline, her status as a WMMA pioneer, and her lack of many emphasized feminine attributes.<sup>35</sup> **Invicta FC** was selected as a “topic of conversation” due to its status as the first major all-female MMA promotion in North

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<sup>33</sup> Memitim, November 8, 2012 (10:02pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>34</sup> Eddie Haymaker, November 8, 2012 (9:47pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>35</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

America and for the wide range of feminine and masculine qualities found amongst its roster of fighters, all while providing a spotlight for Shayna Baszler to perform under.<sup>36</sup> Rousey was chosen due to her rapid rise in the sport despite her late arrival, her duality in terms of emphasized feminine forms, and the difference in media/fan coverage devoted to her versus that dedicated to the rest of professional WMMA (Baszler and **Invicta FC**) combined.<sup>37</sup>

This study serves various purposes, some less visible at first glance, others more obvious. The primary reason for this dissertation's existence is to demonstrate how a combat sport's various media outlets and online fanbases reacted when a woman (Shayna Baszler) inserted herself as a competitor in a heavily hegemonic masculine athletic environment while at the same time choosing not to conform to emphasized feminine ideals to become more popular with producers and consumers. A critical secondary reason is to examine how online media/fan reaction to "masculine" women like Baszler compares to how these two groups responded to more conventionally emphasized feminine fighters such as Ronda Rousey and, to a lesser extent Gina Carano. Does Rousey's significant participation in emphasized femininity provoke more or less of a complicit masculine response from the predominantly male audience than was directed towards Baszler?

Another key secondary purpose is to investigate how WMMA, in general, is accepted/rejected by the overall MMA community, such as shown by the reception that all-female promotions found in the form of the first year of **Invicta FC**. Many media members and fans considered the concepts of women being able to carry the marketing for an entire fight card and the notion of there being any significant level of fighting prowess in WMMA foreign. Did

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<sup>36</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Sailors, "Foucault and the Glamazon: The Autonomy of Ronda Rousey," 432.

the combatants who populated the first four **Invicta FC** fight cards do anything to sway the minds of the MMA media and their respective online readerships? How did the fighters' individual attaining or failing emphasized feminine norms translate into the media/fanbase's reaction, and how much did the latter's perceived hegemonic/toxic masculine identity applaud and/or criticize the former?

The final purpose is to precisely analyze and decipher when hegemonic/complicit masculine comments and narratives regarding WMMA are present in the media's writings and online fan reactions; at what point do these narratives become representatives of toxic masculinities? When do MMA media/fan conversations regarding emphasized feminine tenets of compliance with men's desire for titillation, sociability over technical competence, and female fragility go from hegemonic expectations to toxic expressions? In addition, regarding compliance with men's desire for titillation, how did these conversations invoke and contribute to the male gaze?

### **Framing The Research Questions**

1. *How, and to what degree, has the emphasized feminine concept of expected "compliance with men's desire for titillation," and its relationship with "male gaze" theory featured in MMA media and online fan discourse during the emergence of WMMA between 2002-2013?*
2. *How, and to what degree, has the emphasized feminine concept of "sociability over technical competence" featured in MMA media and online fan discourse during the emergence of WMMA between 2002-2013?*

3. *How, and to what degree, has the emphasized feminine concept of “female fragility” featured in MMA media and online fan discourse during the emergence of WMMA between 2002-2013?*
4. *During the emergence of WMMA, how prevalent were toxic masculine expressions and statements amongst the MMA media and the sport’s online fanbase when discussing the three topics of conversation, and how did such toxic statements transform from their hegemonic/complicit counterparts?*

Before we can get into the study’s methodology and the method of achieving the above objectives and purposes, we must first introduce the trio of “topics of conversations.” This is to make the readers more familiar with those whose histories provide the study’s timeline.

### **Who is Shayna Baszler?**

Shayna Andrea Baszler was born on August 8, 1980, in San Angelo, Texas, the eldest of Skip and Margaret Baszler’s two daughters.<sup>38</sup> Information is limited on her parents. Her dad was born and raised in the small South Dakota town of Redfield, where he, alongside his brothers, wrestled for most of his youth, representing Redfield High School at several state tournaments.<sup>39</sup> Her mother was one of four daughters of retired U.S. Naval Machinist Harry Sha Huang Lee and his wife Eileen, raised in Lee’s birthplace of Hawaii.<sup>40</sup> During Shayna’s early childhood, her family moved around the Western United States due to Skip’s service time in the Army, but by the middle of the decade, they firmly settled in Sioux Falls.<sup>41</sup> Much of the information regarding

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<sup>38</sup> “Bethe Correia vs. Shayna Baszler UFC 177,” August 30, 2014 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 18:14, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/35736>.

<sup>39</sup> “Grapplers win 35-20, MHS mark to 4-2,” *The Daily Republic* (Mitchell, South Dakota), December 10, 1975.

<sup>40</sup> “Lee, Harry Sha Huang” *Honolulu Advertiser* (Honolulu, Hawaii), July 14, 1997.

<sup>41</sup> “Episode 16 (with guest Shayna Baszler)” August 12, 2013, in *MMA Dude Bro Podcast*, podcast, 1:16:32, <http://www.mmadudebro.com>

Shayna's pre-teenage years comes via anecdotes from herself and her dad. That information reveals three essential characteristics which helped to shape her future.

First, starting when she was six years old, her father and uncles, all then wrestling coaches, began passing on their knowledge of the sport to her. In several interviews, Baszler admits she really was not into amateur wrestling at the time, "as it really wasn't something girls did."<sup>42</sup> She never competed officially until after university.<sup>43</sup> However, with her dad, uncles, and a handful of cousins entrenched in the mat game, she "went with the flow," attending tournaments and "hanging out" at training camps with her family. In such a culture, she picked up skills via rolling around with her cousins; techniques passed to her from the adults and simple osmosis of being part of family activity that revolved around amateur wrestling.<sup>44</sup> In this way, Baszler laid the foundation when she sought combat sports as a career later in life.<sup>45</sup>

Second, Baszler needed very little encouragement to fall in love with professional wrestling. Her dad had been a fan ever since he was a little kid, primarily via the exploits of Verne Gagne's American Wrestling Association (AWA), the televised promotion with the most prestige in the Midwestern states and a major competitor to the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). Skip watched it every week on tv and, "as soon as she could talk," Shayna was enjoying the spectacle with him.<sup>46</sup> Around the age of 5 or 6, her favorite wrestlers were a masked heel named Super Ninja,<sup>47</sup> following her father's childhood idol, the Master of the Claw submission,

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<sup>42</sup> "Nikki Bella, Charlotte Flair & Shayna Baszler roundtable interview: WWE Now," WWE, October 27, 2018, video, 26:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuP9P1CmlZU&t=198s>.

<sup>43</sup> "S.F. duo earns spots on Team USA," *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), June 13, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> "Episode 16 (with guest Shayna Baszler)" August 12, 2013, , in *MMA Dude Bro Podcast*, podcast, 1:16:32, <http://www.mmadudebro.com>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> "BTC Uncut Live 'Skip 'From the Front Row'" September 27, 2019, in *Kota iRadio Network*, podcast, 59:51, <https://podbay.fm/podcast/1479000268>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Super Ninja was one of several ring names used by Homosassa, Florida wrestler Larry Oliver Sr.



Baron von Raschke.<sup>48</sup> In a podcast interview, Skip recalled how they would have impromptu matches in the living room. Shayna often wore a ski mask pretending to be Super Ninja, with his daughter playfully saying, “Bodyslam me Dad!”<sup>49</sup> However, the WWF was the Baszler household’s promotion of choice due to Shayna’s love of Hulk Hogan and the show’s “slick packaging.”<sup>50</sup> Regardless of which of the two companies the family put on the television, the critical fact remained she never stopped watching pro wrestling, even as she grew into an adult.<sup>51</sup> This information is essential to the study proper because even though Baszler’s post-MMA pro wrestling career is not examined, certain aspects of the industry, such as “cutting promos” and creating a “heel persona,” featured in how she promoted herself while competing in MMA, along with the fact that pro wrestling is usually considered a masculine endeavor.

Finally, Baszler was a tomboy through and through, as both she and her father attested in interviews. Many of her friends before university were male youths with whom she regularly roughhoused.<sup>52</sup> She also participated in pickup sports whenever she got the chance, according to Skip.<sup>53</sup> Shayna was allowed to dress as she wanted and choose her extracurricular activities as she was “blessed with parents that just didn’t ever place limits on anything I wanted to do . . . you set the rules for who you’re going to be. Never being restrained, this is how you have to do things, this how you have to dress.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Baron von Raschke was the ring name of Omaha, Nebraska wrestler James Raschke.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Hulk Hogan is the ring name of Augusta, Georgia pro wrestler Terry Bollea.

<sup>51</sup> “Nikki Bella, Charlotte Flair & Shayna Baszler roundtable interview: WWE Now,” WWE, October 27, 2018, video, 26:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuP9P1CmlZU&t=198s>.

<sup>52</sup> “BTC Uncut Live ‘Skip ‘From the Front Row’” September 27, 2019, in *Kota iRadio Network*, podcast, 59:51, <https://podbay.fm/podcast/1479000268>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> “Nikki Bella, Charlotte Flair & Shayna Baszler roundtable interview: WWE Now,” WWE, October 27, 2018, video, 26:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuP9P1CmlZU&t=198s>.

No evidence suggests Baszler competed in interscholastic athletic competition for Lincoln High School, her alma mater.<sup>55</sup> Amateur wrestling still did not interest her enough to try competing in it, although she did attempt to convince her dad to let her play football.<sup>56</sup> In an interview, Shayna stated, “I really wanted to play football, but my dad wouldn’t let me, which is funny, because I wrestled (out of competition), which was all guys.”<sup>57</sup> She graduated from Lincoln High School in May 1998,<sup>58</sup> then moved to Kansas City, Kansas, for the next three years attending MidAmerican Nazarene University.<sup>59</sup> In 2001, upon completing her collegiate studies, she moved back to her family in Sioux Falls, where she began working two jobs to try and build cash while figuring out her next steps.<sup>60</sup>

According to a 2008 interview she gave the *Argus Leader* the week of her **EliteXC** fight with Cris Cyborg, she attended “several amateur mixed martial arts fights at the Oaks Hotel and Convention Center,” where she observed a fighter who constantly bragged about her numerous victories.<sup>61</sup> Baszler recalled in the article, “She was too cocky, and I wanted to put her in her place . . . I started training to fight her.”<sup>62</sup> Her father told her when she told him her plan to pursue MMA, “Go on, get your head kicked in, learn a lesson.”<sup>63</sup> It took her two years to learn that lesson. After numerous amateur fights from 2002 to early 2004, “no girl within 75 miles

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<sup>55</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008. There is no evidence she did not play sports, either, just stating no connection made its way into either the local newspaper or her interviews. There was, however, a yearbook photo Baszler posted to Twitter showing her as the student manager for the varsity volleyball team in her junior year.

<sup>56</sup> “Nikki Bella, Charlotte Flair & Shayna Baszler roundtable interview: WWE Now,” WWE, October 27, 2018, video, 26:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuP9P1CmlZU&t=198s>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>58</sup> “1998 Sioux Falls area high school graduates,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), May 23, 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008. I am unable to tell if she returned to college to finish her degree at a later date, or if she was in a three-year program, but she definitely moved back to Sioux Falls after her third year.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> “BTC Uncut Live ‘Skip ‘From the Front Row’” September 27, 2019, in *Kota iRadio Network*, podcast, 59:51, <https://podbay.fm/podcast/1479000268>.

would fight her,”<sup>64</sup> utilizing the skills she learned as a youngster rolling around the wrestling mats and what she taught herself from books on Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Ironically, she revealed that she never faced the unnamed fighter noted above.<sup>65</sup>

During this early stage of her fight training, when she “squeezed workouts between two jobs and devoured books on Brazilian Jiu Jitsu out of a friend’s garage,” Baszler’s pre-professional MMA career is a bit difficult to chronicle with historical accuracy, which is why it is laid out in the introduction instead of the study proper.<sup>66</sup> A brief but detailed summary of the timeframe analyzed in the other dissertation chapters follows, informing the reader of the main points of her combat sports career, which this study’s research centers around.

Trained in the martial arts disciplines of Muay Thai kickboxing, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and catch-as-catch-can wrestling, the latter, under the watchful eye of former **UFC** Heavyweight Champion Josh Barnett, her official MMA head coach since 2007,<sup>67</sup> Baszler attained almost everything one can achieve in the world of professional fighting.<sup>68</sup>

Beginning her pro MMA career in 2003, Baszler joined a small group of women who were the first to enter the cage.<sup>69</sup> At the time, most fans did not know females participated in the sport.<sup>70</sup> WMMA generated little public recognition until 2006, when Gina “Conviction” Carano

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Cory Graves, “Shwing! Featuring: Kevin Owens, Shayna Baszler, Viking Raiders,” November 26, 2019, in *After the Bell*, produced by WWE, podcast, 62:32, <https://www.stitcher.com/show/after-the-bell/episode/shwing-featuring-kevin-owens-shayna-baszler-viking-raiders-65579346>.

<sup>68</sup> “Invicta FC 2: Baszler vs McMann,” July 28, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:58:57, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34063>.

<sup>69</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>70</sup> Jennings, *She’s A Knockout*.

emerged.<sup>71</sup> A year later, Carano and Julie “Fireball” Kedzie fought in the first televised WMMA bout in North America<sup>72</sup>, and it was not until 2013 that the **UFC**, the sport’s premier promotion, staged WMMA fights.<sup>73</sup> Baszler’s career by that point was staggering in terms of longevity (10 years) and caliber of opposition.<sup>74</sup> By the end of January 2013, her record stood at 15 wins against eight losses, fighting fellow pioneers Kedzie, Amanda Buckner, Roxanne Modafferi, Tara LaRosa, Cris Cyborg, Megumi Yabushita, and Sarah Kaufman.<sup>75</sup> Baszler placed in the top ten WMMA bantamweight rankings for almost a decade.<sup>76</sup> In addition, she won two silver medals at the 2009 FILA Grappling World Championships,<sup>77</sup> having competed at the 2007 Worlds.<sup>78</sup> In 2013 she competed on the **UFC**’s hit reality show, *The Ultimate Fighter (TUF)* Season 18, the first to include women.<sup>79</sup> Baszler, a heavy favorite to win the grand prize, tapped out to relative newcomer and eventual winner Julianna Pena in the first elimination fight.<sup>80</sup> After a short-two fight stint in the **UFC**,<sup>81</sup> Baszler switched careers in late 2015, becoming a

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<sup>71</sup> “Gina Carano.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed August 15, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Gina-Carano-16535>.

<sup>72</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 134-135.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150.

<sup>74</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> “The Ultimate Fighter: Ep.1801 History in the Making,” September 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 1:44:25, <https://www.ufc.tv/video/ep-1801-history-in-the-making>.

<sup>77</sup> “World Championship No Gi-Grappling Seniors 2009-12-11 Fort Lauderdale (USA) female 63.0 kg,” UnitedWorldWrestling.org, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://unitedworldwrestling.org/database>.

<sup>78</sup> “S.F. duo earns spots on Team USA,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), June 13, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> “The Ultimate Fighter: Ep.1801 History in the Making,” September 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 1:00:44, <https://www.ufc.tv/video/ep-1801-history-in-the-making>.

<sup>80</sup> The Ultimate Fighter: Ep.1802 Ladies First,” September 12, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 42:42, <https://www.ufc.tv/video/ep-1802-ladies-first>. Pena went on to become UFC Bantamweight Champion in 2022.

<sup>81</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

professional wrestler.<sup>82</sup> In 2017, she signed with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE),<sup>83</sup> where to date she still wrestles.<sup>84</sup>

### **Who is Ronda Rousey?**

Ronda Rousey, born February 1, 1987, in Riverside, California, has been in combat sports most of her life.<sup>85</sup> At a very young age, she started with judo, her mother being former world champion AnnMaria De Mars.<sup>86</sup> From 2002 onwards, she amassed both medals and recognition in the sport, despite the U.S. Olympic Committee's drastic underfunding of U.S. Judo.<sup>87</sup> She missed out on a medal at the 2004 Olympics in Athens but bounced back in 2007, winning a gold medal at the Pan American Games at 70 kg and a silver at the World Championships.<sup>88</sup> At the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, she became a co-bronze medallist.<sup>89</sup> With the Olympics behind her, she left judo and worked odd jobs until she discovered WMMA.<sup>90</sup> With the reluctant support of her mother and boxing coach Edmond Tarverdyan,<sup>91</sup> she made her amateur debut on August 6, 2010, against Hayden Munoz, submitting her opponent in the first round with an armbar.<sup>92</sup> After two additional amateur fights and two professional bouts, all victories via an armbar submission, she was signed to **Strikeforce**'s featherweight

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<sup>82</sup> Alex Goff, "Shayna Baszler's Pro Wrestling Debut," [fightgamemedia.com](http://fightgamemedia.com), 2015.

<https://fightgamemedia.com/2015/09/shayna-baszlers-pro-wrestling-debut/>.

<sup>83</sup> "Shayna Baszler arrives to the WWE Performance Center," WWE, October 4, 2017, video, 0:43.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYS\\_caffEp0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYS_caffEp0).

<sup>84</sup> "Shayna Baszler," WWE.com, World Wrestling Entertainment, accessed August 16, 2022.

<https://www.wwe.com/superstars/shayna-baszler>.

<sup>85</sup> Ronda Rousey with Maria Burns Ortiz, *My Fight / Your Fight* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015) 9-10.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-35.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-84.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-162

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-176.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-197.

division in 2011.<sup>93</sup> After her second **Strikeforce** bout against Julia Budd, “Rousey shocked the MMA community by calling out the incumbent (bantamweight) . . . champion (Miesha) Tate.”<sup>94</sup>

Afterward, Ronda Rousey began carrying herself in a manner that reflected emphasized feminine ideals. Her primary reasoning for why she should be given a title shot against Tate, despite none of Rousey’s first four professional fights taking place in the bantamweight division,<sup>95</sup> was because she was more physically attractive than the recognized number one contender Sarah Kaufman.<sup>96</sup> She had a lengthy press conference with Tate, no stranger to using her emphasized femininity to build her fanbase, where the two debated which was more important: marketing the highest drawing fight possible or respecting the official division rankings and paying one’s dues.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, Rousey’s perspective prevailed, with the two set to square off for the title on March 3, 2012. Rousey became the new champion, submitting Tate with her patented armbar with just over thirty seconds remaining in the opening round.<sup>98</sup> Throughout the remainder of her **Strikeforce** and eventual **UFC** tenures, Rousey frequently posed provocatively in various advertisements and men’s life and entertainment magazines. These included commercials for Buffalo Jeans,<sup>99</sup> Pantene shampoo,<sup>100</sup> Reebok athletic wear,<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> “Ronda Rousey.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>94</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 144. Parentheses mine.

<sup>95</sup> “Ronda Rousey.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>96</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 144-145.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate’s arm to win bantamweight title,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843435/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-breaks-miesha-tates-arm-to-win>.

<sup>99</sup> Sailors, “Foucault and the Glamazon: The Autonomy of Ronda Rousey,” 432.

<sup>100</sup> D’Arcy Maine, “Ronda Rousey shows that strong is beautiful in new Pantene commercial,” espn.com, December 7, 2016. [https://www.espn.com/espnw/culture/the-buzz/story/\\_/id/18227636/ronda-rousey-shows-strong-beautiful-new-pantene-commercial](https://www.espn.com/espnw/culture/the-buzz/story/_/id/18227636/ronda-rousey-shows-strong-beautiful-new-pantene-commercial).

<sup>101</sup> Relaxnews “Ronda Rousey fronts new Reebok #PerfectNever campaign,” ctvnews.com, Bell Media, July 13, 2016. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sports/ronda-rousey-fronts-new-reebok-perfectnever-campaign-1.2985352>.

and the Carl Jr.'s chain of hamburger restaurants,<sup>102</sup> as well as magazine photoshoots for the likes of *Maxim*, *ESPN Magazine*,<sup>103</sup> *Sports Illustrated*'s much-publicized Swimsuit Issue,<sup>104</sup> and *Muscle & Fitness*.<sup>105</sup>

Rousey had only one more fight in **Strikeforce**, a successful title defense against Sarah Kaufman, in August 2012.<sup>106</sup> With the promotion soon being absorbed by the **UFC** in January 2013,<sup>107</sup> the information leaked in November 2012 that "Rowdy" had officially signed a deal with the MMA "major leagues," becoming the first female fighter to do so.<sup>108</sup> Soon after, Dana White announced Rousey as the **UFC**'s inaugural Women's Bantamweight Champion, successfully defending her title against Liz Carmouche on February 23, 2013.<sup>109</sup> The next three years saw her retain the championship on five successive occasions.<sup>110</sup> However, she lost her title

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<sup>102</sup> Khushbu Shah, "Carl's Jr. Swaps Models for Fighter Ronda Rousey," *eater.com*, Vox Media, August 3, 2015. <https://www.eater.com/2015/8/3/9090697/carls-jr-swaps-slutburgers-for-bad-ass-fighter-ronda-rousey>.

<sup>103</sup> John Heinis, "Ronda Rousey Makes September Cover of Maxim Magazine, Poses Topless," *bleacherreport.com*, Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., July 29, 2013. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1720478-ronda-rousey-makes-september-cover-of-maxim-magazine-poses-topless>.

<sup>104</sup> SI Staff, "Ronda Rousey 2015: Captiva, Florida," *swimsuit.si.com*, ABG-SI LLC, January 29, 2016. <https://swimsuit.si.com/swimsuit/model/ronda-rousey-2015-photos#gid=ci02594687f00225db&pid=ronda-rousey-MTY5MjQzOTg5OTk3MTM1MzIz>.

<sup>105</sup> Austin Hargrave, "STRIKEFORCE BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION RONDA ROUSEY," *muscleandfitness.com*, JW Media, 2012. <https://www.muscleandfitness.com/athletes-celebrities/strikeforce-bantamweight-champion-ronda-rousey/>.

<sup>106</sup> "Ronda Rousey." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>107</sup> Steven Marrocco, "With Zuffa contract complete, former Strikeforce boss plans to travel, not promote," *mmajunkie.usatoday.com*, USA Today, April 23, 2014. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2014/04/with-zuffa-contract-complete-former-strikeforce-boss-plans-to-travel-not-promote>

<sup>108</sup> Ariel Helwani, "Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January," *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/11/8/3620614/report-ronday-rousey-set-to-join-ufc-strikeforce-to-hold-last-event>.

<sup>109</sup> "UFC 157: Rousey vs Carmouche," February 23, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 2:00:57, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/68716/ufc-157-rousey-vs-carmouche/>.

<sup>110</sup> "Ronda Rousey." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

via knockout to Holly Holm on November 15, 2015.<sup>111</sup> Following a comeback loss to Amanda Nunes in December 2016, Rousey officially retired from the **UFC** and MMA.<sup>112</sup>

### **What is Invicta Fighting Championships?**

Founded in 2012 by fight promoter Shannon Knapp, **Invicta FC** was created primarily due to the Zuffa absorption of rival promotion **Strikeforce FC**.<sup>113</sup> Having worked for **Strikeforce**, **EliteXC**, the **UFC**, and other promotions, Shannon Knapp was a behind-the-scenes veteran organizing MMA events. From this experience, she noticed a talent gap between the premiere WMMA fighters and a sizeable portion of the remaining competitors: “mismatches all over the place.”<sup>114</sup> Promoters resisted adding women’s divisions because “there aren’t enough big names to create divisions.” Knapp’s response: “Fine, we will build the divisions (featherweight, bantamweight, flyweight, strawweight, and atomweight).”<sup>115</sup> The resistance was understandable to Knapp, but she offered a challenge: “No one is coming in here trying to make a difference. No one is rolling up their sleeves and taking care of this side of the sport, and that’s where we come in. We’re trying to build a legitimate pro-female athlete platform. We want to get in here and provide opportunities and change the landscape.”<sup>116</sup>

On April 28, 2012, **Invicta FC** staged its first show, a presentation from Memorial Hall, a 3,500-seat venue in Kansas City, Kansas, streamed live on the company’s website for free to build a

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Blake Schuster, “Ronda Rousey on Possible UFC Comeback: 'It's No Longer a Priority in My Life',” bleacherreport.com, Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., January 30, 2020. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2873959-ronda-rousey-on-possible-ufc-comeback-its-no-longer-a-priority-in-my-life>.

<sup>113</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 142.

<sup>114</sup> Matt Saccaro, “Invicta FC's Shannon Knapp Talks Providing 'Better Life for the Athletes',” bleacherreport.com, Turner Broadcasting System, April 26, 2012. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1162310-invicta-fcs-shannon-knapp-talks-providing-better-life-for-the-athletes>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.



fanbase for a still somewhat marginalized product.<sup>117</sup> With a stacked card from top to bottom, the show featured a “who’s who “of WMMA. The main event saw former **Strikeforce** bantamweight champion Marloes Coenen defeat Romy Ruyszen via unanimous decision.<sup>118</sup> The free trial viewership, which switched to a PPV model in 2013, worked.<sup>119</sup> **Invicta FC** is still going strong today, with **Invicta** 48 taking place on July 20, 2022.<sup>120</sup>

### Topic of Conversation 1: Shayna Baszler

Why is analyzing Shayna Baszler’s pre-UFC MMA career and the media coverage/fan reaction attached to them essential to the growing academic attention to women in combat sports?

Firstly, there is the simple matter of longevity. Baszler spent over twelve years in professional MMA, starting on the ground floor with other WMMA North American pioneers.<sup>121</sup> When Baszler retired from MMA, she had won several titles,<sup>122</sup> helped **Invicta FC** make a strong debut in 2012,<sup>123</sup> and briefly made it to the “mountaintop” of the **UFC**.<sup>124</sup> Others, such as Ronda Rousey and Miesha Tate, may have been the fighters that drew the **UFC** and its massive audience attention to WMMA,<sup>125</sup> but without Baszler and those of her ilk, there would be no

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<sup>117</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results recap from last night for 'Coenen vs Ruyszen 2' in Kansas City, Kansas,” bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/29/2986042/invicta-fc-1-results-recap-from-last-night-for-coenen-vs-ruyszen-2-in>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 142.

<sup>120</sup> “INVICTA FC 48 - TENNANT VS. RUBIN,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-48-Tennant-vs-Rubin-93542>.

<sup>121</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>122</sup> Rob Sargent, “Weekend Recap: Baszler, Pene Win At The Cage Inc.,” MMArising.com, November 22, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/11/22/weekend-recap-baszler-pene-win-at-the-cage-inc/>.

<sup>123</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198093/invicta-fc-2-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

<sup>124</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>125</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 144-145.

WMMA!<sup>126</sup> Baszler's career also provides a lengthy timeframe to analyze the challenges and barriers in MMA for women historically, having spent just under ten years as a pro fighter before she reached the **UFC**.<sup>127</sup>

Second, Shayna Baszler is not the stereotypical performer the **UFC** would preferably promote as the face of their women's division. She is an Asian-American with toned muscles and tattoos, displaying little adherence to emphasized femininity.<sup>128</sup> A quick scroll through her Twitter timeline shows she loves muscle cars, football, guns, Star Wars, and video gaming, all typically perceived as male preserves.<sup>129</sup> Finally, it is important to note for this study that Shayna Baszler is not the focus, though her career in combat sports and how she presents herself is why her career is utilized as a "topic of conversation." This study is not one of Shayna Baszler's life; it is not a biography, though, admittedly, in parts, it takes on that appearance. The Queen of Spades draws on a vast amount of accessible material, a lengthy range of events, and coverage to analyze a hegemonic masculine sporting environment chronologically and a potentially toxic masculine fanbase's views on a fighter's adherence/defiance regarding emphasized femininity. This gives the study a natural starting focal point (her amateur days in the early 2000s) and a logical conclusion (the end of her pre-**UFC** career).<sup>130</sup> However, as mentioned before, Shayna Baszler is not the sole narrative "topic of conversation" utilized. Ronda Rousey and **Invicta FC** are crucial topics of examination and analysis in the latter half of this dissertation.

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<sup>126</sup> "Bethe Correia vs. Shayna Baszler UFC 177," August 30, 2014 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by the Ultimate Fighting Championship, video, 18:13, <https://www.ufc.tv/video/35736>.

<sup>127</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>128</sup> "Shayna Baszler." WWE.com, World Wrestling Entertainment, accessed December 4, 2019. <https://www.wwe.com/superstars/shayna-baszler>.

<sup>129</sup> "Shayna Baszler: @QoSBaszler, accessed December 4, 2019.

<sup>130</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

## Topic of Conversation 2: Ronda Rousey

While this study's analysis on the media coverage/fan reaction to Ronda Rousey's pre-UFC MMA career is nowhere as in-depth or as comprehensive as that dedicated to those surrounding Shayna Baszler, it is necessary to use "Rowdy" as a "topic of conversation" in the essay's latter half. The first and primary reason for this is that Rousey was heavily covered by MMA journalists during the last two years of the study period, with more articles devoted to her than were published about the rest of WMMA combined.<sup>131</sup> This makes her career relevant to the current state of professional WMMA and how the sport's media/fans reacted to her presence. In addition, the sheer number of published writings on Rousey makes it easy to glance at the available data and add to the study's examination rather than analyze her in the same detail as Baszler or **Invicta FC**.<sup>132</sup>

Second, whereas Baszler generally resisted emphasized feminine norms, Rousey fought against and for these expressions. As mentioned earlier, Rousey openly argued she deserved a shot at Miesha Tate's **Strikeforce** title because she and Tate were the most physically attractive women in the bantamweight division.<sup>133</sup> Many academics, along with Ronda Rousey herself, have pointed out that Dana White allowed the former Olympic medalist to compete in the Octagon because she was attractive and a good fighter.<sup>134</sup> She also was a frequent trash talker, most notably refusing to apologize for breaking Tate's arm in their **Strikeforce** fight.<sup>135</sup> The

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<sup>131</sup> "Search results for Rousey," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021.

<https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=414&q=rousey> through <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=407&q=rousey>.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout*, 144-145.

<sup>134</sup> Charlene Weaving, "CAGE FIGHTING LIKE A GIRL: EXPLORING GENDER CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP (UFC)," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 41, no. 1 (2014), 129-142, 135-137.

<sup>135</sup> JG87, March 4, 2012 (12:20am) Comment on Roth, "Strikeforce Tate Vs. Rousey Results: Ronda Rousey By Armbar."

gender dichotomy she displayed and the media/fan reaction to it contrasts Rousey with Baszler's apparent defiance.

The last reason Rousey is employed as a “topic of conversation” to discuss the emergence and media/fan treatment of pre-UFC WMMA is that in early November 2012, two months before the end of the study period, “Rowdy” signed with the UFC.<sup>136</sup> This fits with the examination as it shows the media/fan response to women finally making it to the “major leagues” of MMA. In addition, it serves as an interesting parallel to the media coverage and fan reaction to female fighters like Baszler, who had been fighting for a decade and were still toiling in the “minor leagues.” One final notation, Rousey receives much less analysis than Baszler, as academics extensively studied the former, and she did not compete during the first seven years of the latter's pro career.

### **Topic of Conversation 3: Invicta FC**

For several reasons, the first major all-women MMA promotion based in North America became a “topic of conversation” separate from Shayna Baszler. First, Shayna Baszler's final three pre-UFC bouts occurred for **Invicta**.<sup>137</sup> Second, across their first four fight cards (the last three which Baszler competed on), seventy-two different WMMA combatants fought at least once for **Invicta**.<sup>138</sup> While this by no means suggests that each of these competitors is worth examination for this study, more women fighting means more opportunities for the MMA news media and their readership to comment on emphasized femininity adherence or defiance within

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<sup>136</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/11/8/3620614/report-ronday-rousey-set-to-join-ufc-strikeforce-to-hold-last-event>.

<sup>137</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>138</sup> “Invicta Fighting Championships” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/organizations/Invicta-Fighting-Championships-4469>.

WMMA. It would have been a waste of resources not to cover these four events in more detail than the prior male-dominated cards where Baszler competed.

Finally, due to its nature as an all-female promotion, **Invicta FC** entered the televised MMA landscape at a fortuitous time. The company hosted its first-ever event one month after Rousey submitted Tate,<sup>139</sup> arguably the most reported on and discussed WMMA bout up to that point in the sport's history.<sup>140</sup> **Invicta FC** held their fourth event just two months after Rousey signed a **UFC** contract.<sup>141</sup> Both supporters and detractors would have focused on **Invicta's** inaugural cards to see if the overall women's game held up to the standard set by Rousey and Tate, ergo either reinforcing or changing stereotypes regarding WMMA fighters. **Invicta** does not feature from beginning to end in this academic study until the latter half because it does not exist until midway through the final year that the dissertation examines.<sup>142</sup> The pre-**UFC** media coverage of WMMA and the fan reaction to it needed examination from beginning to end, hence why Baszler and not **Invicta** is the more prominent figure in this study.

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<sup>139</sup> "Invicta FC 1- Coenen vs Ruysen," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed August 16, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-1-Coenen-vs-Ruysen-20545>.

<sup>140</sup> "Search results for Rousey," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

<sup>141</sup> "Invicta FC 4- Esparza vs Hyatt," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed October 6, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-4-Esparza-vs-Hyatt-26535>.

<sup>142</sup> Press Release, "Invicta Fighting Championships announces female featherweight tournament, Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen to headline," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, February 21, 2012.

## Methodology

To examine fan, fighter, and media interpretations of Shayna Baszler, **Invicta FC**, and Ronda Rousey, this study draws on R.W. Connell's theories of hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, and emphasized femininity, rooted in the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations.<sup>143</sup> To further examine those three "topics of conversation," the study also draws upon the theory of toxic masculinities derived from Connell's work, though initially noted and defined by psychiatrist and academic Terry Kupers. Before delving into the specifics behind hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, and emphasized femininity, I briefly explain why I use Connell's theorems instead of more recent and acclaimed academic literature. The answer is twofold. First, it is a pioneering cornerstone of gender studies. Many other gender theories and applications either owe the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a base from which they can construct and/or compare their rulesets (such as hegemonic femininity)<sup>144</sup> or likely played a role in forming Connell's theorem (such as hypermasculinity).<sup>145</sup> This allows the ability to intersperse other theories when needed throughout the dissertation sparsely. Second, it is a theory that is simple to understand and implement in an academic study, especially relative to this study. As discussed later in the method section, the dataset utilized is broad in scope and large in scale. With so much data to examine, it makes sense to choose a methodology that is broad in concept and easily translatable for historians. As to why I am also utilizing toxic masculinity, it is primarily for two specific reasons. First, despite not being mentioned by Connell in her work, toxic masculinity discussions heavily involve hegemonic masculine talking

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<sup>143</sup> Connell, "Gender and Power," 183-184.

<sup>144</sup> Mimi Schippers, "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony," *Theory and Society* 36, no.1 (2007), 85-102, 94-95.

<sup>145</sup> Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation," *Journal of Research in Personality* 18 (1984), 150-163.

points, which complements the usage of her theorems. Second, and most importantly, based on the literature, it seems to represent the excesses of hegemonic masculinity in Kupers' words, "socially destructive."<sup>146</sup>

Connell explains, "hegemony means . . . a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes."<sup>147</sup> Hegemonic masculinity refers explicitly to the "ascendancy" of dominant masculinity "in relation to various subordinate masculinities as well as in relation to women." The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an integral part of how a patriarchal social order works."<sup>148</sup> Within this theorem reside four distinct interacting groups: (1) hegemonic masculinities, (2) complicit masculinities, (3) subordinate masculinities,<sup>149</sup> and (4) emphasized femininities.<sup>150</sup> Each plays its role in keeping the dominant narrative in control, with minor "non-compliant" or non-conforming groups resisting the social ascendancy of patriarchy.<sup>151</sup> For this study, only the hegemonic masculine, complicit masculine, and emphasized feminine groups will be focused upon, along with their respective toxic masculine spinoffs, mainly because of the lack of involvement that subordinate masculinities have with the available dataset. The examined subjects, Shayna Baszler, Ronda Rousey, and **Invicta FC**'s fighters, are all female, which makes subordinate masculinities irrelevant as emphasized femininities cover similar territory specifically for the female individual.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Kupers, "Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health," 716.

<sup>147</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>149</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Berkeley: Polity Press, 1995), 79-81.

<sup>150</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 1831-87.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* 185-186.

*Hegemonic masculinity* is the title given to the dominant masculine form and the overall cultural negotiation of gender.<sup>153</sup> Critical aspects of the dominant masculine group must be addressed to understand its importance at the top of the patriarchal pyramid. First, it can be achieved with or without force. *With force* usually refers either to physical violence or economic violence, the latter of which “backs up . . . ideologies used to justify the holders of physical power.”<sup>154</sup> *Without force* applies to “ascendency embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures . . . and so forth.”<sup>155</sup> This is important to address because while Shayna Baszler and other WMMA fighters compete in violent sports, there is no physical violence confronting them from the hegemonic masculinity point of view. Rather it lies in the behind-the-scenes “without force” machinations of the **UFC** and the sport-specific media. However, there is also the notion that violence in sports, let alone violence in general, is not a place for women. So simply by competing in MMA, Baszler competes against hegemonic masculine ideals. Second, “the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures, such as the film characters played by Humphrey Bogart . . . and Sylvester Stallone.”<sup>156</sup> Connell stresses that these “fantasy figures . . . need not correspond to the men who hold the most social power – in contemporary societies the corporate or social elites.”<sup>157</sup> In this sense, those who benefit the most from patriarchal supremacy need not subscribe to these ideals. The “fantasy figures” are arguably more critical to the hegemonic masculine dynamic than the real people in charge.<sup>158</sup> This applies to the study of Baszler’s career relative to the larger-than-life legends who formed the backbone of the **UFC**:

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>154</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 185-186.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.



violent brawlers and “bad boys” such as Ken “The World’s Most Dangerous Man” Shamrock,<sup>159</sup> Chuck “Iceman” Liddell,<sup>160</sup> and Tito “The Huntington Beach Bad Boy” Ortiz.<sup>161</sup> To these symbols, women were either ring girls or girlfriends.<sup>162</sup> For a woman entering these professions as a participant, not a sideline act, while refusing to adhere to emphasized feminine appearance standards, she directly conflicts with the symbols of hegemonic masculinity and those who benefit from or promote the dominant ideology.

The second group contained within the theory of hegemonic masculinity that this study examines is *emphasized femininity*, which Connell describes as “the pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support at present.”<sup>163</sup> While Connell mainly uses this to determine the culturally-promoted ideal for how women interact with men and how they are perceived by men in relationships, the issues pertinent to this study are broader in stroke. Of those issues that Connell lists in her 1987 book *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, those that stand out are “the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men’s desire for titillation.”<sup>164</sup> Regarding Baszler, Rousey, and **Invicta FC**, these tenets of emphasized femininity are valuable in their own unique ways. “The display of sociability rather than technical competence” can apply to fans not wanting to see women show proficiency or brashness in a masculine preserve, such as fighting and MMA specifically.<sup>165</sup> “Fragility in mating scenes” (i.e., dating comes from a similar ideal) reflects that men should be the dominant, strong protectors. At the same time, women are culturally seen as

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<sup>159</sup> Snowden, *The MMA Encyclopedia*, 403-408.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-257.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-322.

<sup>162</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 185-186.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 187

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Cplmac, “Shayna Baszler: “Tara is the one fight that I really want,” MMAforum.com, April 22, 2008.

<https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/shayna-baszler-tara-is-the-one-fight-that-i-really-want.35048/#post-532456>.

the more submissive and weaker gender in sexual relationships.<sup>166</sup> A woman who can defend herself takes away the male's protector role. This study, however, primarily addresses "female fragility" as a much broader concept in the hegemonic masculine theorem that women are not "biologically built" for fighting and risk severe injury by competing in MMA.<sup>167</sup> "Compliance with men's desire," also known as contributing to the male gaze, shows that even if a woman invades a dominant masculine space, society expects her to arouse men as a primary purpose.<sup>168</sup> Within MMA, this comes in the form of either the ring-card girls clad in bikinis or female fighters having to portray themselves in heteronormative and sexualized fashions.<sup>169</sup> To further understand this, we must look at the concept of the male gaze.

Film theorist Laura Mulvey coined the male gaze theory in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."<sup>170</sup> Focusing on what she described as the "scopophilic instinct (pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object),"<sup>171</sup> Mulvey argued: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*."<sup>172</sup> In her world of cinema, she posited that the primary

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<sup>166</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 187.

<sup>167</sup> Rainmaker6, April 14, 2009 (10:36 pm) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>168</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 187.

<sup>169</sup> SHORT\_BUS, July 24, 2012 (5:01pm) Comment on Thomas, "On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA."

<sup>170</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen 16*, no.3 (1975),6-18.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

role of women was to be, in the word of Dr. Aoiffe Walsh “a canvas on which male desires are projected, hence subverting female agency and power.”<sup>173</sup>

As this theory spread from film to other mediums, describing this in lay terms became essential. The male gaze depicts women from a masculine, heterosexual perspective as sexual objects for the pleasure of heterosexual male viewers. This phenomenon is seen in film and arguably in pop culture in general.<sup>174</sup> For the purposes of this study, I surmise there is a symbiotic relationship between the macro “male gaze” and the micro “compliance with men’s desire for titillation” tenet of emphasized femininity. Whenever a heterosexual male, either in the MMA media or within their online fanbase, praises women for meeting feminine physical appearance standards or denigrates them for failing to, this contributes to the overall toxic “male gaze” environment surrounding the sport.

Media and fans subject WMMA fighters who fail to abide by these emphasized feminine norms are subjected to the further subjugation of being cast out or ostracized. Groups of women placed in this category of nonconforming femininities include lesbians, promiscuous women, and tomboys: Lesbians for not abiding by heteronormative ideals, promiscuous women for not saving themselves for just one man or “marriage,” and tomboys for not contributing to the male gaze.<sup>175</sup> As pointed out by Connell, society expects women to portray emphasized femininity. With that in mind, it stands to reason that men and women benefitting from the hegemonic masculine order would vehemently reject those women failing to adhere to or outright confront these norms.

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<sup>173</sup> Dr. Aoiffe Walsh, “What is Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory?” Perlego.com, Perlego, Accessed August 3, 2023. <https://www.perlego.com/knowledge/study-guides/what-is-laura-mulveys-male-gaze-theory/>.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other,” 95-96.

A good example of this is Dana White's profanity-laced tirade against female MMA media reporter Loretta Hunt for publishing a story claiming, "two anonymous sources informed her that the UFC had been preventing backstage access . . . to agents and managers that were currently unpopular with the organization."<sup>176</sup> White's rant cast doubt on Hunt's intelligence because of her gender, along with him insinuating that her sources and perhaps Hunt herself were "faggots."<sup>177</sup> Hunt's credibility was questioned by White, alleging a refusal to abide by emphasized feminine norms while also not conforming to the UFC's preferred narrative of being portrayed in a positive only light.<sup>178</sup> Hunt was treated as a pariah, not just by a man, but by a man who makes millions of dollars capitalizing on hegemonic masculinity (White revoked her press pass).<sup>179</sup> One can only imagine how male colleagues, the media, and the primarily male fanbase would cast out WMMA fighters.

*Complicit masculinity* arguably constitutes most men participating in and/or benefiting from the hegemonic masculine structure. As explained earlier, very few men meet the "models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures."<sup>180</sup> Connell defines complicit masculinities as "constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy."<sup>181</sup> A person who does not display subordinate masculine behaviors is compelled not to criticize the hegemony to benefit from it, which is enough to make them complicit. As Connell states: "It is tempting to treat them as slacker versions of hegemonic masculinity – the difference between the men who cheer football

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<sup>176</sup> Mark S. Williams, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy: The Sport vs. Spectacle Divide* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2018), 94-95.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Christian A. Vaccaro and Melissa L. Swagger, *Unleashing Manhood in the Cage: Masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 86-88.

<sup>180</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 185-186.

<sup>181</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

matches on TV and those who run out into the mud and (make) the tackles themselves. But there is often something more definite and carefully crafted than that . . . A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives . . . are never violent . . . do their accustomed share of the housework . . . and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists.”<sup>182</sup> Based on this framework, I would delineate between two forms of complicit masculinity, ones that Connell does not define herself: hegemonic and toxic. The former consists of those “great many men” who get along with women at home and yet still find nothing wrong with WMMA competitors being excluded from the sport entirely or viewed as lesser than their male counterparts. The latter contains those who openly revel or “cheer” in sexualizing, degrading, or mocking female participation and presence in MMA. In this patriarchal celebratory excess, the masculinities displayed by the MMA media and online fans shift from hegemonic to toxic.

Connell did not define toxic masculinity, but its usage in academic literature stems from her work. In her 2005 essay, co-authored with James W. Messerschmidt, entitled “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” Connell made two notations of what she classified as “toxic practices.” First, she noted: “In some contexts, hegemonic masculinity actually does refer to men’s engaging in toxic practices—including physical violence—that stabilize gender dominance in a particular setting. However, violence and other noxious practices are not always the defining characteristics.”<sup>183</sup> Here, Connell acknowledges that while toxic practices exist in one configuration of hegemonic masculinity, it is far from representing most configurations. Second, in their conclusion of the study, Connell and Messerschmidt argued: “While we

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>183</sup> R.W. Connell and J.W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society*, 19, no. 6 (2005), 829-859, 840.

welcome most of the applications and modifications of the hegemonic masculinity concept as contributions to the understanding of gender dynamics, we reject those usages that imply a fixed character type, or an assemblage of toxic traits.”<sup>184</sup> This seems to suggest that the authors concluded that toxic traits are not on their own representative of Connell’s theorem, which is a primary reason why in this study, I treat hegemonic and toxic as separate masculinities, with the latter being, in my view, gross excesses of the former.

As stated earlier, the term toxic masculinity did not originate with Connell. It first appeared in the 1970s in the doctoral thesis of Shepard Bliss, who was a proponent of the mythopoetic men’s movement.<sup>185</sup> In 1996, the term surfaced again in an academic article by Tracy Karner, which focused on the behaviors of American soldiers returning from the Vietnam War and the pressure placed on them by their childhoods and their time in the service to become “real men.”<sup>186</sup> However, psychiatrist Terry Kupers coined the primary definition of toxic masculinity in a 2005 journal article. In “Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health Treatment in Prison.” Kupers defined this particular gender theorem as one: “constructed of those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that foster domination of others and are, thus, socially destructive.”<sup>187</sup> He elaborated further that these aspects included: “the devaluation of women, homophobia and wanton violence.”<sup>188</sup> Regarding this dissertation, these three elements are important in delineating between hegemonic masculinity and its toxic counterpart. A significant

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 854.

<sup>185</sup> Bryant W. Sculos, “Who’s Afraid of ‘Toxic Masculinity’?,” *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, 5, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>186</sup> Tracy Karner, “Fathers, Sons, and Vietnam: Masculinity and Betrayal in the Life Narratives of Vietnam Veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” *American Studies*, 37, no. 1, (1996), 63-94.

<sup>187</sup> Kupers, “Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health,” 716.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 714.

example that appears all too often in the dataset is fans specifying which WMMA fighters they wanted to sleep with, often in crass, overtly descriptive fashion.<sup>189</sup>

To reference when the WMMA discussion amongst the online media/fans shifts from hegemonic tones to toxic ones, this paper utilizes the term Virtual Manhood Acts (VMA) to describe such shifts. Coined by sociologists Mairead Maloney and Tony Love, VMAs are essentially how the hegemonic oppression of women occurs online in all “male circles.”<sup>190</sup> The four primary characteristics of a VMA are: “1) creation of homosocial, heterosexist space, 2) sexualization of women, 3) signaling possession of a heterosexual, male body, and 4) humor as a tool of oppression.”<sup>191</sup> Throughout the dissertation, one or more of these characteristics will differentiate between hegemonic dialogue and its toxic counterpart. In addition, Maloney and Love argue that in the case of VMAs, a physical body is not needed to signal manhood; simply claiming you have a heterosexual male body is enough in an online environment.<sup>192</sup> Given the nature of social media, the perpetrator of a VMA is most often anonymous, with their actual name, physical appearance, and sex unknown to others participating in the discussion. This allows anyone to “enact manhood and claim the concomitant power offered by the hegemony of men.”<sup>193</sup>

Numerous scholars apply hegemonic masculinity to sport, highlighting the centrality of physicality and violence in the social-cultural negotiation of ‘appropriate’ gender norms in the cases of the players, fans, and those who profit from the spectacle. Works providing good

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<sup>189</sup> Fat Daddy Doobs, April 27, 2012 (10:15pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for ‘Coenen vs Ruysen 2’.”

<sup>190</sup> Mairead Moloney and Tony P. Love, “#TheFapping: Virtual Manhood Acts in (Homo)Social Media,” *Men and Masculinities*, 21, no. 5 (March 9, 2017), 603-623.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 603.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 614.

<sup>193</sup> Mairead Moloney and Tony P. Love, “Assessing online misogyny: Perspectives from sociology and feminist media studies,” *Sociology Compass* 12, no. 5 (2018), 1-12, 8.

examples of this include those by Michael A. Messner, David Whitson and Kevin B. Wamsley, Stacy L. Lorenz and Geraint B. Osborne, and Macintosh Ross.

In Messner's landmark work, "When Bodies are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport," the author discusses several key observations, amongst both male athletes and spectators, as to how women fit into violent sports. When he interviewed former NFL lineman Marvin Upshaw, the retired player compared his job to that of a woman giving birth, namely, both are amazing feats, but neither body is performing a task it was not designed for, implying that female bodies are not "built" for violent sport.<sup>194</sup> Framed in Messner's conclusion is a quotation attributed to a male fan espousing: "A woman can do the same job as I can do - maybe even be my boss. But I'll be damned if she can go out on the field and take a hit from Ronnie Lott."<sup>195</sup> This belief allows for the cultural domination of women. As Messner ascertains, perhaps 99 percent of American males would not be able to take a hit from Ronnie Lott, and yet, promoting "skill and force in the body" still helps separate men from women.<sup>196</sup>

Wamsley and Whitson, along with Lorenz and Osborne, help show historically that via the sports of boxing and hockey, respectively, hegemonic masculinity promotes across class lines the idea that there is a crucial aspect of male identity that only violent sports can provide. The deaths of boxer Luther McCarty<sup>197</sup> and hockey stars Allan Loney and Charles Masson were portrayed by fans, the press, and the courts as "terrible accidents," but by no means a reason to hinder the growth of young men by instituting stricter rules to suppress violence.<sup>198</sup> Finally, Ross

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<sup>194</sup> Messner, "When Bodies are Weapons," 206-207.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>197</sup> Kevin B. Wamsley and David Whitson, "Celebrating Violent Masculinities: The Boxing Death of Luther McCarty," *Journal of Sports History* 25, no. (1998), 419-431.

<sup>198</sup> Stacy L. Lorenz and Geraint B. Osborne, "'Nothing More Than the Usual Injury': Debating Hockey Violence During the Manslaughter Trials of Allan Loney (1905) and Charles Masson (1907)," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 30, no. 4 (2015), 698-723.



explains that in boxing, much like in MMA, “The ring becomes a stage for the . . . exaltation of this violence and physicality, which loses its ordering capacity if women are permitted entrance to the sport. Professional boxing, then, is a naturalizing practice. Boxers, largely unknowingly, “serve to stabilize a structure of domination and oppression in the gender order’.”<sup>199</sup>

### **Method**

Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, and emphasized feminine ideals, along with Terry Kupers’ outlining of toxic masculinity, is applied to a wide range of documents, the nature of which vary somewhat from chapter to chapter, including newspaper/online articles, blog posts, and comments, forum entries, fight film, YouTube comments, and the occasional podcast. This study is told in a combined format of a narrative historical approach and what I have termed theoretical contextual analysis. According to historian Jordan Goldstein, “narrative historians base their interpretations primarily on the primary source evidence and communicate these interpretations in a story format,” usually in chronological order. Since my data clusters around different points in time, telling the timeline more or less in order makes the most sense. However, due to the general wide breadth of history, such academics cover in their research, most tend to make an addendum where they utilize thematic contextual analysis in addition to the narrative method.<sup>200</sup> Thematic chapters are generally told chronologically, but the overall narrative flow jumps backward at the beginning of a successive section.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Macintosh Ross “Documenting the Female Boxing Experience: Using the Films *Toy Tiger*, *J.C.*, and *Tyson* to Unveil Women’s Relationship with Boxing,” *Sports History Review* 42 (2011), 56-69, 57.

<sup>200</sup> Jordan Goldstein, “Stanley’s Political Scaffold: Building Canadian National Identity within the State and through Ice Hockey: A political analysis of the donation of the Stanley Cup, 1888-1893,” PhD diss., (University of Western Ontario, 2015), 15.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

Looking at various aspects, it is apparent that a thematic analysis would not fit my study. Unlike Goldstein, my study does not deal with a large swath of Canadian political and social history, delving into scores of relevant realms of historical background. My work covers a ten-year timeframe in a comparatively new “niche sport within a niche sport,” dealing with modern, yet still historical, actors. Doing that same level of background research would be time-consuming and unnecessary, making deriving themes and their context irrelevant. This adds to my notion that the narrative method trait of chronologically telling the story from beginning to end fits this study, with the study being historical. However, the study requires a straightforward timeline-driven narrative without that level of background or political context.

Instead of a thematic-based approach, a contextual theoretical analysis fits better. This study covers the timeframe of late 2003 through early 2013, or put another way, my freshman year in high school through the end of the first year of my master’s degree. Despite not following MMA in this near-decade, I still lived as a young adult when the events covered herein occurred. Because I am writing on such a modern historical timeframe, I naturally contain bias due to my personal, however unintentional, skewing of events. Adding theory, something used in most other sociocultural studies of present times would make the recent data more objective. It also helps the reader better understand the overarching social contexts involved within the historical narratives.

As for a specific layout for the study’s narrative flow, the chapters are placed in the chronological order of Shayna Baszler’s life. Chapter 3 focuses on her early amateur and professional MMA careers (2002-2008).<sup>202</sup> Chapter 4 describes her post-primetime television

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<sup>202</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

debut period (2009-2011),<sup>203</sup> while Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the first four events held by **Invicta FC**.<sup>204</sup> Beginning with her first pro MMA fight at the Sioux Falls Fairgrounds on October 31, 2003, the paper flows event to event of Shayna Baszler's pre-UFC career until concluding with her January 5, 2013 bout against Alexis Davis from Kansas City, Kansas's Memorial Hall.<sup>205</sup> There are some narrative detours, as reflected in how Gina Carano and Cris Cyborg are treated in Chapters 3 and 4, with Ronda Rousey receiving important focus in Chapters 5 and 6. These two chapters also focus more on the entirety of **Invicta FC** than Shayna Baszler individually. Anecdotes and general summaries form the connective tissue between events. Three narrative steps are taken when a major event occurs, such as her first live televised fight against Cris Cyborg in June 2008.<sup>206</sup> First, the event is explained in detail. Second, the surrounding media/fan portrayal of and reaction to the event is laid out, with the various hegemonic masculine and emphasized feminine narratives examined. Narrative shifts from hegemonic masculinity to toxic masculinity are also noted and analyzed. How exactly this examination occurs is further explained in this section. Finally, the timeline then proceeds through to the next major event. As her fights become more high profile and feature pre-match commentary from the various contributors to the dialogue, the surrounding media, and fan portrayal will also be examined from before this event. By the time Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 develop entire **Invicta FC** fight cards (to the extent promoted by the news media) are examined with this same analytic structure.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> "Cris Cyborg vs. Shayna Baszler EliteXC: Unfinished Business," July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 14:12, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

When examining, analyzing, and discussing media/fan postings with my interpretations of the various fights and interviews, the work is divided into three sections in the context of my methodological framework. The first section comes in the form of collecting and recording the data. Concerning all three “topics of conversation,” the amount of raw primary source material to examine is staggering, a sizeable portion of it irrelevant to the study. This is because not many limitations are available to compartmentalize the dataset.

Because of this, I limited my primary dataset to a few yet reliable sources. I utilized several online MMA news websites, fan forums, and YouTube. I used Shayna Baszler’s last name on the various websites’ search function feature, doing the same for Ronda Rousey and simply typing **Invicta** for their respective data collections. I then organized the search results by article/thread publication date for the three lenses on the MMA news sites and fan forums. Concerning Shayna Baszler, I then read every article/thread which fell between October 2003 (her pro debut) and January 2013 (her final pre-**UFC** fight), along with the attached reader comments. For **Invicta**, I read every media article and the respective fan comments from February 2012 (when Shannon Knapp announced the creation of the promotion) through January 2013 (when they held their fourth PPV event). For Ronda Rousey, I counted the number of articles published between 2010 and 2011 on various websites without reading them outside of a cursory glance. For 2012, I selected one or two articles from each news outlet for each of the three timeframes I chose to examine the Rousey narrative. I recorded relevant data by screenshotting articles and fan comments or taking notes.

Most video footage was from the *UFC Fight Pass* online streaming service or YouTube. I watched every Baszler fight available on *Fight Pass*, along with **Invicta**’s first four fight cards.

Because of the context, I also watched Carano vs. Cyborg<sup>207</sup> and Rousey vs. Tate.<sup>208</sup> Where YouTube and videos were concerned, I selected fight videos that were either unavailable on *Fight Pass* and/or featured viewer comments, along with a portion of the Gina Carano ESPN documentary.<sup>209</sup> I took detailed notes on the videos I watched and took screenshots of relevant fan comments. In the dissertation proper, I provided an analysis of the video footage and a running commentary on how Baszler's fights were depicted by whichever MMA promotion ran the show. Comments made by the broadcast team and how each particular bout or interview played out to the viewing audience, i.e., the type of fighting style or social demeanor displayed by the participating combatants, outline this examination. Although the video footage is irrelevant to this study's findings, it provides important historical context for the reader regarding what image of WMMA the fans and news media received.

The second step in the analysis process considers my initial reaction to the primary data (Baszler's MMA bouts, interviews conducted in both audio and print form, and news articles about Baszler, Rousey, and **Invicta FC**). Using Connell's hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, and emphasized femininity theorems, along with Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity and Moloney/Love's description of VMAs, I provide a brief baseline positive/negative analysis based on moments and quotes from this raw data (or lack thereof) which represent the opposites of the hegemonic masculinity spectrum, along with the frequency of their appearance. I note my biases towards what is a positive and negative portrayal. Still, the

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<sup>207</sup> "Cris Cyborg vs. Gina Carano Strikeforce: Carano vs. Cyborg," August 14, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce, 17:07, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31868/cris-cyborg-vs-gina-carano-strikeforce-carano-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>208</sup> "Ronda Rousey vs Miesha Tate Strikeforce: Rousey vs. Tate," March 3, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, 20:23, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31868/cris-cyborg-vs-gina-carano-strikeforce-carano-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>209</sup> "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," sstorm10, February 7, 2010, video, 6:47. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

theoretical application of Connell's and Kupers' respective works helps to make the study more objective. This initial analysis forms the foundation for examining the reactionary data (further media/fan response).

Next, I move into the third section, which examines the media/fan interaction with articles and social media surrounding the raw footage. I first note the opinions from news articles from the press discussing Shayna Baszler, Rousey, and Invicta FC (the individual fighters competing on their shows and the company itself). Then, I analyze the comment sections of news articles and those on YouTube videos, forum thread discourse, and other written opinions regarding those three WMMA entities. This analysis provides a general media/fan consensus on Baszler, Rousey, and **Invicta**'s roster from different periods regarding their respective adherence or defiance to hegemonic/toxic masculinity and emphasized feminine ideals. Also, noting how often these "topics of conversation" elicit toxic masculine responses provides a further in-depth consensus. Rather than present these findings as percentages and numbers (though the number of reader comments is included for context), I frame them in a broader overall chronological narrative, comparing them to Kupers' and Connell's social theorems.

When it comes to fan comments or media articles which feature one or more of the three specific aspects of emphasized femininity, I specify which of these tenets are being utilized: (1) compliance with men's desire for titillation, (2) sociability over technical competence, and/or (3) female fragility simply by listing the requisite aspect. Discussing comments featuring toxic masculine or VMA traits necessitates a different tack, as they are multi-faceted. Toxic masculinity's occurrences are labeled as Toxic Traits 1, 2, or 3 to prevent the dialogue from becoming cluttered. The same is true when determining if VMAs contain VMA Traits 1, 2, 3, or 4. As featured in the methodology section, Kupers lists three major toxic masculinity elements:

“the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence.”<sup>210</sup> Within the study, “the devaluation of women” primarily refers to sexualizing women in a demeaning manner, but in certain instances also includes fans/media disregarding the quality and talent displayed in WMMA. Quotations or actions containing this element engage in Toxic Trait 1. Within toxic masculinity, two types of homophobias, or Toxic Trait 2, are featured throughout the dissertation. The first stems from the hegemonic masculine trait of subordinating gay men as lesser than their heterosexual counterparts. The second homophobia comes from fans or media writers labeling certain female fighters as being lesbian, thereby disqualifying them from the commenter’s male gaze contribution. Labeling quotations as promoting “wanton violence” or Toxic Trait 3 is a bit hard to discern, considering WMMA is a combat sport where one should expect a certain level of violence. When a commenter wishes excessive physical and verbal harm to a particular WMMA fighter or women overall, they display Toxic Trait 3.

Determining which components of a VMA are displayed is similar to examining toxic masculine occurrences. Moloney and Love listed their VMA criteria as containing four traits: (1) creation of homosocial, heterosexist space, (2) sexualization of women, (3) signaling possession of a heterosexual, male body, and (4) humor as a tool of oppression against women.<sup>211</sup> Examples of VMA Trait 1 are found in analyzed quotations that try to transform a website, comment section, or the sport of MMA into a “homosocial, heterosexist space.” The primary way of labeling such examples is whether the quote enacts “strict boundary maintenance of gendered norms” regarding MMA fighters and other commenters featured in the online discussion.<sup>212</sup> Whether a fan comment or line from a media article engages in VMA Trait 2, “sexualization of

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<sup>210</sup> Kupers, “Toxic Masculinity as a Barrier to Mental Health,” 714.

<sup>211</sup> Maloney and Love, “#TheFappening,” 603. Parentheses mine.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 610-612.

women,” hinges on whether the quote features toxic masculine levels of arguing women must comply with men’s desire for titillation or reduces them to sexual functions. Instances of VMA Trait 3, “signaling possession of a heterosexual, male body,” occur when a commenter emphasizes what they can or wish to do sexually as an alleged heterosexual cis male individual. These often include posters listing sexual acts they want to perform alone or with women. Implementation of VMA Trait 4, “humor as a tool of oppression,” is signaled when an analyzed quotation contains a joke at the expense of women or subordinate masculinities, which defines them as being lesser than or subordinate to men.

For Baszler’s early life (pre-2003), the Sioux Falls *Argus Leader* newspaper<sup>213</sup> and a handful of podcast interviews with her and her father are the only sources available.<sup>214</sup> As Baszler’s pre-**Invicta FC** professional MMA career (2007-2011) got underway, primary sources became much more diverse, with podcast interviews hosted on *Sherdog*<sup>215</sup> and websites like *MMA Rising*, which exclusively covered WMMA.<sup>216</sup> Her fights against Cris Cyborg and Sarah Kaufman received national media attention in the fight industry press, like *MMA Junkie*<sup>217</sup> and *Bloody Elbow*.<sup>218</sup> Although this timeframe contains the bulk of her cage fighting tenure (twenty of her twenty-six professional fights occurred before 2012), only ten fights from this time are available on video, and only half of those featured both fan and media commentary attached.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> “1998 Sioux Falls area high school graduates,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), May 23, 1998.

<sup>214</sup> “BTC Uncut Live ‘Skip ‘From the Front Row’” September 27, 2019, in *Kota iRadio Network*, podcast, 59:51, <https://podbay.fm/podcast/1479000268>.

<sup>215</sup> Jordan Breen, “Jordan Breen Show: Shayna Baszler,” August 2, 2007, in *Jordan Breen Show*, produced by Sherdog.com, podcast. MP3 audio, 00:00:00, <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Jordan-Breen-Show-Shayna-Baszler-271>

<sup>216</sup> “Keyword: baszler,” *mmarising.com*, accessed May 14, 2020. <http://www.mmarising.com/?s=baszler>.

<sup>217</sup> “Search results for Baszler,” *mmajunkie.usatoday.com*, USA Today Sports, accessed May 14, 2020. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/?s=Baszler>.

<sup>218</sup> “Results for Baszler,” *bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, accessed May 14, 2020. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?q=Baszler>.

<sup>219</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.



The final three bouts of Baszler’s pre-UFC career (2012-2013) with Invicta received the most coverage up to that point from various websites, with each one televised.<sup>220</sup> In terms of media available for **Invicta** and Ronda Rousey, there was ample coverage for both despite only featuring in the final two years of the study period, with MMA news outlets reporting the women’s side of the sport at its zenith between late 2011 and early 2013. The online news media ran the gamut in terms of which fight fans they marketed towards, from a niche readership, as was the case for *MMA Rising*, to a worldwide audience, such as the trio of Vox Media websites (*Bloody Elbow*, *MMA Fighting*, and *MMA Mania*). Here, a distinction needs to be made between mainstream news sources and what I consider MMA news sources.

In Dunja Antunovic’s academic article, “‘A Female in a Man’s World’: New-Media Discourse around the First Female NFL Referee,” the author distinguishes between “traditional” and “new” media sources, clarifying: “differences may exist between traditional and new media outlets in terms of coverage . . . Whiteside, Yu, and Hardin . . . found that ‘although bloggers may see themselves as providing analysis and opinion, better story contextualization and assessment of facts— when presented— may more often than not be found in coverage from traditional media outlets.’”<sup>221</sup> Regarding gathering research for her study, Antunovic specified: “Historical context came from traditional news- media outlets, not bloggers. Even though this research does not specifically compare traditional to new media, the analysis attends to the difference between outlets that presumably follow journalistic norms and those that may not.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> “Invicta FC” UFCFightpass.com, UFC, accessed August 17, 2022. <https://ufcfightpass.com/playlist/1629/invicta-fc>.

<sup>221</sup> Dunja Antunovic, “‘A Female in a Man’s World’: New-Media Discourse around the First Female NFL Referee,” *Journal of Sports Media*, 9, no. 2, (2014), 45-71, 48-49.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

However, I cannot treat my study in the same fashion as Antunovic in terms of “attending to the differences” between “traditional” and “new” media. In my research, I found that WMMA between 2002-2013, outside of Ronda Rousey, went virtually uncovered by mainstream news sources such as the New York Times or significant sports news outlets such as *ESPN*. The closest was the website *MMA Junkie*, which is attached to the online sports section of *USA Today*.<sup>223</sup> Because of this, most major MMA media (*Sherdog*, *MMA Fighting*, *MMA Mania*, *Bloody Elbow*, etc.) is part of the “blogosphere” instead of sports journalism. For the context of this study, higher echelon websites in the MMA media “blogosphere” are treated as if they were “traditional” new sources. When considering the virtually non-existent WMMA coverage in mainstream media during the study’s timeframe, *Sherdog* and *Bloody Elbow* are the next best things.

It is also important to note that the MMA news websites and fan interaction on such websites do not represent the entirety of the sport’s fandom. The commenters focused upon are not even the entirety of the various websites’ collective readerships, let alone every MMA fan. However, the vocal aspects of these online fan communities are essential to analyze because by speaking out openly, they become a de-facto face for the sport’s fandom or, at minimum, the readerships of the websites they frequent.

Three more editorial choices need explanation before finishing the method section. First, in most academic studies, when a direct quotation contains a spelling or grammatical error on the part of the initial writer, the term [sic] is usually placed directly following the error. For two crucial reasons, [sic] is not utilized for this paper. First, most quotations in the analysis portions

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<sup>223</sup> Ben Fowlkes, “Behind the scenes at Invicta FC 3,” *MMAjunkie.usatoday.com*, USA Today Sports, October 8, 2012. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2012/10/ben-fowlkes-behind-the-scenes-at-invicta-fc-3>.

of the study come either from reader comments about online news articles or postings to online forums. Therefore, there was less pressure upon those writing to adhere to strict spelling and grammar since these were neither professionally published works nor from peer-reviewed academic studies. These were fans making seemingly quick opinions on the various articles' topics. As was quickly realized, the amount of spelling and grammatical problems in the analyzed data were so pervasive that adding sic after each example would have deluged the respective quotations, thereby detracting from the paper's readability. Second, knowing how jarring it is for a reader when one runs into an obvious grammar faux pas, leaving [sic] out of the quoted remarks leaves a particular impression upon readers. This impression only grows when spelling errors occur in repeated succession, not just from quote to quote but from sentence to sentence. The sic becomes unnecessary as a result, as these impressions are key in how readers perceive the study's data.

Second, many reader comments contain derogatory terminology, mainly expletives and slurs, which this writer has decided to print uncensored. This decision was made for three primary reasons. First, similar to how reading a fan comment filled with spelling and grammatical errors can impact the reader more than reading a paragraph full of "sics," reading a fan post full of sexual and homophobic expletives is more effective than one with all the hurtful words crossed out. Second, some offensive language is not found in most academic discourse, which requires a definition of this language to be provided to the reader to get the best understanding of what the data is saying. A perfect example is the term "paper bag job," which a fan on *MMA Mania* used to describe two WMMA participants.<sup>224</sup> Censoring "paper bag job"

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<sup>224</sup> RealIrish, June 19, 2009 (11:23pm) Comment on Brookhouse, "Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary."

takes away from the perspective in which it was used, first by reducing it to simple, throwaway expletives like “fuck” or “bitch,” and second, losing out on learning this terminology’s definition for both the writer and the reader. Finally, the terminology I choose to leave unaltered from the data are not words I encourage in everyday discourse. However, only by confronting these defamatory words in their entirety can we analyze their meaning and their impact.

Finally, I must address my usage of particular terminology when describing Baszler’s and others’ respective actions regarding the quotations I utilize. Specifically, this concerns when I write a sentence similar to “Baszler is defying emphasized feminine norms” or “Readers of *MMA Mania* frequently complained when certain fighters failed to satisfy or adhere to their particular “male desires for titillation.” In the former, some may infer that Baszler is consciously aware of the three specific tenets of emphasized femininity and Connell’s theorem, which impacts her decision-making process. Likewise, the latter could be construed as the theoretical concept of the male gaze being publicly known to *MMA Mania* readers, which helps them decide how to word their respective comments. In neither case is this an accurate depiction of what my sentences convey. Unless stated otherwise, references to someone adhering/defying to any of the mentioned gender theorems or their sum parts do not infer knowledge or lack thereof of the featured gendered terminology by that someone.

### **Delimitations**

The study’s time frame from October 31, 2003, through January 31, 2013, was selected because it covers Shanya Baszler’s entire career relative to her being an unseen pioneer, an almost invisible character suddenly recognized by the casual MMA fanbase.<sup>225</sup> Before 2007,

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<sup>225</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

little primary data existed on Shayna Baszler or North American WMMA outside of random articles in local newspapers and word-of-mouth. MMA forums did exist, but next to none covered WMMA. By 2008 her EliteXC fight with Cris Cyborg was being discussed across MMA blogs,<sup>226</sup> and by 2013 she was being mentioned in the same sentences as Ronda Rousey and the **UFC** on major MMA news websites.<sup>227</sup> The timeframe also allows most of the peaks and valleys of Baszler's career to be analyzed, including the early years of her professional status and the brief period away from televised fights back to the regional MMA scene in 2010 and 2011.

Adding in the pre-**UFC** career of Rousey improves the study due to the immense size of primary data (in the form of news articles) written about her. This allows for a compelling comparison to Baszler in the narrative structure without wasting time on additional research or compiling extensive background knowledge. Similarly, **Invicta FC**'s first year of existence also adds narrative strength to the study due to the amount of primary data available. While Baszler was not covered any more in-depth than the other **Invicta** fighters, Vox Media websites, and other MMA media sources covered the fight cards in fair detail. Covering other fighters provides a more detailed picture of what was occurring with WMMA as a sport during the end of the analysis period than if we relied on Baszler as the sole narrative lens. In addition, since virtually all of my primary sources come from online, no travel factored into data availability while conducting research.

Listed below are the individual websites, newspapers, streaming services, and other primary sources utilized for this study. I did not list any of the podcasts I utilized, as I used them

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<sup>226</sup> Mike Fagan, "EliteXC CBS Saturday Night Fights "Unfinished Business" Results and Recap," bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/27/580232/elitexc-cbs-saturday-nigh>.

<sup>227</sup> Alejandro Castellanos-Jaramillo, January 6, 2013 (8:18am) Comment on Grant, "Invicta 4 Results and Video Highlights: Carla Esparza defeats Bec Hyatt for Title."

in the document sparingly to provide added context. If I used a source only once, I do not include it here as it likely did not offer that much weight to this dissertation's findings:

#### News Websites-

- [Sherdog.com](#)
- [Bloodyelbow.com](#)
- [Mmabilia.com](#)
- [F4wonline.com](#)
- [Mmaweekly.com](#)
- [Fighthype.com](#)
- [Mmafighting.com](#)
- [Mmanews.com](#)
- [Mmarising.com](#)
- [Bleacherreport.com](#)
- [Fightergirls.com](#)
- [Mmajunkie.usatoday.com](#)

#### Newspapers-

- *Argus Leader*

#### Online forums-

- [mmaforum.com](#)
- [mixedmartialarts.com/forums](#)

#### Streaming Services-

- Ufcfightpass.com
- YouTube.com
- Dailymotion.com

### **Limitations**

The one major limitation was my lack of general theoretical knowledge. I am a historian by education and experience with limited exposure to the world of academic social theory. Naturally, with my methodology and method for this paper steeped in gender theory, I enter it with a disadvantage, utilizing a field I have only studied sparingly in my academic career. However, due to the user-friendly accessibility of Connell's gender theorems, Kuper's definition of toxic masculinity, and the depth to which I conducted my literature review of gender theory and combat sport, I feel this is not an insurmountable limitation.

### **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter 2: "Events and Analysis: Historiography/History and Gender Studies in WMMA"

Because there is, at this writing, a severe paucity of academic attention paid to the history of women in combat sports, especially in MMA, and a parallel, less-pronounced scarcity in the number of scholarly works treating women in MMA from a gender studies perspective, I seek to combine the two parallels in one chapter. In Chapter 2, the literature review and a detailed relative background history of WMMA are discussed in tandem. Separating them would be redundant and less coherent since the sport of MMA is relatively modern in scope, and the two (literature/history) stem from related secondary sources. Attached is an examination of academic gender studies concerning women in the sport and masculine and feminine concepts present in MMA.

Chapter 3: “Fighting Out of Sioux Falls, South Dakota”: 2002-2008- Hometown Beginnings, Televised Fights, and the Carano-Cyborg Contrast.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first focuses on how Shayna Baszler began competing in amateur MMA as early as 2002, along with the media/fan attention or lack thereof given toward her first seven pro fights.<sup>228</sup> The second section skips over her next five contested fights to focus on two contests (her thirteenth and fourteenth pro bouts) that occurred on live-streaming broadcasts of **EliteXC** between 2007 and 2008,<sup>229</sup> along with examining early media/fan opinion towards Gina Carano. The third portion explores more in-depth how Carano’s emphasized feminine traits were treated by MMA media/fans, especially in comparison to how they reacted to more masculine-presenting fighters such as Baszler and Tara LaRosa.<sup>230</sup> The final section culminates in the media/fan leadup and the aftermath of Baszler’s first live televised fight in 2008 against Cris Cyborg.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019.  
<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> “Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired),” sstorm10, February 7, 2010, video, 6:47.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05EReI>.

<sup>231</sup> “Cris Cyborg vs. Shayna Baszler EliteXC: Unfinished Business,” July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 14:12, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.



Chapter 4: “Just Like the Guys!”: 2009-2011-Strikeforce, Regional WMMA, and Ronda Rousey’s Arrival.

Chapter 4 is divided into five sections, covering various issues concerning WMMA before Ronda Rousey’s arrival. The first is a brief introduction that chronicles the exodus of female talent to Strikeforce following the financial collapse of **EliteXC**, with both media and limited fan commentary analyzed.<sup>232</sup> The second combines covering the media/fan response to the Shayna Baszler-Sarah Kaufman fight from June 2009 and examining how these two groups reacted to the news that WMMA would now be contested in five-minute rounds instead of three.<sup>233</sup> Next, some focus is given to fan/media reaction in the leadup to the Gina Carano-Cris Cyborg **Strikeforce** title bout and how the fight’s outcome impacted WMMA.<sup>234</sup>

Fourth, I give attention to the trio of contests Baszler competed in as part of the **Freestyle Cage Fighting Grand Prix**,<sup>235</sup> along with the oft-postponed Strikeforce number one contender’s tournament.<sup>236</sup> The final section focuses briefly on Baszler’s last match before 2012

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<sup>232</sup> Tim Leidecker, “WHERE SHOULD ELITEXC’S TOP FIGHTERS GO?,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, October 22, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Where-Should-EliteXCs-Top-Fighters-Go-14875>.

<sup>233</sup> Dr. Johnny Benjamin, “Ask the Doc: Why is Dr. Benjamin against five-minute rounds in women’s MMA?,” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 22, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/06/ask-the-doc-why-is-dr-benjamin-against-five-minute-rounds-in-womens-mma>.

<sup>234</sup> Mike Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women’s MMA Will Be Okay,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 14, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/8/14/989727/regardless-of-the-result-of-gina>.

<sup>235</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>236</sup> Robert Sargent, “Lineup Set For Strikeforce Women’s Tournament,” MMArising.com, July 10, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2010/07/10/lineup-set-for-strikeforce-womens-tournament/>.

and what occurred during 2011, when she did not compete in MMA,<sup>237</sup> before concluding on introducing Ronda Rousey to the WMMA landscape.<sup>238</sup>

Chapter 5: “The Birth of the Phoenix”: March-August 2012- Invicta FC, Baszler’s Mainstream Return, and MMA’s Rousey Addiction.

This chapter is comprised of four sections, bookended by the upwards career trajectory of Ronda Rousey. First, the immediate aftermath of “Rowdy’s” dethroning Miesha Tate for the **Strikeforce** bantamweight title is examined from the perspectives of the Vox MMA media<sup>239</sup> and that of their online readership.<sup>240</sup> Second, a brief look is given to the coverage/fan reaction to **Invicta FC**’s first fight card, showing how the overall fanbase received the concept of an all-WMMA event.<sup>241</sup> Third, a much more in-depth analysis covers Invicta’s second outing, particularly focusing on the main event bout of Shayna Baszler vs. Sara McMann.<sup>242</sup> Finally, the media hype and fan response surrounding Rousey’s successful title defense against Sarah Kaufman and the subsequent praise heaped upon the **Strikeforce** champion by Dana White are studied.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> “Twitter Search: (@QoSBaszler) until:2011-12-31 since:2011-01-01,” accessed May 22 2021. [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(from%3AQosbaszler\)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3AQosbaszler)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed_query).

<sup>238</sup> “Search results for Rousey,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

<sup>239</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843435/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-breaks-miesha-tates-arm-to-win>.

<sup>240</sup> Ryan Kinsley, March 4, 2012 (12:42am) Comment on Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title.”

<sup>241</sup> Mollcutpurse, April 29, 2012 (2:53pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

<sup>242</sup> “Invicta FC 2: Baszler vs McMann,,” July 28, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:58:57, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34063>.

<sup>243</sup> Jesse Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3259943/strikeforce-ratings-showtime-dana-white-warming-up-womens-mma>.

Chapter 6: “The Phoenix, the Queen, and the Octagon”: October 2012-January 2013- Invicta FC and Women Join the UFC.

In terms of outline and structure, Chapter 6, in many ways, mirrors Chapter 5, containing three lengthy sections instead of four. First, the before, during, and aftermath phases of **Invicta FC 3** are narrated, with again Vox Media websites and their corresponding fan reactions comprising most of the data examined.<sup>244</sup> Second, the middle portion of Chapter 6 follows up where Chapter 5 left off, with the UFC officially signing Ronda Rousey.<sup>245</sup> Finally, I discuss **Invicta FC 4**, or more so the media coverage and online fan reaction surrounding it, and examine the highlighted attention given to the co-main event of Baszler vs. Alexis Davis.<sup>246</sup>

Chapter 7: “The End of the Long and Winding Road”: Epilogue and Conclusion

The bulk of the final chapter reiterates and summarizes the theoretical findings produced via the dual lens of MMA media and online fans. Specifically, it focuses on how these two groups absorbed and reacted to the chronological history of professional WMMA’s emergence via the “topics of conversation” of Shayna Baszler, Ronda Rousey, and **Invicta FC**. The findings discuss how toxic masculine rhetoric from MMA media and fans subconsciously promoted the emphasized feminine ideals of appeasing the male gaze, sociability over technical competence, and female fragility toward WMMA fighters. The dissertation concludes with a general overview of the results and ideas for future research.

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<sup>244</sup> “Search results for Invicta,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed October 3, 2021 <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=127&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=124&q=invicta>.

<sup>245</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/11/8/3620614/report-ronday-rousey-set-to-join-ufc-strikeforce-to-hold-last-event>.

<sup>246</sup> “Search for invicta,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 6, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=122&q=invicta>.

## Chapter 2

### Events and Analysis: Historiography/History and Gender Studies in WMMA

“If you want to MAKE history, you have to KNOW history”- Shayna Baszler<sup>1</sup>

Works examined for this study centered primarily around MMA, of which plenty of academic and non-academic literature is valuable in analyzing to form a somewhat comprehensive picture of modern combat sport. For this study, I utilized twenty-nine pieces of literature, including books, journal articles, and dissertations/theses covering either MMA itself or combat sports within MMA. Many in this corpus were informative, some sensationalistic, and all made it apparent that until recently, academic historical literature regarding WMMA was sorely lacking in diversity. As to why I am confident in utilizing six master’s theses/doctoral dissertations, I would remind readers of two points. First, when writing a graduate school-level thesis, one primary purpose is to produce a work that “adds to the academic literature.” By that logic, the work becomes part of the academic literature once it passes a thesis defense. Second, due to the limited amount of academic writing on MMA, in some cases, graduate-level theses are the only research available to those covering particular topics about the sport.

#### WMMA History Literature Review

In one sense, the history of MMA and combat sports, in general, has been examined. There are three essential reads if one wants to grasp a complete picture of MMA before 2012: *Total MMA: Inside Ultimate Fighting* by Jonathan Snowden,<sup>2</sup> *No Holds Barred: The Complete*

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<sup>1</sup> Shayna Baszler (@QoSBaszler), “If you want to MAKE history, you have to KNOW history,” Twitter, September 18, 2019, <https://twitter.com/QoSBaszler/status/1174321993988091916>.

<sup>2</sup> Snowden, *Total MMA*.

*History of Mixed Martial Arts in America* by Clyde Gentry III,<sup>3</sup> and Jared Walter's M.A. thesis, "'There are no Rules! Except these 108.' the Multidirectional Flow of Influence between Sportization, Subculture and Violence on the History of Mixed Martial Arts."<sup>4</sup> Each work covers MMA from the creation of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in the 1930s<sup>5</sup> to the first **UFC** event in November 1993<sup>6</sup> and the sport's meteoric rise to mainstream status in the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup> One key notation about these works is that neither Gentry nor Snowden is an accredited historian; both are former sportswriters.<sup>8</sup> Snowden also worked for the United States government's Department of Defense.<sup>9</sup> Regarding a broad historical perspective, Walters, then an M.A. student at Western University, relied heavily on Snowden's and Gentry's writings.<sup>10</sup>

Additional works helpful in the historiography are *The MMA Encyclopedia* by Jonathan Snowden and Kendall Shields,<sup>11</sup> *Shooters: The Toughest Men in Professional Wrestling* by Jonathan Snowden,<sup>12</sup> and *Fight Sports and American Masculinity: Salvation in Violence from 1607 to the Present* by Christopher David Thrasher.<sup>13</sup> Other readings delve into MMA's history, but most are brief interludes that familiarize readers before discussing the author's thesis on combat sports. All of the works mentioned primarily focus on the history of **UFC**, from the

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<sup>3</sup> Clyde Gentry III, *No Holds Barred: The Complete History of Mixed Martial Arts in America* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2011)

<sup>4</sup> Jared V. Walters, "'There Are No Rules! Except These 108.' The Multidirectional Flow of Influence Between Sportification, Subculture, and Violence on the History of Mixed Martial Arts," M.A. thesis (Western University, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Snowden, *Total MMA*, 10-22.

<sup>6</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Snowden, *Total MMA*, 280-318.

<sup>8</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, Back cover.

<sup>9</sup> Snowden, *The MMA Encyclopedia*, Back cover.

<sup>10</sup> Walters, "There Are No Rules," 7-9.

<sup>11</sup> Snowden, *The MMA Encyclopedia*.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Snowden, *Shooters: The Toughest Men in Professional Wrestling*, (Toronto: ECW Press, 2012)

<sup>13</sup> Christopher David Thrasher, *Fight Sports and American Masculinity: Salvation in Violence from 1607 to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2015)

politicizing of “human cockfighting” in the mid-1990s<sup>14</sup> to the sport becoming regulated in New Jersey and Nevada in the early 2000s,<sup>15</sup> as well as some in-depth background of the now-defunct Japanese MMA promotion, **Pride**.<sup>16</sup> In *Total MMA, the MMA Encyclopedia*, and *No Holds Barred*, there are appendix sections that detail promotions competing in the shadow of the **UFC**.<sup>17</sup> In his study, Gentry examines, in minute detail, most of **UFC**’s fight cards up until 2011, declaring that: “This final version of *No Holds Barred*, while it has its share of crazy stories, is a history book, plain and simple.”<sup>18</sup> In *Total MMA*, Snowden journeys into the fights, “behind the scenes-deals,” and results of *The Ultimate Fighter (TUF)* reality TV show, a show credited with saving the **UFC** from bankruptcy in 2005 and significantly increasing the promotion’s fanbase.<sup>19</sup> What was missing from these works almost entirely were the perspectives of female historians and the history of WMMA.

When surveying the written works on the history of MMA, one notable aspect of the sport is overlooked or outright ignored: female participation. Two of Snowden’s contributions, *Total MMA (2008)* and *Shooters (2012)* do not mention WMMA. However, the *MMA Encyclopedia (2010)* discusses three examples of women in MMA: Gina Carano,<sup>20</sup> Cris Cyborg,<sup>21</sup> and the Japanese defunct WMMA promotion, **Smackgirl**.<sup>22</sup> Snowden praises Carano but overly focuses on her physical appearance, stating: “Carano looms over the entire women’s sport. While much of that perspective is drawn from her good looks, Carano is also a heck of a

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<sup>14</sup> Jennifer R. McClearen, “Converging Media and Divergent Bodies: Articulations of Powerful Women in the Ultimate Fighting Championship,” PhD diss., (University of Washington, 2017), 15-16.

<sup>15</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, 352-354.

<sup>16</sup> Snowden, *Shooters*, 208.

<sup>17</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, 289-310.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>19</sup> Snowden, *Total MMA*.

<sup>20</sup> Snowden, *The MMA Encyclopedia*, 50-52.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-386.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

fighter.”<sup>23</sup> He calls her loss to Cyborg, after which she retired, a negative signal for the future of WMMA as there was no apparent attractive star to replace her.<sup>24</sup> In his entry for **Smackgirl**, where “the action is top notch,” he also espouses: “women’s MMA is a tough sell, a niche sport within a niche sport.”<sup>25</sup> He then briefly mentions how promoter Jeff Osborne contributed to promoting female fighters.<sup>26</sup> However, despite this almost grudging acknowledgment of their prowess, in his encyclopedia piece, Snowden includes a picture of the Octagon, calling it “an important symbol of the sport,” beneath which is a picture of a ring card girl whom he labeled “another important symbol of the sport.”<sup>27</sup> Did Snowden question the legitimacy of WMMA by defining the cheerleader as more important than the female fighter?

In his 2015 work *Shooters*, Snowden does not mention WMMA pioneer Megumi Fujii, despite her career immediately following the heyday of male Japanese shoot fighters Mashakatsu Funaki and Minoru Suzuki, who he covers extensively.<sup>28</sup> In *No Holds Barred*, Clyde Gentry assigns little more than a sole page of his 430-page 2011 (4<sup>th</sup> edition) tome to WMMA history.<sup>29</sup> He also wrote an additional paragraph each to the Carano-Kedzie bout and the Carano-Cyborg fight, respectively.<sup>30</sup> *Fight Sports and American Masculinity* gives women the same amount of coverage.<sup>31</sup> Despite focusing on how female terms are used negatively in labeling male UFC fighters, Stephan Swain's doctoral dissertation does not mention women as MMA fighters.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 322-323.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>28</sup> Snowden, *Shooters*, 182-188.

<sup>29</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, 356-357.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 301-309. There was a major inaccuracy in Gentry’s recount of the Carano-Cyborg fight. He stated that Cyborg won via TKO with one minute and twenty seconds remaining in the third round. However, Cyborg’s TKO victory came with one second left in the first round.

<sup>31</sup> Thrasher, *Fight Sports and American Masculinity*, 233-234.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen L. Swain, “MMAsculinities: SPECTACULAR NARRATIVES OF MASCULINITY IN MIXED MARTIAL ARTS,” PhD diss., (University of Western Ontario, 2011)

Only Jared Walters confronts this lack of historical acknowledgment, saying further historical research is desperately needed.<sup>33</sup>

The historiography of WMMA is extremely limited in terms of in-depth information. Aside from fight records on websites such as Sherdog, no comprehensively detailed written chronology exists. However, with the rise (and fall) of the likes of Ronda Rousey, some people have been drawn towards learning more about women's history in combat sports. Many works like to tout either Rousey or the 2006 debut of Gina Carano as the first appearance of women fighting in MMA. These assertions are false, especially if you examine events across the Pacific.<sup>34</sup> The one piece of academic literature which attempts to document WMMA history from the beginning is the final chapter of L.A. Jennings's 2015 book, *She's a Knockout: A History of Women in Fighting Sports*. While most of the book covers women's boxing and women in amateur wrestling, the last section clearly states the impact and growth WMMA has had on the combat sports industry.<sup>35</sup>

The first WMMA fight card took place in 1995 in Japan, but the next contest did not occur until 2000. As Jennings illustrates, WMMA history in the US was grossly mismanaged and underreported in its early years. The first stateside participants in an officially sanctioned WMMA bout "remain unidentified."<sup>36</sup> To help address these shortcomings, Jennings promotes the initiatives of the website *Sherdog*. She espoused: "While there are many discrepancies in online articles and websites . . . Sherdog.com is a fantastic and accurate resource."<sup>37</sup> *Sherdog's* detailed records also present a way of filling in the blanks Jennings left behind. The oldest fight

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<sup>33</sup> Walters, "There are No Rules," 145.

<sup>34</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 126-127.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.



mentioned by Jennings is a November 21, 1998, bout between Jennifer Howe and Terry Lukomski.<sup>38</sup> Gentry, whose work predated Jennings by four years, cites a 1997 bout between Becky Levi and Betty Fagan.<sup>39</sup> Similar early WMMA bouts likely escaped the radar of the MMA fanbase as most of the news coverage for the sport surrounded the **UFC**. In addition, the idea of women fighting, let alone in a “barbaric” sport such as cage fighting, was too outlandish for even MMA proponents to imagine.<sup>40</sup>

Trying to chronicle North American WMMA pre-2006 is a challenging task. Both Jennings and Jennifer R. McClearen’s 2017 doctoral dissertation, “Converging Media and Divergent Bodies: Articulations of Powerful Women in the Ultimate Fighting Championship,” give credit to **Hook-N-Shoot** as one of the earliest and most progressive professional promotions to put women on fight cards,<sup>41</sup> first doing so on March 10, 2001.<sup>42</sup> The former work focuses on Debi “Whiplash” Purcell, who “main-vented” the company’s first all-female show, mainly for her credibility as a pioneer and an advocate for WMMA fighters after her 2008 retirement.<sup>43</sup> Jared Walter’s thesis, which contains a brief history of the female version of the sport, misrepresents the number of women competing in this timeframe. While he mentions that the amateur MMA promotion **Tuff-N-Uff** included women’s fights on their cards since their first show on December 29, 2006,<sup>44</sup> he emphasizes: “the majority of women participated in MMA in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>39</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, 356. According to Sherdog, this bout took place on March 28, 1997, in Hogansburg, New York.

<sup>40</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 128.

<sup>41</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> “HOOKnSHOOT-Quake.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/HOOKnSHOOT-Quake-471>. 7 bouts were contested, only the main event featured female fighters, Judy Neff and Jessica Ross.

<sup>43</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 129-130.

<sup>44</sup> “TUFF-N-UFF: TUFF-N-UFF 1.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/TuffNUff-TuffNUff-1-4733>.

the early days as ring girls or sexualized spectacle athletes.”<sup>45</sup> The only fighter Walters acknowledges in this perspective is Ronda Rousey, who debuted in 2011.<sup>46</sup>

Most WMMA fights before **Tuff-N-Uff** and 2006 were not held under quality conditions, often viewed by fans as sideshows. Jeff Dudek, an MMA promoter from the same time frame, was quoted by Jennifer McClearen as stating: “I was shocked by the resistance I got. People called it a gimmick or a freak show or said it would be boring because women were fighting. Venues wouldn't book us...Out of 10 phone calls, I'd get two to consider it and the other eight would hang up on me.” McClearen mentions misogyny experienced by both female fighters and fans during this timeframe; the crowd and male competitors made it quite clear it was a masculine domain. Julie “Fireball” Kedzie said fans pinched her buttocks as she walked to the cage. Kedzie also recounted that women’s bouts were often staged last on the program, as few spectators would stay that late to watch. Finally, the WMMA veteran recalled a threat of sexual assault from a male fighter.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to mention that apart from “Converging Media,” most of the few academic works covering women fighters tell collectively similar stories that do not tell us much. While Jennings’ *She’s a Knockout* does cover sexualizing female competitors and the rough and tumble nature of 2000-2005 WMMA, her work spends much more time focused on MMA post-2005.<sup>48</sup> By 2008, and especially by 2013, print interviews about this period exist and are easily accessible. Yet, such sources are not featured in the academic literature, removing a critical voice from the historical proceedings. Despite this, both *She’s a Knockout* and “Converging Media”

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<sup>45</sup> Walters, “There are No Rules,” 129-131

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>47</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 20.

<sup>48</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 127-132.

briefly advance the idea that being a WMMA fighter in this early period was not respected by the predominantly male fanbase, substantiating that these shows heavily promoted hegemonic and/or toxic masculine ideals. With *TUF* just a few years away from being the catalyst of the UFC's financial success, the "unseemly" female counterpart was left to struggle on its own.

From 2006 to 2011, the fight chronology of North American WMMA becomes much easier to discern and catalog. However, there is some initial confusion that we must address. Jennings states that Gina Carano "went to Elite XC on February 10, 2007, to compete in the first televised MMA match between two women,"<sup>49</sup> with the bout airing live on the premium channel Showtime.<sup>50</sup> Jennings' assertion is correct regarding "North American," however **BodogFights** aired two WMMA matches from their October 4, 2006 show, held in Tokyo, Japan. Hitomi Akano defeated Keiko Taimai,<sup>51</sup> and Shayna Baszler submitted Roxanne Modafferi.<sup>52</sup> There were also Shayna Baszler vs. Amanda Buckner and Tara LaRosa vs. Hitomi Akano contests from a June 3, 2006, **Mix Fighting Championships** card<sup>53</sup> which featured video footage and play-by-play commentary.<sup>54</sup> However, **BodogFights** did not air these contests live, showing the footage months after the fights took place.<sup>55</sup> Those technical details aside, the chronological path from **BodogFights** to Ronda Rousey, as told by Jennings, is straightforward. Her history covers fight promotions rising and falling, along with WMMA's journey from prelims to the main card.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>51</sup> "Mars Bodog Fight," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 6, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/MARS-Bodog-Fight-4339>.

<sup>52</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Roxanne Modafferi Rise to UFC," FightXtreme, September 9, 2013, video, 3:34,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VchBwQoDp0Y>.

<sup>53</sup> "MFC: USA VS. RUSSIA 3," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/MFC-USA-vs-Russia-3-3839>.

<sup>54</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Amanda Buckner Rise to UFC," FightXtreme, September 11, 2013, video, 17:15,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU8W9N\\_1dw8&t=43s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU8W9N_1dw8&t=43s).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

**BodogFights**, formed in 2006, held their first event in Costa Rica on August 22 of that year, with Tara LaRosa defeating Amanda Buckner in the third out of ten fights that night.<sup>56</sup> Jennings takes pains to specify how LaRosa “is another pioneer of women’s MMA,” then proceeds to give a list of “top-tier fighters” such as Baszler, Modafferi, and Alexis Davis, without providing any examples as to why they were top-tier.<sup>57</sup> Regardless, **BodogFights** ceased to exist in early 2008, holding only 12 cards.<sup>58</sup>

Next to try WMMA on a notable scale was **EliteXC**, or **Elite Xtreme Combat**, a company backed by the television channel Showtime. On their February 10, 2007 inaugural card, “two women, Gina Carano and Julie Kedzie would catapult WMMA from the sidelines towards the center of the MMA phenomenon . . . Many MMA fans had never seen women in the cage. Showtime . . . changed the way fans thought about female fighters.”<sup>59</sup> The fight went three rounds, with Kedzie being bombarded by Carano’s offense, leading to the latter’s unanimous decision victory.<sup>60</sup> In Ronda Rousey’s autobiography, *My Fight, Your Fight*, she cites this event as what inspired her to compete in MMA, having lost interest in judo, “When the guys (fellow judokas) were talking about the female fighters, they talked about their physical appearance with a level of admiration. The look I saw on their faces was respect . . . I imagined fighting, winning, and being embraced by my cornermen.”<sup>61</sup> **EliteXC** survived for almost two years before disappearing in October 2008. Despite this closure, it provided a platform for “top-tier” performers to showcase WMMA on a nationally televised stage.<sup>62</sup> However, those performers

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<sup>56</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 133.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “BODOGFIGHT.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/organizations/BodogFIGHT-883>.

<sup>59</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 133-136.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Rousey, *My Fight/ Your Fight*, 126-127. Parentheses mine.

<sup>62</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 133-136.

were limited both in number and televised appearances. This fact is not made clear in any historical WMMA literature; it only becomes known when researching the fight cards online. Jennings creates a historiographic problem as she completely omits the evidence of several key developments in the sport during this period; all-women's cards were rare, and having more than one female fight on a show was also unlikely, especially at the industry's top tiers. While WMMA was arguably no longer considered a "freak show," it only marketed a few stars, limiting female contribution to the product.<sup>63</sup> One additional star, who put the sport firmly in the spotlight, was introduced by **EliteXC**. Starting her career in her native Brazil in 2005, Cris "Cyborg" Justino steamrolled through the local competition before fighting in **EliteXC**.<sup>64</sup> After the company folded, she made the leap with Carano to the first legitimate U.S.-based threat to the **UFC**'s monopoly: **Strikeforce**.<sup>65</sup>

After a few years of operation, **Strikeforce** rose to the forefront of WMMA. Although having its first female fight (Gina Carano vs. Elaina Maxwell) on December 8, 2006,<sup>66</sup> it did not host another women's contest until June 27, 2008 (Miesha Tate vs Elaina Maxwell).<sup>67</sup> However, from that fight to their final show in 2013, generally, one, if not two, WMMA bouts featured on each of their shows' main cards (again, the fights are not in the literature).<sup>68</sup> According to Jennings, it became one of **Strikeforce**'s significant branding differences from the **UFC** following the success shown with women fighters in 2009.<sup>69</sup> Despite the impressive number of

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<sup>63</sup> "Fight Finder." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/events>.

<sup>64</sup> "Cristiane Justino." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Cristiane-Justino-14477>.

<sup>65</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout*, 136.

<sup>66</sup> "Strikeforce-Triple Threat." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Strikeforce-Triple-Threat-4345>.

<sup>67</sup> "Strikeforce-Melendez vs. Thomson." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Strikeforce-Melendez-vs-Thomson-7340>.

<sup>68</sup> "Strikeforce." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/organizations/Strikeforce-716>.

<sup>69</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 138-139.

WMMA fight veterans and newcomers evolving through **Strikeforce**, only three gain much attention: Carano, Cyborg, and Ronda Rousey.

Jennings and other academics have sparsely covered both Gina Carano and Cris Cyborg, especially about the polar opposite ways they were individually portrayed in the MMA media, in particular their August 15, 2009 fight for the inaugural **Strikeforce** Women's Featherweight Championship. Jennings remarked: "Internet pundits, labeled the contest as "Beauty and the Beast."<sup>70</sup> McClearen's assessment of Carano depicted her as "the hegemonically feminine fitness model."<sup>71</sup> Although the contest marked the first-time women main evented on a pay-per-view (PPV), most of its pre-match hype centered around Carano's beauty while questioning Cyborg's appearance and gender. To quote Jennings, "More than any other fighter Justino's name has become synonymous with a 'masculine' female body . . . In a basic internet search of her name, the first suggestion to pop up is 'Cris Cyborg Steroids' followed by 'Cris Cyborg is a Man.'"<sup>72</sup> According to McClearen, Cyborg's resounding first-round TKO of the future Hollywood actor "led to questions about her gender identity and use of steroids in the court of popular opinion."<sup>73</sup> Carano retired after the fight, while Cyborg defended the championship twice. Shortly after her third defense, she tested positive for anabolic steroids. **Strikeforce** stripped Cyborg of the title and confronted cheating and gender claims for the remainder of her career.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the established role that Ronda Rousey played in the history of both WMMA and the **UFC**, specifically the rise of the former and the entrance of women into the latter, not much historiography is available nor needed when discussing the fighter nicknamed "Rowdy." The

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>71</sup> McClearen, "Converging Media," 21.

<sup>72</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 137.

<sup>73</sup> McClearen, "Converging Media," 21.

<sup>74</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 136-138.

first reason is simple: I previously covered the broad strokes of her life and MMA career in the introduction chapter. Second, most published histories of MMA either came out before Rousey's 2011 **Strikeforce** debut or focused solely on the male side of the sport. A few works, including Ashely Mikelonis' Master's thesis, "EXPLORING THE SUCCESS AND DEFEAT OF RONDA ROUSEY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TWITTER AND NEWSPAPER COVERAGE FROM 2014-2016, focus solely on her UFC career.<sup>75</sup> The solitary piece of literature containing Rousey's complete "history" is her autobiography, *My Fight/Your Fight*, covering her life until her preparations for her sixth **UFC** title defense in 2015.<sup>76</sup> With the book being co-authored and written during the peak of her career, the reliability of some sections is questionable. Still, overall, the work primarily consists of her legitimate thoughts on her life.<sup>77</sup> The only academic work which covered Rousey's MMA career in **Strikeforce** and subsequent signing by the **UFC** was L.A. Jennings' *She's a Knockout*.

After her second **Strikeforce** bout against Julia Budd, "Rousey shocked the MMA community by calling out the incumbent . . . champion (Miesha) Tate."<sup>78</sup> From this arose controversy, as not only did Rousey compete in a different weight class than the former high school wrestler/world champion grappler, but the bantamweight division already had its fair share of contenders.<sup>79</sup> Rousey and Tate held a press conference to discuss a possible fight between them in late 2011. The argument boiled down to Rousey saying she was the more marketable fighter than number 1 contender Sarah Kaufman. At the same time, Tate declared

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<sup>75</sup> Ashley Mikelonis, "EXPLORING THE SUCCESS AND DEFEAT OF RONDA ROUSEY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TWITTER AND NEWSPAPER COVERAGE FROM 2014-2016," M.A. thesis., (University of Arizona, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Rousey, *My Fight/Your Fight*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 144.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

that Rousey needed to prove herself as a bantamweight. According to Jennings, Rousey asserted: “She was more marketable than Kaufman because of the growing hype surrounding her skill and looks.”<sup>80</sup> This opinion sparked a lengthy argument in the MMA community about whether the attractiveness of female fighters needed to be a marketing strategy for the sport, which is explored further in this study proper in various article comment sections. Jennings argued: “The Rousey-Tate fight was an exhausted subject . . . many claimed that the hype surrounding these two women had reached a saturation point . . . Many WMMA supporters . . . declared that there were other female fighters who deserved attention, which was absolutely true . . . Although Rousey’s continual self promotion . . . became overbearing, the buildup of this fight was an integral part of bringing women out of the margins and into the forefront of . . . MMA.”<sup>81</sup> Eventually, the two did fight for the title in early 2012, with Rousey forcing a submission late in the opening round.<sup>82</sup> On one hand, it did not matter because **Strikeforce** was purchased by the **UFC** in 2011, closing its doors in January 2013.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, it was on the back of the Tate-Rousey feud that Dana White changed his 2011 stance from “women will never fight in the UFC”<sup>84</sup> to promoting an entire WMMA division in 2013 built around Rousey.<sup>85</sup>

The only major non-**UFC**-affiliated North American-based MMA company still existing today is **Bellator**, founded in 2008. **Bellator** (along with **Strikeforce**) gave women a platform to compete, keeping the sport active on a national level. In 2010, **Bellator** held a bantamweight Women’s Championship tournament won by Zoila Frausto (Jennings incorrectly reported that

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.,145.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>83</sup> McClearen, "Converging Media," 22.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy*, 104.

<sup>85</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 149-150.



Megumi Fujii won).<sup>86</sup> However, this was the only title tournament held, as women only “sporadically appeared” on **Bellator**’s fight cards for the next three years.<sup>87</sup> The demise of the **Bellator**/WMMA marriage occurred on August 12, 2013, four months after **Bellator** staged its last WMMA bout, when the company announced they were dropping the entire division.<sup>88</sup> This brings us to the final company, **Invicta FC**.

I covered most of Invicta FC’s early history in the introduction chapter. As such, it does not need to be repeated and laid out like the other companies’ WMMA forays mentioned in this section. Instead, this section focuses on what Jennings and other academics said or failed to mention in their brief history of **Invicta**. According to McClearen, **Strikeforce** was seen as the top tier for North American WMMA, and with that platform’s demise looming following the **UFC**’s purchase of the rival promotion in March 2011, many female fighters were worried about their careers.<sup>89</sup> Regarding long-time promoter Shannon Knapp’s formation of **Invicta**, Jennings failed to examine how and why Knapp chose to do so, only that **Strikeforce**’s closure allowed her to create her company.<sup>90</sup> Knapp’s background was undersold by Jennings, simply describing **Invicta FC**’s CEO as: “an executive who held high-level positions in several MMA promotions.”<sup>91</sup> She also leaves out the vital oration Knapp gave in an interview, where she stated: “No one is coming in here trying to make a difference. No one is rolling up their sleeves and taking care of this side of the sport, and that’s where we come in. We’re trying to build a legitimate pro female athlete platform. We want to get in here and provide opportunities and

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<sup>86</sup> “Zoila Frausto vs. Megumi Fujii Pt. 3,” NonStopWMMA, October 31, 2010, video, 14:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Zx29XCXUKU>.

<sup>87</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 140-141.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. The division was brought back in 2017.

<sup>89</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 22.

<sup>90</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 142.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

change the landscape."<sup>92</sup> She instead focused her attention on describing how a fighter's walk to the cage differs in **Invicta** when compared to the **UFC** and a barebones description of how Knapp: "implemented a protocol for weigh-ins . . . for fighters."<sup>93</sup> Jennings failed to mention this protocol: monetary fines instituted for a competitor missing weight.

In the introduction chapter, I briefly discussed **Invicta**'s first fight card, which included the date, where, and who headlined the event. It was here where Jennings gave the most detail regarding this new promotion. Jennings summarized: "streamed live and free on the Web, on April 28, 2012. Headlining . . . was long time veteran Marloes Coenen, who defeated Romy Ruysen via decision."<sup>94</sup> Jennings also discussed the results of three other fights: Jessica Penne vs. Lisa Ellis, Kaitlyn Young vs. Leslie Smith, and Liz Carmouche vs. Ashleigh Curry.<sup>95</sup> Jennings noted the aftermath: "After offering the fights through a free streaming platform for the first few shows, the organization switched to the pay-per-view formula used by the UFC, although at a fraction of the price."<sup>96</sup> However, Jennings did not cover any of the nine-fight cards the promotion held between its inaugural event and 2015 when *She's a Knockout* was published. She also chose to omit from her book that **Invicta FC** signed a working relationship agreement with the **UFC** in 2014, becoming in many ways a feeder system to the latter's WMMA ranks.<sup>97</sup> Aside from Jennings' *She's a Knockout*, no academic works mention **Invicta**. Jennings' more recent publication, *Mixed Martial Arts: A History from Ancient Fighting Sports to the UFC*,

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<sup>92</sup> Matt Saccaro, "Invicta FC's Shannon Knapp Talks Providing 'Better Life for the Athletes'," bleacherreport.com, Turner Broadcasting System, April 26, 2012. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1162310-invicta-fcs-shannon-knapp-talks-providing-better-life-for-the-athletes>.

<sup>93</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 142-143.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Damon Martin, "Invicta FC signs multi-year deal to air events on UFC Fight Pass," foxsports.com, Fox Media, June 5, 2014. <https://www.foxsports.com/ufc/story/invicta-fc-signs-multi-year-deal-to-air-events-on-ufc-fight-pass-060514>. This deal expired in April 2021, as Invicta FC was purchased by Anthem Sports & Entertainment.

renders **Invicta** even less coverage there than she did in *She's a Knockout*.<sup>98</sup> This dissertation intends to provide primary source information relative to **Invicta FC**'s first full year (April 2012-January 2013).

Having reached the end of the WMMA history section and an examination of its scant historiography, the conclusion of two of the works, along with some shortcomings from the reading list, must be discussed to understand the full impact the reviewed literature has on this study. The primary stance of note, taken by both Jennings and McClearen, is that from Carano to Rousey, the marketing has been focused on one fighter only to be the "face of WMMA."<sup>99</sup> In addition, if a WMMA fighter displays masculine traits or the media presents them as male-gendering, as in the case of Cris Cyborg, she is shunned rather than welcomed into the fold.<sup>100</sup> These factors likely influenced Shayna Baszler's MMA career path, especially when she began receiving more media exposure and fan scrutiny transitioning from the "minor leagues" to **Invicta**. This dissertation adds to and extends certain narratives in these works, especially by comparing Baszler's media/fan reception with that of Ronda Rousey and **Invicta FC**.

The prominent absence from these works, even in the case of Jennings' examination, is why those labeled pioneers are so dubbed, beyond that they began their fight careers in North America earlier than everybody else. Other than Debi Purcell, no other North American veteran received substantial coverage.<sup>101</sup> Only Purcell and Tara LaRosa received more than a few sentences summarizing their careers.<sup>102</sup> The coverage of Purcell focuses mainly on her fighter

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<sup>98</sup> L.A. Jennings, "Mixed Martial Arts: A History from Ancient Fighting Sports to the UFC," (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021)

<sup>99</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 148-149.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy*, 105-107.

<sup>101</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 129-133.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

advocacy work.<sup>103</sup> The coverage of LaRosa lists other veterans she faced and beat during her seventeen-year career.<sup>104</sup> All Baszler and Modafferi received was their respective fighter nicknames and the fact they competed on *TUF 18*.<sup>105</sup> Veterans of the sport were usually limited to a sentence at best. Baszler is the perfect example of this, as in Chapter 5 of Mark S. Williams' work, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy: The Sport vs. Spectacle Divide*, she is only mentioned as one of Rousey's sparring partners.<sup>106</sup> The works primarily covered Carano, Cyborg, and Rousey. All three started their careers well after the likes of LaRosa (2002),<sup>107</sup> Baszler (2003),<sup>108</sup> and Purcell (2001).<sup>109</sup> The "true veteran's" impact on the sport is not acknowledged, let alone examined. Through the perspective of Shayna Baszler's career, how the media, fans, and fellow fighters view a WMMA pioneer is a question this study answers, thus adding to the academic literature. In addition, audio and print interviews involving the Queen of Spades during her fighting career and after are also examined. Regarding her amateur days, Baszler details how "niche" WMMA was at its earliest frontier. Those early years starkly contrast with how the same media and fans viewed entire WMMA fight cards circa 2011-2012 following the creation of **Invicta FC** and Ronda Rousey's arrival.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 129-133.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 150-151. Modafferi's nickname is the "Happy Warrior."

<sup>106</sup> Williams, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy*, 109.

<sup>107</sup> "Tara LaRosa." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Tara-LaRosa-4227>.

<sup>108</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>109</sup> "Debi Purcell." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 3, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Debi-Purcell-4230>

## Gender Studies in MMA Literature Review

There has been abundant theoretical academic literature about women participating in “masculine” sports. Since numerous works explicitly focus on MMA, I decided to examine such studies, leaving the broader sporting landscape for others. This section is divided into four parts: (1) masculinity in MMA, (2) WMMA, (3) Ronda Rousey, and (4) MMA fan culture. Investigating both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity frames each section.

### Masculinity in MMA Literature Review

When examining masculinity’s role in MMA, three studies of similar methods should be discussed: *Unleashing Manhood: Masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts* by Christian A. Vaccaro and Melissa L. Swagger,<sup>110</sup> *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment: Violence, Gender, and Mixed Martial Arts* by Dale C. Spencer,<sup>111</sup> and “Caged Morality: Moral Worlds, Subculture, and Stratification Among Middle-Class Cage-Fighters,” by Corey M. Abramson & Darren Modzelewski.<sup>112</sup> These three works relate because each analyzed MMA gym culture, an important dimension to examine as it tends to spill over into MMA fan culture, with a vocal portion of the fanbase alleging to be practitioners or competitors themselves.

Unlike the other two works, *Unleashing Manhood* features no interviews with female participants.<sup>113</sup> The work’s entire discussion of WMMA fighters, ring girls, and girlfriends culminates in the penultimate chapter entitled, “She’s My Property and Always Will Be,” referring to a social media post written by former **UFC** fighter War Machine (birth name, Jon

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<sup>110</sup> Vaccaro and Swagger, *Unleashing Manhood in the Cage*.

<sup>111</sup> Dale C. Spencer, *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment: Violence, Gender, and Mixed Marital Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012)

<sup>112</sup> Corey M. Abramson and Darren Modzelewski, “Caged Morality: Moral Worlds, Subculture, and Stratification Among Middle-Class Cage-Fighters,” *Qualitative Sociology* 34 (2011), 143-175.

<sup>113</sup> Vaccaro, *Unleashing Manhood in the Cage*.

Koppenhaver) shortly before raping and attempting to murder his ex-girlfriend. This framing demonstrates that the authors' main concern for women in MMA focuses on domestic violence.<sup>114</sup> Vaccaro and Swagger briefly discuss WMMA, concentrating in a generalized fashion on the over-sexualization of fighters by male counterparts, the **UFC**, and online fans.<sup>115</sup> Most relevant to this study is a speech Ronda Rousey planned to give to the *TUF 18* female competitors, in which she warned, "You will be forever known as the girl who is not so classy and the guy will always be the guy who, hey, got laid in the house," a frontal recognition of the double standard afforded to men and women in the sport.<sup>116</sup>

However, the primary focus of *Unleashed Manhood* was to assert that MMA gyms help foster certain hypermasculine behaviors amongst their fighters.<sup>117</sup> First defined by Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin in 1984, hypermasculinity is considered "an exaggerated masculine style,"<sup>118</sup> which consists of three variables: "(a) calloused sex attitudes towards women, (b) violence as manly, and (c) danger as exciting."<sup>119</sup> These three variables, as the authors argue, reveal that hypermasculinity is simultaneously not only treated as "boys being boys," a naturally occurring presence in violent sports, but also that MMA training facilities, gyms, events, and media/ fan interaction seemingly promote this ideology. *Unleashed Manhood's* back cover proclaims, "MMA organizers, from the very beginning, purposefully created elements of the sport that are linked to dominant narratives about manhood . . . The sum of these elements is the creation of a type of publicly accessible and consumable . . . masculinity."<sup>120</sup> Vaccaro and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 95-98.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 88-93.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>117</sup> Vaccaro, *Unleashing Manhood in the Cage*.

<sup>118</sup> Mosher, "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation," 151.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>120</sup> Vaccaro, *Unleashing Manhood*, Back cover.

Swagger later identify a five-step gender embodiment process to achieve this end. They argue that MMA culture does not want women associated with it beyond ring girls and the occasionally heteronormative emphasized feminine fighter.<sup>121</sup> This study helps assert or dispute this notion of the UFC-driven MMA media/fan culture not wanting women in the sport, especially masculine types. Baszler's near-decade career during WMMA's Emergence provides a lengthy timeframe to ascertain the veracity of this notion.

Another gym-centric article arrived at a starkly different conclusion. *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment* is a field study where the author, an MMA practitioner, interviewed fighters from several gyms.<sup>122</sup> The work primarily centers around mind-body dualism, discussing what Dale C. Spencer's defined senses (touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight) picked up through the lens of masculinity, race, and gender during different activities in the gym.<sup>123</sup> One relevant theory Spencer does emphasize is that for this particular study, he is viewing gender "as social produced distinctions based on sex differences that are enacted through various practices that rework bodies in specific ways."<sup>124</sup> It is important to note how Spencer frames the issue of women competing in MMA.

Out of forty-five fighters that Spencer interviewed, only two were women.<sup>125</sup> However, unlike *Unleashed Manhood*, Spencer argues that opinions on female participation are balanced.<sup>126</sup> For instance, in the chapter *Differences and Bodies*, he cites nine interviewed fighters on the female participation topic. Four were against it, espousing chauvinistic remarks

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 86-90.

<sup>122</sup> Spencer, *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment*.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 2-13.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 70.

about “only holding up the ring card numbers;” two supported the initiative but refused to watch female fights or train with women; two males espoused enthusiastic support, and a female trainee qualified her approval by saying, “looks matter.”<sup>127</sup> This “nuanced” response certainly differs from *Unleashed Manhood’s* findings. However, while Spencer talks at length about gender theories and women’s forced exclusion from combat, he focuses little on WWMA fighters and precious little WMMA history is mentioned, outside of a lone paragraph that only cites Gina Carano.<sup>128</sup> Also, the only quoted example of one of the two female fighters Spencer interviewed regarding matters aside from women’s participation in the sport was when ‘Samantha’ differentiated between an MMA enthusiast and an MMA fighter.<sup>129</sup> While admittedly focused on Shayna Baszler along with Ronda Rousey and Invicta FC, this dissertation provides a more linear approach and a detailed account of a veteran WMMA fighter’s career and experiences within the context of the sport overall. The arrival of Ronda Rousey and **Invicta FC** in the latter portion of Baszler’s pre-UFC career warrants this approach.

*Caged Morality* differs from the previous studies in one major aspect. Abramson and Modzelewski completely integrated themselves by training at the same gyms as their interviewees for over two years, even participating in sanctioned amateur MMA bouts. Their study aimed to understand why middle-class people with “regular” jobs would pursue MMA as a recreational activity, thinking they would get the most genuine answers if they became part of the community.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 66-70.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>130</sup> Abramson, “Caged Morality,” 147-150.



Based on their observations, “the vast majority of male subjects encouraged, supported, and actively trained with women. . . over-aggressiveness and the ‘win-at-all-costs’ mentality were stigmatized, while caring was valued. The organizing principal of meritocracy overshadowed gender-based divisions . . . within the gym.”<sup>131</sup> While acknowledging that meritocracy based on divisions such as gender exist, they argue, “gender was not explicitly deployed as an organizing principle that determined . . . the allocation of prestige.”<sup>132</sup> Whenever the authors heard contrary notions, it came from community outsiders like journalists.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, women fighters interviewed suggested the problem lies with MMA fans. A “well known professional” stated that when she hears the media or fans criticizing WMMA she feels pressure to prove them wrong.<sup>134</sup> The authors conclude: “The problem was not seen as the distinctions around gender *within* the subculture of fighters, but rather *outside* when dealing with spectators.”<sup>135</sup>

There are two key two aspects of Abramson’s and Modzelewski’s findings. First, they blamed hegemonic masculine structures existing within MMA on “outsiders” or non-fighters, such as fans and journalists. Examining Baszler, Rousey, and the early cards from **Invicta FC** allows a lengthy test of this conclusion by covering almost a decade of fan comments and media reactions on specific female fighters. Second, *Caged Morality* offers points of comparison to the authors’ perceived lack of hegemonic and toxic masculine incidents in MMA gym culture with media coverage and fan comments on this decade of North American WMMA, allowing for insightful analysis.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 156-158.

Next in consideration for this study's literature review is *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy: The Sport vs. Spectacle Debate* by journalism professor Mark S. Williams. Throughout the book, Williams gravitates between fascination and disgust at what he views as problems with the UFC and MMA. While feigning "balance and impartiality," his severe criticism of MMA reflects his one-sidedness. For instance, he tells readers: "MMA is a place where the men are overdosed with testosterone and women dress in booty shorts and bikini tops to inform the masses of the impending round."<sup>136</sup>

Nevertheless, it is intriguing as Williams delves into issues such as nationalism, racism, drug use, concussions, and worker's rights.<sup>137</sup> Chapter 5, subtitled Spectacle and Patriarchy, is the most relevant to this study. Eleven pages (just under half the chapter) focus on how "MMA is discursively overwhelmed by insults of 'fag,' 'pussy,' and 'bitch,' . . . giving us a disturbing window into the highly patriarchal and misogynistic norms of a subculture."<sup>138</sup> In this quote, Williams refers to how male fighters often use such insults when promoting a fight to demean their opposition. After several examples of competitors doing this, he takes this to the extreme end of the spectrum, telling the War Machine story, along with former **UFC** competitor Josh Grispi, who threatened to murder his wife with his pit bull.<sup>139</sup> While he avoids placing the blame on the **UFC**: "The UFC has no control over the actions of sociopaths," he implies that male dominance is a heavy part of the MMA subculture, a haven for toxic masculinity, and the **UFC**'s allowance of homophobic and misogynistic language in promoting their fights only reinforces this kind of behavior.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Williams, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy*, 93.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-97.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-103.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

Regarding WMMA itself, he mainly reflects on three things: male colleagues' distaste/disregard for female fighters, the sexualization/ostracization of female fighters in the **UFC** based on gender norms, and the crowd ogling of "Octagon women," aka ring girls.<sup>141</sup> Williams praises Ronda Rousey for calling for more inclusive female representation but criticizes her for promoting hetero-feminine norms.<sup>142</sup> He also discusses Cris Cyborg, stating: "A lot of people rightfully observed that PED cheats get off too lightly in MMA, but don't tell Cyborg that."<sup>143</sup> Williams' main argument here is that while Cyborg is a fighter who cheated with definitive steroid use, which initially helped her become a megastar in WMMA, men that cheat with PEDS are held to a less stringent standard, as was the case with former **UFC** fighter Chael Sonnen.<sup>144</sup>

What Williams seems to omit is recognizing that WMMA fighters exist who do not abide by emphasized femininity while also avoiding steroids, which is something to take advantage of by examining the career of someone like Shayna Baszler. She was popular almost exclusively within WMMA circles, defiantly adhered to male presenting norms, and was never associated with a drug scandal.<sup>145</sup> This fact makes an examination of Baszler's career one that contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding women in modern combat sports.

"Reframing the 'Violence' of Mixed Martial Arts: The 'Art' of the Fight," by Gordon Brett, essentially analyzes how "the MMA media construct symbolic boundaries around different kinds of fights through aesthetic and moral evaluations." Most of Brett's work focuses on what

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 111-112.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

defines an exciting bout in the minds of the sport-specific press but discusses this entirely in the context of male combatants.<sup>146</sup> However, Brett examines one pertinent example regarding WMMA, as shown by MMA journalists Luke Thomas and Ariel Helwani.

Thomas and Helwani compared the fights of Cris Cyborg and Ronda Rousey. Brett analyzed their comparative slants. For example, Thomas said it's hard to watch "Cyborg-esque terrorism" for her violent quick "brutal knockouts via ground and pound," while simultaneously praising Ronda Rousey fights as "watching a live chicken being thrown into a tank of piranhas." On the other hand, Helwani stated that Rousey's fights were not brutal and appealed more to "those of us who watch the sport . . . I mean I watched that 14 second fight a hundred times just to see how she managed to get that submission in 14 seconds . . . Every single thing she did was purposeful and really perfect, and so she has something for everyone."<sup>147</sup>

From this comparison, Brett observes, "Importantly, an implicit, gendered dynamic may be operating here. American audiences generally see 'striking' as . . . more 'masculine', grappling and submissions are characterized as . . . more 'feminine'. . . Thus, the brutality of Cyborg Santos may be rooted in the 'masculine' understanding of her fighting style . . . Ronda Rousey's victories are also appreciated as technically masterful, rather than dominance."<sup>148</sup> This proposed gendered dynamic needs to be considered when analyzing Shayna Baszler, who, while presented as a "masculine" female, won fourteen of her fifteen victories by way of the "feminine" submission."<sup>149</sup> This notion is also the focus of "Men Who Strike and Men Who

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<sup>146</sup> Gordon Brett, "Reframing the 'Violence' of Mixed Martial Arts: The 'Art' of the fight," *Poetics* 62 (2017), 15-28., 15.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>149</sup> "Shayna Baszler." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

Submit: Hegemonic and Marginalized Masculinities in Mixed Martial Arts” by Akihiko Hirose and Kay Kei-Ho Pih.<sup>150</sup>

Brett’s examination of fighting styles directly referenced Hirose and Pih’s work; many other studies also quote their 2010 journal article and how it compares Western and Asian MMA cultural views on striking and submission fighting styles and how this relates to hegemonic masculinity.<sup>151</sup> They argue that in North America, “a win by submission can . . . be seen as ‘cheating’ although it is a perfectly rule-bound way of achieving a victory . . . the opponent also cheated using an ‘unmanly’; way of fighting . . . submission is considered a more humiliating way to lose since the fighter is forced to admit that he is giving up. To avoid such humiliation, some fighters actually refuse to tap . . . Hence, there is a common expression in MMA, ‘tap or snap,’ which suggests the ultimate choice . . . when facing a voluntary admission of loss.”<sup>152</sup> Hirose and Pih theorize that MMA strikers have begun learning submission techniques, not because they view grappling as a valued “masculine” tactic, but rather because they cannot risk losing to a fighter who builds their foundation upon the “feminine way” of victory. Better to use a “feminine” technique to win than to lose to a “feminine/marginalized male.”<sup>153</sup>

Conversely, Hirose and Pih recognize that WMMA fighters who typically favor submissions to gain victory have begun incorporating striking styles into their skill set, subconsciously adapting to MMA’s male presentation. The authors note, “MMA’s masculinity whether it be hegemonic or marginalized is a masculine structure independent of contributions of

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<sup>150</sup> Akihiko Hirose and Kay Kei-ho Pih, “Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit: Hegemonic and Marginalized Masculinities in Mixed Martial Arts,” *Men and Masculinities* 13, no. 2 (2010). 190-209.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 199-200. Some fighters actually refer to it as Tap, Nap, or Snap.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 202.

individual athletes.”<sup>154</sup> This notion and the concept of masculine knockouts and feminine submissions are important to this dissertation for two reasons. First, studying the reaction to Baszler’s fights amongst the media and the fandom in the context of an independent “masculine structure” can help discern something about Baszler fighting against this immovable object, if MMA’s hegemonic masculinity is indeed one. Second, it is interesting to survey fan and media comments on Baszler’s “feminine” submission style contrasting with her “masculine” female identity. Showing similarities and differences in how Baszler’s fighting is perceived against those of Rousey and **Invicta FC** fight cards is particularly important in the latter half of the study.

Stephen L. Swain’s doctoral thesis, “MMAsculinities: Spectacular Narratives of Masculinity in Mixed Martial Arts,” provides valuable insight while at the same time exposing future research possibilities. Swain analyzed how the competitors on *TUF* Season 10 portrayed masculinity and how this applies to MMA/UFC culture.<sup>155</sup> He meticulously notes instances of casual misogyny, homophobia, and threats of violence that reaffirm masculinity, weaving them throughout the reality TV show’s various storylines.<sup>156</sup> In particular, Swain remarks about how casual references to opponents in derogatory feminine and homophobic terms further the notion that women are only body objects in MMA.<sup>157</sup> This method helps contextualize precisely how much of a man’s world the UFC presented itself, demonstrating how much it would have to shift to allow WMMA acceptance by the mainstream fandom, let alone its entry into the Octagon.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>155</sup> Swain, “MMAsculinities,” iii.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 135-144.

The avenue Swain leaves vacant for future research is fan/media response to WMMA. While Swain does not deny that women compete in the sport, he never mentioned WMMA throughout his lengthy dissertation. And this is not entirely his fault. He defended his thesis the year before Dana White stated that women would never fight in the **UFC** and two years before White recanted and signed Ronda Rousey. Rousey vs. Tate had yet to happen in **Strikeforce**, and Carano-Cyborg was two years in the past. However, in a paper about masculinity in a sport that openly demeaned women, one wonders why he did not note the WMMA evidence and its relevance.

### **WMMA Literature Review**

While WMMA literature is steadily increasing, its share of pitfalls and problems remain. For example, only twelve articles are referenced and analyzed in the review below. Though in today's WMMA, there is a sizeable fanbase, it has failed to capture much in the way of academic attention. This study does not seek to solve that problem; it is a beginning of a much larger academic need to take place.

Courtney C. Choi's "Position before Submission: Grappling with Gender and Hypermasculinity in Mixed Martial Arts" is almost a counterpart colleague of the three works beginning the masculinity section. *Unleashed Manhood* and *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment* are two theoretical cornerstones for Choi's master's thesis, which examines the interaction, conformation, and conflict with societal gender norms at a local MMA training center.<sup>158</sup> However, her study differs in notable ways. First, she does not rely on the responses of primarily male subjects. She instead limited her analysis to four men and four women, ranging from

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<sup>158</sup> Courtney C. Choi, " Position Before Submission: Grappling with Gender and Hypermasculinity in Mixed Martial Arts," M.A. thesis., (University of Washington, 2017), 10-13.

students and fighters to coaches.<sup>159</sup> Early in her study, she remarks that previous MMA works concerning gender had little to no female voice. Choi felt her voice could add to the literature.<sup>160</sup> Second, she explores in detail how the genders interact at the training gym, how men see themselves as students and women see themselves as female students. She focuses on how women navigate different areas of the sport, from the gym to competitions, and how female fighters get advertised.<sup>161</sup> Choi's thesis featured no information gap that intends to be filled by this dissertation. However, Choi's work does provide my study with descriptions of a misogynistic gym culture, which parallels the online MMA community in which media and fans perceive Baszler and the other lenses.

When sparring with female counterparts, men said they held back their strength and speed to "make it fairer" or were worried about hurting them.<sup>162</sup> Choi states, "The lack of female presence in the gyms necessitated men and women sparring with one another regardless of perceived strength differences. Fighters are socialized to equate men with strength and muscle and women with technique."<sup>163</sup> Both male and female interviewees comment on mixed-gender sparring sessions being discouraged because the men are worried the women will see certain actions as sexually inappropriate or because the men do not see females as fighting equals.<sup>164</sup> Choi remarks how men can refuse mixed-gender sparring; for women, it is a necessity as often they will be the only female in a class.<sup>165</sup> Aside from the unwillingness of male partners to spar

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 31-41.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 38.



with them, it is harder for a female to find a willing partner who is the same size, which is the best to practice your techniques against, as that is what one faces in a sanctioned fight.<sup>166</sup>

Choi concludes:

“The women interviewed . . . did not specifically view themselves as existing on MMA culture’s periphery. Despite reporting that men tended to be physically stronger, had broader emotional access as fighters, and avoided sexualization of their bodies, women thought of themselves as MMA insiders. It is likely that women who get into the sport shop around for a gym culture that is supportive . . . Women were more acutely aware of gender and masculine displays and were able to articulate gender differences, norms, and expectations outside of physical attributes.”<sup>167</sup>

This quote is essential for two reasons. First, while participants might have luck finding MMA gyms with a supportive culture towards women, as Choi ascertains, this dissertation shows female fans struggle for acceptance in online MMA communities. Second, fighters simultaneously viewed themselves as MMA insiders, needing no gender adjective. This aspect of gym culture starkly contrasts how male fans perceive women entering their preserve, as will be shown in the MMA fandom portion of the literature review.

“Muay Thai: Women, fighting, femininity” by Sharyn Graham Davies and Antje Deckert provides another examination. In this study, the authors interviewed several female Muay Thai fighters from around the world gathered at a camp in Thailand.<sup>168</sup> Though Muay Thai is only one of the numerous martial arts proliferating MMA, this essay is important to the literature review because its findings echo across all combat sports. The article highlights a key factor many other MMA studies miss: “It is not one size fits all.” Women approach Muay Thai from various angles and perspectives, especially when balancing competing in a masculine fighting contest with their own perceived femininity or female values. While combining their “fighting skills with feminine

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 24-26.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>168</sup> Sharyn Graham Davies and Antje Deckert, “Muay Thai: Women, fighting, femininity,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, (2018). 1-17.

beauty” was important to many interviewees, others were proud of appropriating hegemonic masculine spaces.<sup>169</sup> One interviewee was happy that it angered men at the gym that she was not adhering to the male gaze, stating: “So many guys think that girls go to the gym just to look good for them. But the reality is we don’t go to the gym for them. We don’t get punched in the face and kicked in the shins for them.”<sup>170</sup> Conducting this study on Baszler is aided by “Muay Thai” because it acknowledges that while the Queen of Spades is an MMA fighter, she does not represent all women in MMA; she only represents herself. However, that category is one that three different factions are at work trying to control the narrative: the media, the fans, and herself. Studying them and their reactions to her fighting persona adds a new dimension to the literature. So does analyzing comparative looks to Ronda Rousey (an emphasized feminine counter) and the multitudes of fighters featured in **Invicta FC**. Most works either limit examination to just one faction or focus on the primarily heteronormative presentation of the fighters, which was the case in “Muay Thai.”

Regarding this dissertation, one of the most important works to consult is “Converging Media,” by Jennifer R. McClearen. McClearen argues that the **UFC**: “introduced female fighters in 2013 as an innovative sports media convergence strategy that imagines difference (including gender, race, sexuality, class, and nationality) as central to its brand identity.”<sup>171</sup> However, the **UFC** does so in a homogenized environment which “flattens and commodifies difference as a neatly packaged marketing strategy that obscures the cultural, economic, and social discourses that create differences in the first place. It is these same discourses of gendered, racial, and sexual difference that regulate the participation of women in the UFC even as the promotion

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 14-15.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>171</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” Abstract page 2.

superficially celebrates difference.”<sup>172</sup> McClearen theorizes that while the **UFC** is publicly promoting and profiting from difference, it is simultaneously maintaining the status quo of **WMMA** fighters as being less valuable than their male counterparts, i.e., white women are more profitable than women of color, straight women are more marketable than lesbian women and feminine women are more desirable than “masculine” females.<sup>173</sup> McClearen’s study examines each of these differences while also acknowledging that the **UFC** does promote difference.

“Converging Media” is critical in analyzing Baszler’s **MMA** career and her fellow **Invicta FC** compatriots for three reasons. First, McClearen’s focus is on “Divergent bodies,” which she defines as bodies that fall outside the “hegemonic feminine norm” or “fall outside an assumed straight, white, cisgender norm.”<sup>174</sup> McClearen further states: “While the **UFC** has embraced the women’s **MMA** divisions in compelling ways, the experiences of privileged female bodies become hypervisible while divergent bodies, including women of color, lesbians . . . are marginalized.”<sup>175</sup> Shayna Baszler fits that description, being both a woman of color and openly bisexual, falling outside the hegemonic/emphasized norm. Other fighters briefly examined in this study, such as Liz Carmouche and Ediane Gomes, also fall outside this norm. Carmouche is openly lesbian and served with the United States Marine Corps.<sup>176</sup> Gomes is a woman of color and does not conform to emphasized feminine appearance norms as discussed in the study proper.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13. The word cisgender denotes a person whose sense of gender corresponds with their birth sex.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> “**UFC 157: Rousey vs Carmouche - Extended Preview**,”

**UFC - Ultimate Fighting Championship**, **UFC**, February 13, 2013, video, 9:33,

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRuDUJlp\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRuDUJlp_g)

<sup>177</sup> John Heinis, “Ediane Gomes: ‘To Be in the **UFC**, You Have to Show Your a--’” *Bleacherreport.com*, Turner Broadcasting System, June 23, 2014. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2106309-ediane-gomes-to-be-in-the-ufc-you-have-to-show-your-a>.

Next, McClearen discusses how this divergence is put into practice by the marketing efforts of the **UFC** and what she calls the “MMA blogosphere.”<sup>178</sup> To do so, she compares the global reach between a promotional trailer for the Ronda Rousey vs. Holly Holm **UFC** Bantamweight title fight with a YouTube video heralding the **UFC** debut of Brazilian prodigy Jessica Andrade.<sup>179</sup> Rousey and Holm are white heterosexual women who mainly abide by emphasized feminine norms.<sup>180</sup> Andrade is a woman of color and a lesbian, and by featuring favelas in the background of the YouTube video, the video portrays her as coming from the lower class.<sup>181</sup> There are two things of note relevant to this study. The first is the notion of “we are all fighters,” a **UFC** marketing tagline. McClearen argues: “By crafting each of these fighters’ stories as overcoming an obstacle, the fighter belongs to a . . . **UFC** brand built upon individualism and the America dream—something that **UFC** fighters have access to regardless of their nationality, gender, or sexuality.”<sup>182</sup> However, according to McClearen, “The American dream ‘symbolically erases real issues of social inequality, class struggle, profit-motive, and others that may provide barriers toward success’ . . . In the **UFC** imaginary, obstacles can only be overcome through individual hard work. A fighter’s triumph in the Octagon symbolizes these efforts without regard to any persisting inequalities, struggles, or barriers. Failing to achieve the American dream logically stems from failing to work hard.”<sup>183</sup> In presenting this narrative with the “we are all fighters” mantra, the MMA audience and, to an extent, the media, are conditioned to believe that regardless of differences, **UFC** competitors all have the same baseline in terms of the obstacles they have to overcome.<sup>184</sup> As a result, it becomes easier for fans and the MMA

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<sup>178</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 112.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

media to dismiss any claims of marketing hardship from fighters like Andrade or Baszler due to their masculine appearance or sexuality. They are not being passed over for marketing opportunities because they are “divergent bodies.” The UFC passes them over because they are not working hard enough and are therefore not worth promoting.

The second thing relevant to this study is comparing the amount of marketing content for the world title bout featuring two white, feminine, and heterosexual women with the Brazilian, masculine-presenting lesbian’s debut. “A digital trace on Facebook and Twitter reveals that numerous individuals and handles dedicated to MMA reposted the YouTube video (*Jessica Andrade Emerges*) . . . The UFC leverages the free labor that fans and prosumers, such as bloggers, perform to promote Andrade’s difference. Effectively, the UFC deals in niche media to generate buzz around fighters who embody difference in ways that the organization’s mainstream efforts may still hedge.”<sup>185</sup> Essentially, because Andrade’s lesbian, non-emphasized feminine identity is something the UFC cannot efficiently market to the MMA community, it will let fans discuss these identities and differences for them, often in a negative light. According to McClearen: “The scale to which difference becomes visible is still a question to consider. *Jessica Andrade Emerges* has only received 24,000 hits on YouTube since 2013, while the Rousey vs. Holm promotional trailer was . . . replicated on numerous YouTube sites to reach millions of viewers. Casual fans may only see UFC Pay-Per-View broadcasts or Ronda Rousey’s interview on late night television and never engage with the UFC’s YouTube channel or seek out content in Portuguese. Difference then loses its attachment to marginalized identities and becomes co-opted by privileged identities.”<sup>186</sup> Essentially, McClearen is arguing that only

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

hardcore MMA fans or Brazilian fans sought out the video of Andrade. In contrast, the entire MMA fanbase got saturated with coverage for Rousey vs. Holm. As a result, the UFC conditions MMA fans to accept emphasized feminine portrayals as natural, which makes female fighters outside this norm, such as Andrade and Baszler, more vulnerable to dismissal out of hand.

Finally, McClearen utilized the media coverage and scrutiny from within the MMA community regarding trans woman fighter Fallon Fox's forced outing in February 2013 and her further participation in WMMA to show male and female physical forms are coded in specific ways to portray the latter as "physically inferior."<sup>187</sup> McClearen notes: "Sex-segregation in sport relies on embedded notions of gender-normativity to assert that there are immutable advantages offered cis male bodies and corresponding disadvantages for cis female bodies. Testosterone levels, muscle mass, and bone structure are the main "advantages" afforded men . . . This . . . ignores any bodies that may operate outside of normative categories, exaggerates the differences between men and women, and polices the boundaries . . . to make it difficult for cis or trans women to transgress."<sup>188</sup> To some fans and media pundits, the amount of musculature a woman can naturally build up is limited. If they deem the musculature on display exceeds the "natural" amount, it means either a fighter is using steroids, or was born male, providing her with a testosterone level advantage over feminine women.<sup>189</sup> McClearen points out that even Fox's supporters argued she lost her "male chemical mojo" from hormone replacement therapy and bottom surgery.<sup>190</sup> She was as weak as any other female. McClearen elaborates: "The positions for and against Fox's participation in MMA fail to recognize the myriad of other factors that contribute to an athlete's success, such as training . . . non-sex related genetics . . . determination,

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 128-133.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 128-133.

etc. Instead, they support a . . . system that values male bodies above female ones. Sexism ensures that the power to be a physical threat resides solely within the male body.”<sup>191</sup> Doing so only supports the existence of hegemonic/toxic masculine and emphasized feminine structures within WMMA. While none of the fighters examined in this study are trans women, how fans casually refer to WMMA competitors who do not meet their male gaze as “trannies” or “men” throughout makes her findings pertinent.

Allyson Quinney’s: “The @UFC and Third Wave Feminism? Who Woulda Thought?: Gender, Fighters, and Framing on Twitter” is obliquely irrelevant to the study. Based on her master’s thesis, Quinney focuses on how Twitter users consume and interpret female fighters, specifically their bodies. She examined 303 tweets from January 2011, when Dana White proclaimed that women would never fight in the **UFC**, to March 2015, when Rousey was, by and large, the **UFC**’s entire marketing campaign.<sup>192</sup> Quinney determined which tweets to use by containing hashtags #feminism and #UFC.<sup>193</sup> Since the study does not utilize Twitter as a source, her analytical methods are not equitable in the value distinction that this adds to the academic literature. However, her theoretical arguments leading up to her examination proper are quite relevant, as are her overall findings. First, Quinney argues that the separation of men’s and women’s MMA divisions in a hegemonic masculine sport causes fans to view the female divisions as lesser than their male counterparts.<sup>194</sup> Quinney articulates: “When women are excluded from elite levels of sport, this constructs a cultural belief that they are naturally inferior athletes to men, which creates a glass ceiling for women in sports. There is a clear glass ceiling

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>192</sup> Allyson Quinney, “The @UFC and Third Wave Feminism? Who Woulda Thought?: Gender, Fighters, and Framing on Twitter,” *Martial Arts Studies*, (2016), 34-55.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 39

in MMA, and specifically within the UFC . . . Under the UFC’s current rules . . . Rousey can never be the champion; she can only be the women’s champion. Through these gendered weight divisions, the UFC is letting women participate in the male dominated realm of MMA, but only under conditions that reinforce MMA as a man’s world.”<sup>195</sup>

Second, she argued that WMMA fighters get utilized primarily to serve the male gaze. She states: “beauty norms are partly enforced through the UFC’s only women’s weight classes, the 115-pound Strawweight division and the 135-pound Bantamweight division . . . I argue that this regulates female fighters’ bodies so they aren’t too muscular, which plays into heterosexual male desire and subordinates women who do not conform.”<sup>196</sup> Since Quinney wrote the article, the UFC has added the 125-pound flyweight and 145-pound featherweight divisions. Nevertheless, Quinney’s point is still accurate.<sup>197</sup> She elaborates this further by suggesting that female fighters, to appeal to the heterosexual male viewer, are encouraged to wear tighter, more revealing clothing when competing instead of loose-fitting gear.<sup>198</sup> Overall, she makes similar remarks to those found in McClearen’s dissertation regarding the impact differences, such as race, sexuality, and body type, truly have on a WMMA fighter’s acceptance by the UFC and its fanbase.

Quinney continues this point in her examination of her 303-tweet dataset, dividing the results into sections labeled: “Heteronormativity, White Normativity, Female UFC Fighters as Inferior to Male UFC Fighters, Sexualization, and Female Fighters’ Bodies as Violent.”<sup>199</sup> These

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, in current (2023) UFC title fights, the UFC refers to both male and female champions as the champion of their weight class, not of their gender.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> “UFC Athlete’s Rankings,” UFC.com, accessed May 30, 2022. <https://www.ufc.com/rankings>.

<sup>198</sup> Quinney, “The @UFC and Third Wave Feminism?”

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 51-55.



are essential starting points to understanding the types of criticism many fans show to WMMA throughout Shayna Baszler's pre-UFC career. Quinney concluded: "Through this research, I learned that female fighters in the UFC are framed in static and narrow ways on Twitter. Issues of race, heteronormativity, and cis-normativity are not mentioned in the dataset. The exclusion of these topics . . . has not been challenged by this group of Twitter users, which suggests an acceptance of the domination of white, cis gender, and straight women in the UFC."<sup>200</sup> In this regard, my dissertation intends to further add to the academic literature and expand on her findings, albeit using media articles and fan forums instead of Twitter. However, the number of comments analyzed for her study pales compared to those examined in this dissertation; the former examines 303, and the latter counts into the thousands.

*Global Perspectives on Women in Combat Sport: Women Warriors around the World*, edited by Alex Channon and Christopher R. Matthews, presents several relevant chapters to this dissertation. However, the majority appearing in this 2015 publication cover issues already discussed in this literature review or discuss topics irrelevant to North American professional WMMA. None of these articles discuss female combat sports fandom or MMA press coverage of women.<sup>201</sup> I singled out two specific chapters, one to conclude the WMMA section and the other helping transition into the Ronda Rousey analysis portion of the review.

L.A. Jennings's chapter, entitled "'Beauty and Strength': Defining the Female Body in *The Ultimate Fighter* Season 20 Promotional Campaign," examined the promotional marketing campaign conducted by the UFC for the television show in question, utilizing a variety of gender

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>201</sup> Alex Channon and Christopher R. Matthews eds., *Global Perspectives on Women in Combat Sports: Women Warriors around the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

theories.<sup>202</sup> *TUF 20* was the first TUF season to have an all-female cast, and the UFC would crown the winner as their inaugural Women's Strawweight Champion.<sup>203</sup> However, as Jennings remarked: "Where previous seasons' trailers previewed the upcoming fights . . . the *TUF 20* promo video focused exclusively on the fighter's looks . . . pronouncing the fighters. . . 'easy on the eyes,' and 'hard on the face.' The promotional video conveyed a problematic message: that these women may be fighters but they were women, beautiful women, first."<sup>204</sup> According to Jennings, this presented the narrative: "If women were going to be a part of . . . the UFC, they must . . . serve the male gaze."<sup>205</sup> Although not mentioned by name, Connell's emphasized femininity theorem was acknowledged.

The chapter contains two noteworthy findings, which help lay a foundation for the dissertation's discussions surrounding Shayna Baszler, Gina Carano, and, eventually, Ronda Rousey. The first comprises a single sentence: "Proclaiming Ronda, or any other woman, as the 'face' of WMMA is problematic because it reinforces the idea that women are always represented by a single ideal."<sup>206</sup> Jennings echoed this in *She's a Knockout* when discussing Rousey's rivalry with Miesha Tate, exclaiming: "The problem was not the hype surrounding the match, it was the constant insistence from multiple media outlets that Rousey must be the 'face' of WMMA. The popularity of the UFC . . . does not rest on the shoulders of one man, but the sport of WMMA must, for some reason, be embodied by one woman."<sup>207</sup> Regarding *TUF 20*, Jennings noted: "The most popular competitors were those who walked the line between

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<sup>202</sup> L.A. Jennings, "'Beauty and Strength': Defining the Female Body in The Ultimate Fighter Season 20 Promotional Campaign," *Global Perspectives on Women in Combat Sports: Women Warriors around the World*, eds. Alex Channon and Christopher R. Matthews (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 73-85.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>207</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout*, 148-149.

stereotypical ideals of femininity while simultaneously dominating the cage. They had to, in essence, be the Ronda Rousey of the strawweight division, who look like . . . swimsuit models and ‘fight like men.’”<sup>208</sup> The second reinforces this when Jennings discusses her centerfold imperative theorem, where: “Female athletes of all types are encouraged to pose for magazines, advertisements . . . as pinups, which can both be empowering or disenfranchising.”<sup>209</sup> Both the search for a sole “face” of WMMA and the centerfold imperative theorem leaves many WMMA fighters trapped, either by forcing them to adopt emphasized feminine ideals or refusing to do so, putting their careers in jeopardy for their individual sense of womanhood.

Further, Jennings argued that the *TUF 20* contestants had zero voice in how they were marketed, revealing: “what is perhaps most irritating is not that the . . . competitors were displayed as sex objects first and athletes second, but rather that all the women . . . regardless of their personal preferences, had to take part in the ‘Beauty and Strength’ campaign.”<sup>210</sup> This statement implied that emphasized femininity is preferred and strictly enforced by the **UFC**. As this study intends to add to the literature, we can see if the MMA news media and fanbase also promote these strict enforcements.

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<sup>208</sup> Jennings, “‘Beauty and Strength’,” 80.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-81. If you watch the commercials, a handful of the fighters were not in the advertisements.

## Ronda Rousey Literature Review

From 2011, when she publicly challenged Miesha Tate for the **Strikeforce** bantamweight title, until she was knocked out in an upset by former pro boxer Holly Holm at **UFC 193** in late 2015, “Rowdy” Ronda Rousey was the face of WMMA.<sup>211</sup> She effectively shaped how the UFC, the media, and fans perceived WMMA. Virtually all the academic literature that covers the career or aspects of one specific WMMA fighter focuses on Ronda Rousey. Only one, “Gender, Media, and Mixed Martial Arts in Poland: The Case of Joanna Jędrzejczyk,” exhibits a subject other than Rousey.<sup>212</sup> In “Converging Media,” McClearen determinably states on the first page: “I want to be clear from the outset: I am *not* writing the Ronda Rousey story.”<sup>213</sup> However, she devotes considerable attention to Rousey to support her assertions.<sup>214</sup>

Both Jennings and McClearen discuss the problematic trend of trying to present one person as the face of WMMA, as was the case with Carano and, more notably, Ronda Rousey.<sup>215</sup> Although the “baddest woman on the planet” has been retired from MMA for over six years, she arguably remains the most featured and, indeed, most marketable individual associated with the female side of the sport. Although all but one of the academic works focused on Ronda Rousey from 2013 onwards, many of their points regarding her impact on WWMA remain accurate, both positive and negative, regarding the 2010-2013 portion of the study period. Charlene Weaving, whose chapter in *Global Perspective* entitled “‘Chicks Fighting in a Cage’: A Philosophical

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<sup>211</sup> Ashley Mikelonis, “EXPLORING THE SUCCESS AND DEFEAT OF RONDA ROUSEY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TWITTER AND NEWSPAPER COVERAGE FROM 2014-2016,” M.A. thesis., (University of Arizona, 2017)

<sup>212</sup> Honorata Jakubowska, Alex Channon, and Christopher R. Matthews, “Gender, Media, and Mixed Martial Arts in Poland: The Case of Joanna Jędrzejczyk,” *Journal of Sports and Sports Issues*, Vol. 40 (5), 410-431.

<sup>213</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 71-92.

<sup>215</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 134-145.

Critique of Gender Constructions in the Ultimate Fighting Championship,”<sup>216</sup> is an extension of her journal article “Cage Fighting Like A Girl: Exploring Gender Constructions in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC),” is both praising and critical of Rousey.<sup>217</sup>

In the works above, Weaving deconstructs the career of Rousey primarily through the lens of Iris Young’s famous essay, “Throw Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality.”<sup>218</sup> Weaving argues that the former judoka represents a woman not afraid to question the emphasized feminine ideal while at the same time contributing to the problem by engaging in heteronormative feminine practices such as posing for male lifestyle and entertainment magazines.<sup>219</sup> Weaving critiques Rousey’s acknowledgment that her physical appearance helps to sell fights<sup>220</sup> but is unsure of whether Rousey’s remarks that “women don’t have to trade their femininity for athleticism . . . skinny girls look good in clothes, but fit chicks look good naked,” are transgressive or “female apologetic.”<sup>221</sup> However, while Weaving seems intent not to lay blame at Rousey’s feet, she points to the former Olympian as central to the problem at hand- the **UFC**’s marketing of WMMA fights primarily through sexuality and the male gaze more than fighting prowess.<sup>222</sup>

In “Foucault and the Glamazon: The Autonomy of Ronda Rousey,” Pam R. Sailors collaborated with Weaving. Weaving’s dual narrative is furthered by Sailors theorizing that Rousey is simultaneously a gender transgressor but also chooses to be a “Glamazon,” or “women

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<sup>216</sup> Charlene Weaving, “‘Chicks Fighting in a Cage’: A Philosophical Critique of Gender Constructions in the Ultimate Fighting Championship,” *Global Perspectives on Women in Combat Sports: Women Warriors around the World*, eds. Alex Channon and Christopher R. Matthews (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 57-72.

<sup>217</sup> Weaving, “CAGE FIGHTING LIKE A GIRL.”

<sup>218</sup> Iris Marion Young “Throw Like a Girl: *Throwing Like a Girl and other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 141-159.

<sup>219</sup> Weaving, “CAGE FIGHTING LIKE A GIRL,”136.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

who are different from other women, but who also fit societal ideals and gender norms,”<sup>223</sup> willingly and autonomously (as opposed to false consciousness) outside the cage because she knows fully well that this desire is caused by her having lived in the hegemonic masculine oppressive system and still arrives at the personal decision to participate.<sup>224</sup>

However, the authors also criticize Rousey for posing topless in heteronormative advertisements for Buffalo Jeans, where a male model conceals her bosom from the reader.<sup>225</sup> Sailors and Weaving also mentioned how Rousey’s long-time coach, Edward Tarveydayn, began telling her when she made the **UFC** to “start looking more feminine” and to trade in her sweatpants for dresses.<sup>226</sup> Conversely, Weaving and Sailors acknowledge her status as a gender transgressor, primarily through “the do-nothing-bitch campaign,” which promoted physical activity for women.<sup>227</sup> With this importance placed on Rousey, this dissertation can serve to confirm or disprove certain assertions made by Sailors and Weaving by correlating Rousey’s rise with the treatment that Shayna Baszler received as well as fellow fighters who competed alongside the “Queen of Spades” in **Invicta**.

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<sup>223</sup> Sailors, “Foucault and the Glamazon,” 432.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 437-438.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 430-431.

## MMA Fandom Literature Review

Finally, works which examine MMA fandom, with at least a tangential connection to gender in the sport, are analyzed. The first study, "Ultimate Fighting Championship Fans: Foundations of Subcultural Stratification" by Katie E. MacDonald, Matthew Lamont, and John M. Jenkins, was a field analysis of the 2016 UFC International Fight Week held in Las Vegas.<sup>228</sup> The study consisted of observing the attendees interact covertly and conducting semi-formal interviews. The goal was to discover "social stratifications" within UFC fan subcultures using theories based on collectives.<sup>229</sup> While a female former U.S. serviceman led the experiment, only four out of fourteen interviewees were women.<sup>230</sup>

A portion of the writers' findings are engaging, such as the expression that people who are only UFC zealots are considered neophytes by "vested MMA fans" and that there is a "social hierarchy in the MMA subculture."<sup>231</sup> All interviewees stressed there was no prescribed way to communicate from one MMA fan to another except when talking online. Interviewees explained: "It is expected that an individual who makes a comment on an MMA-related matter must . . . be accurate or face having his or her credibility within the subculture challenged in online fora . . . Moreover, an individual's awareness of MMA history and knowledge around fighting and training techniques also appeared to constitute subcultural capital."<sup>232</sup> This finding demonstrates that MMA forums are gatekeepers behind the wall of anonymity. There was a divide between respondents, with some viewing MMA online fora and social media as toxic, while others voiced

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<sup>228</sup> Katie E. MacDonald, Matthew Lamonta, and John M. Jenkins, "Ultimate Fighting Championship Fans: Foundations of Subcultural Stratification," *Leisure Sciences* 41, No.6 (2019), 441-459.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 441-442.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 445-448.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 451-452.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 451. fora is plural for forum.

that it shows their “true fandom.” Finally, concerning this study, the lead researcher (MacDonald) noted that she was frequently “tested” on MMA knowledge at events to verify her status as an insider.<sup>233</sup> One wonders what the frequency of being tested would have been if the insider was male. It is fair to assume the interviewees questioned MacDonald’s presence due to her gender. In their conclusion, the authors acknowledge that “mediated environments like internet chat forums” are worth further examination.<sup>234</sup> In her observations, for the most part, gender did not, at least in the manner presented by the lead author, show up as a form of stratification.<sup>235</sup>

The two most relevant studies regarding gender in WMMA are Michael Narine’s Master’s thesis “Developing an Understanding of the Role of Gender in the Consumption of Mixed Martial Arts”<sup>236</sup> and “The Effects of Gender and Social Roles on the Marketing of Combat Sport” by T. Christopher Greenwell, Meg Hancock, Jason M. Simmons, and Dustin Thorn.<sup>237</sup> Narine conducted a survey followed by mediating several group interview sessions. Fans selected from the undergraduate student body of the University of Windsor’s Kinesiology Department discussed various MMA topics.<sup>238</sup> Narine’s initial focus groups, that is, were based on work conducted by Jackowski and Gray, which divided fans into either social or vested categories. He constructed all-male social, all-male vested, all-female social, all-female vested, sex-integrated social, and sex-integrated vested research groups. Narine defined: “Vested fans

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Michael Lance Narine, "Developing an understanding of the role of gender in the consumption of mixed martial Arts," M.A. Thesis., (University of Windsor, 2012)

<sup>237</sup> T. Christopher Greenwell, Meg Hancock, Jason M. Simmons, and Dustin Thorn, “The Effects of Gender and Social Roles on the Marketing of Combat Sport,” *Sport Marketing Quarterly* 24 (2015), 19-29.

<sup>238</sup> Narine, “Developing an understanding,” 50. The school’s Kinesiology department was selected as being an athletic and sport base faculty, it had a higher likelihood of an MMA fanbase than other faculties. As a baseline knowledge of MMA was required to participate in the focus groups, it made sense to use the Kinesiology department for subject recruitment.



refer to those individuals who ‘use sport as an extension of their community’ . . . have deep emotional ties to sport,” while a “social fan is someone who does not really care about the sport or outcome but consumes to enjoy the overall entertainment experience.”<sup>239</sup> These focus group delineations resulted in not being viable as insufficient people, especially females, identified themselves as vested. Narine’s new focus groups were labeled all-male social fans, all-female social fans, sex-integrated social fans, sex-integrated non-fans, and vested fans. The last group contained only men, despite Narine also seeking female participants.<sup>240</sup> The lack of women raises a point that needs further study. Some women are vested in MMA, though hard to find. Narine leaving out their viewpoints removes a measure of credibility.

Interestingly, most members of the vested group felt that sex sells in MMA and thought ring girls were essential to their viewing experience.<sup>241</sup> There was also consensus that most women fans follow MMA solely to support their boyfriends. When asked about women wearing MMA apparel, a male fan replied: “Does she really think she’s worthy of wearing that shirt?”<sup>242</sup> Another man referred to a female fan as a “smokeshow.”<sup>243</sup> In the split-sex group, females identified as fans because they were in awe of the struggle to become a fighter and the will to compete. However, one female respondent revealed that . . . “Females don’t feel comfortable getting involved in [MMA].” Both sexes in the split-sex session also agreed that if a female were an avid consumer of MMA and was “rowdy,” she would be labeled “a bitch” or a “lesbian.”<sup>244</sup> When questioned about female fighters, the vested group admitted they would watch amateur WMMA but not professional. Most telling was a response from the male social session, “There’s

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 94.

nothing appealing about the girls in cornrows. They look like they're in prison almost."<sup>245</sup> This gatekeeping of how a woman can be a fan, let alone a fighter, is pertinent to the study of Baszler, Rousey, and **Invicta** because it reflects how discussion threads, whether online forums or comments under news articles are utilized and moderated, and firmly establishes in the minds of "vested" fans that their sport is strictly a male space.

The procedural method of "The Effects on Social and Gender Roles" focuses exclusively on surveys, with the researchers creating fake advertisements for a hypothetical MMA event, gauging subjects' interest in attending based on the gender of the fighter pictured and the level of violence depicted. Noting contrasting figures in previous statistics, the authors raised the point that on weeks when women fought in *TUF* 18, viewership spiked 20 percent on average.<sup>246</sup> They also paraphrased Shannon Knapp, stating: "that it should not matter if the fighter is male or female . . . true fans are not gender biased."<sup>247</sup> However, they also note that many are not keen on women fighting and are firmly lodged on hegemonic masculine norms, mentioning UFC fighter Mike Brown saying he would only watch WMMA if the women were topless.<sup>248</sup> To determine how these trends interacted between genders, the authors conducted surveys administered to students from three different universities: "half of the ads featured female fighters . . . the other half featured male fighters. To manipulate for the level of violence, the first . . . featured . . . two competitors in a non-violent pose, the second . . . featured . . . two competitors engaged in the fight, and the third . . . featured . . . two competitors . . . with visible blood."<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>246</sup> Greenwell, "The Effects of Gender and Social Roles," 19-20. With *TUF* 18 being a co-ed season, the weekly elimination fights alternated between female and male.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 22.

Many more men responded to the survey than women. However, men showed they were much more likely to care about gender links in fighters than females, while the latter were more likely to be turned off by violent imagery. Arguably the most crucial finding was that female respondents' views of violent ads did not change significantly when the ad showed a female fighter compared to a male one. Women tended to grade ads featuring female fighters with a similar score to those featuring men, suggesting gender linking in sports is predominately a male issue.<sup>250</sup>

In summary, while the literature concerning gender within combat sports covers considerable research ground, much remains to be explored, which my study attempts to address. Most MMA fandom literature focuses more on in-person interviews, which require approval from a university or academic journal's board of ethics. In contrast, this dissertation focuses on news articles and fan comments people can access with a laptop and a Wi-Fi signal. None of the discussed works addresses online fandom on a massive scale; only one examines physical examples of fans' responses to WMMA. The studies focusing on WMMA fighters include only a few that broach fan and media reactions. More popular and attractive female fighters are generally the subject of personal studies, something this dissertation challenges by analyzing a woman who refuses to abide by emphasized feminine norms, along with the wide range of female bodies displayed in the first four cards of **Invicta FC**'s history. None of the studies examined considered the approach of viewing WMMA through the lens of a veteran's career, let alone that of the start of an all-female promotion.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 23-27.

## Chapter 3

### “Fighting Out of Sioux Falls, South Dakota”: 2002-2008

#### Hometown Beginnings, Televised Fights, and the Carano-Cyborg Contrast

This (Carano) is one out of a handful of those chicks that can really scrap. The rest of them just look like shit . . . I can't be put behind a woman and I will stand behind that until the day I die.”- MMA fighter Mike “Quicksand” Pyle<sup>1</sup>

#### Section 1: Before Turning Professional

##### 2002-2004

The early days of Shayna Baszler's MMA career are like most early female pioneers of the sport in North America: virtually unknown. Even though Debi Purcell and Jennifer Howe had been plying their trade since the mid-1990s,<sup>2</sup> WMMA remained on a regional and word-of-mouth basis into the early 2000s.<sup>3</sup> Outside of the UFC and Japanese promotion Pride, the male variety was similar in public recognition but more recognized regarding training opportunities, available fights, and coverage in the mainstream media.<sup>4</sup> In several interviews, Shayna Baszler stated that she faced numerous obstacles in finding bouts because of the “underground” nature of WMMA at the time.<sup>5</sup> A sampling follows with some of the issues Baszler had to go through to fight during her amateur and early professional days.

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<sup>1</sup> Zach Arnold, “Quotes of the Week,” Fightopinion.com, November 7, 2007. <https://www.fightopinion.com/2007/11/07/quotes-of-the-week/>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>2</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 126-128.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 129-130.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 196-207.

<sup>5</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 20.

In her interview with pro wrestling icon Chris Jericho, Baszler cracked a joke about how she was four years into her MMA career before she started training.<sup>6</sup> This statement was not far from the truth. Baszler trained out of her garage with a few friends as an amateur, self-teaching themselves martial arts via books from the library.<sup>7</sup> At the time, there were virtually no accredited MMA trainers in her area because the entire sport, let alone WMMA, had difficulty finding acceptance in South Dakota.<sup>8</sup> Because the state of South Dakota, in the “human cockfighting” misnomer days of MMA,<sup>9</sup> did not have the sport officially sanctioned and regulated, there were allegedly often no doctors or medical personnel at fight cards within the state’s borders before 2004.<sup>10</sup> No medical personnel meant no one to administer drug tests or conduct bloodwork. Many bouts were catchweight (i.e., whatever weight the fighters recorded at the time), and rules for individual fights were often not agreed upon until the show was about to start.<sup>11</sup> Baszler admitted doing that was “reckless in hindsight.”<sup>12</sup>

Baszler would often have to fight whoever they put in front of her or not get paid. Since very few females as a whole participated in MMA events, let alone in Baszler’s section of the country, she often learned who her opponent was on the day of the fights, sometimes arriving at the venue with no scheduled opponent, waiting hours upon hours hoping an opponent would

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<sup>6</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast, 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-jericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-jeric>.

<sup>7</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008

<sup>8</sup> “Episode 16 (with guest Shayna Baszler)” August 12, 2013, in *MMA Dude Bro Podcast*, podcast, 1:16:32, <http://www.mmadudebro.com>.

<sup>9</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 15-16. In 1996, Arizona Senator John McCain sent a letter to all 50 U.S. state governors in which he called MMA “human cockfighting.”

<sup>10</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Shayna Baszler’s long-winding road of a fight career leads to the door on Saturday,” *mmafighting.com*, Vox Media, August 30, 2014. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2014/8/30/6080213/ufc-shayna-baszlers-long-winding-road-of-a-fight-career-leads-to-the-door>.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Campbell and Bryan Alvarez, “WWE: Bayley’s turn, Shayna Baszler drops by, AEW All Out (9/5),” September 5, 2019, in *State of Combat*, produced by CBSSPORTS, podcast, 2:12:29, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/wwe-bayleys-turn-shayna-baszler-drops-by-aew-all-out-9-5/id1226601288?i=1000448681389>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

show up.<sup>13</sup> At one amateur show, the only other woman to show up refused to fight without wearing her tennis shoes (MMA bouts are contested barefoot, on rare occasions wearing boxing shoes). Baszler recalled, “At the risk of losing the "chick fight," they (the promoters) asked if I would just agree to the fight . . . so I did.”<sup>14</sup> On another card, she claimed three other women signed up one night, but rather than have two “chick fights,” she fought “three times in one night before a standing-room-only crowd.”<sup>15</sup> Baszler recalls times when she had to wait in line with the fans buying tickets for the night’s card so she could get inside the venue to sign up to fight.<sup>16</sup> She had to pay to fight, and in the rare instances she got paid, it was only enough for roundtrip gas money.<sup>17</sup> Recompense rarely came from the promoters, instead often coming from whatever was thrown in the ring by the crowd before or after her fights.<sup>18</sup> She was simply doing it because she loved to fight.

In those early days, Baszler never fought in even a small-sized arena. She fought in broken rings,<sup>19</sup> cornfields,<sup>20</sup> and barns.<sup>21</sup> In one such cornfield fight, her opponent backed out of the bout, causing the announcer to proclaim: “Who wants to see a chick fight?” He attempted to

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<sup>13</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast , 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-gericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-geric>.

<sup>14</sup> Fightergirls.com Accessed September 19, 2020. No citation as website is no longer active. Parentheses mine.

<sup>15</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Shayna Baszler's long-winding road of a fight career leads to the door on Saturday,” mmafighting.com, Vox Media, August 30, 2014. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2014/8/30/6080213/ufc-shayna-baszlers-long-winding-road-of-a-fight-career-leads-to-the-door>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast , 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-gericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-geric>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Shayna Baszler's long-winding road of a fight career leads to the door on Saturday,” mmafighting.com, Vox Media, August 30, 2014. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2014/8/30/6080213/ufc-shayna-baszlers-long-winding-road-of-a-fight-career-leads-to-the-door>.

<sup>20</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast , 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-gericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-geric>.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Gerbasi, “Shayna Baszler: Hail to the Queen,” ufcespanol.com, UFC, August 28, 2014. <https://www.ufcespanol.com/news/shayna-baszler-hail-queen>.

entice the crowd into throwing money, thus prompting the other woman to compete.<sup>22</sup> This instance was not the only time Baszler witnessed local promoters marketing WMMA bouts in this fashion.



Figure 3 Shayna Baszler prepares to fight at an undisclosed location on an undisclosed date early in her career.<sup>23</sup>

One particular story from these rough and tumble amateur days summarizes not only the difficulties Shayna Baszler and those like her had to surmount to fight but also the hegemonic male behaviors displayed by the promoters and fans in attendance. Baszler recounts an incident where she fought on a local card at a Native American reservation.<sup>24</sup> Shortly before the fight, her opponent backed out. The promoter/ring announcer entered the ring and announced the bout's cancellation. However, he persisted in trying to convince the other girl to compete, exclaiming,

<sup>22</sup> Chris Jericho, "Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one)," October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast , 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-gericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-jeric>.

<sup>23</sup> Shayna Baszler (@QoSBaszler), "How it started. How it's going," Twitter, October 08, 2020, <https://twitter.com/QoSBaszler/status/1314345957530705921>.

<sup>24</sup> Chris Jericho, "Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one)," October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast , 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-gericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-jeric>.

“This girl doesn’t want to fight; let’s make it worth her time!”<sup>25</sup> The crowd began tossing dollar bills into the ring, the pot eventually reaching ninety dollars. The unnamed opponent opted to participate, with money now on the line. Baszler won the fight, collecting the cash.<sup>26</sup>

A pertinent example of hegemonic masculinity imposing its power to enforce emphasized feminine adherence evolves from events after Baszler’s opponent initially dropped out of the fight. In McClearen’s “Converging Media,” retired fighter Julie Kedzie remarks positively about the promotion **Hook-N-Shoot**: “avoiding the objectification strategy so many promotions at the time (the mid-2000s) defaulted to.”<sup>27</sup> Whatever regional amateur organization set up the card had no problem using the male gaze strategy, albeit on short notice. This is evident by the announcer trying to bribe the other woman into performing and the crowd responding similarly to those at a strip club.<sup>28</sup> To praise a stripper for their provocative dance routine, customers toss money to the dancer on stage, which seems quite similar to the cash-throwing scenario described in Baszler’s recollection.<sup>29</sup>

Now, while it is intriguing to note that the act the fans asked the women to perform was usually a male preserve, WMMA, at that point, was niche and of low quality. It is implausible that Baszler and her opponent were being cheered because the crowd wanted to see progressivism in female combat sports.<sup>30</sup> More likely, the audience viewed Baszler’s bout as the MMA version of the catfight phenomenon. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* describes a catfight

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<sup>25</sup> Joe Rizzo and Jay Kelly, “Shayna Baszler talks Nattie, Bellas, WWE, Ronda Rousey, Wrestling, MMA,” August 12, 2016 in *Rear Naked Choke Radio*, produced by ronshowjoeted, podcast, 2:09:35. <https://radiopublic.com/rear-naked-choke-radio-mma-8XMdXj/s1!3cef5>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 20. Parentheses mine.

<sup>28</sup> Bernadette Barton, *Stripped, 2nd Edition: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



as “an intense fight or argument especially between two women,”<sup>31</sup> usually involving hair pulling, tearing of clothes, and tends to be heavily eroticized in a hegemonic masculine society.<sup>32</sup> The most infamous example of using this in sports marketing is the 2003 Miller Lite commercial, aired during National Football League games, entitled “Catfight.”<sup>33</sup> The advertisement “goes from a poolside argument” over whether the beer in question is better because it tastes great or because it has less filling (fewer calories) than their primary competitors “into an angry, clothes-shredding, wrestling match between two women who end up in bras and panties.”<sup>34</sup> This ad campaign aired at the end of Baszler’s amateur career, showing the lens through which fans viewed her fights.<sup>35</sup> Again, as shown in Kedzie’s recollections of her early career, crowds at many shows exhibited fans and even male fighters acting crass and sexual towards her, which implies the men were seeking titillation.<sup>36</sup> And even though it is highly likely Baszler did not view the “chick fights” she participated in as complying with emphasized femininity, the crowd certainly displayed hegemonic masculine behavior.<sup>37</sup>

Baszler made her professional MMA debut on October 31, 2003, defeating Tina Johnson via armbar in the first round for the regional promotion **Reality Cage Fighting**.<sup>38</sup> This contest and her next subsequent fights (in which she compiled a record of six wins and four losses

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<sup>31</sup> “Catfight.” Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, accessed January 31, 2021. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catfight>.

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Reinke, “Catfight: A Feminist Analysis,” *Chrestomathy*, (2010), 162-166.

<sup>33</sup> Michael McCarthy, “Miller Lite’s ‘Catfight’ ad angers some viewers,” accessed December 13, 2020. <https://superbowl-ads.com/miller-lites-catfight-ad-angers-some-viewers/>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 12, 2020. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>36</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 20.

<sup>37</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast, 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-jericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-jeric>.

<sup>38</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 12, 2020. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

between Nov 14, 2003, and March 10, 2007) will not be discussed or analyzed in significant detail. While she did clash with fellow pioneers such as Roxanne Modaf ferri, Julie Kedzie, and Tara LaRosa in this timeframe, the information obtained was deemed irrelevant concerning the research questions.<sup>39</sup>

I judged the data as inconsequential for a few reasons. First, Baszler’s initial seven fights had no video footage for me to analyze. Second, while the next four bouts were filmed and shown online to a paying audience via the promotion **Bodogfights** (the final one hosted by **New Fight Films**), there was minimal online press coverage and virtually no online fan reaction surrounding them.<sup>40</sup> Only three of Baszler’s first eleven professional contests had media coverage: Her fifth fight against Amanda Buckner featured in three *MMA Weekly* articles,<sup>41</sup> her seventh, also against Buckner, had a single *Sherdog* article dedicated to the card,<sup>42</sup> and her eleventh battling Samantha Anderson received the same amount of press attention while none featured any fan feedback.<sup>43</sup> With a lack of media and fan discussion of her first three years as a pro, there is little data for me to examine, let alone data relevant to the analysis of Connell and Kupers’ gender theorems.

Most importantly, though, is their lack of relation to what this dissertation dubbed “the emergence of WMMA.” If we utilized the word emergence in terms of chronological history, Baszler’s first nine bouts would indeed be relevant, taking place in North American WMMA’s

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> MMAWeekly.com Staff, “SPRATT, 3 TITLES HIGHLIGHT RING OF FIRE 20,” MMAweekly.com, December 6, 2005. <https://www.mmaweekly.com/spratt-3-titles-highlight-ring-of-fire-20>.

<sup>42</sup> Steven Curtis, “MFC: Hometown Boy Doesn’t Disappoint,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2006. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/MFC-Hometown-Boy-Doesn146t-Disappoint-4631>.

<sup>43</sup> TJ de Santis, “‘Mega Megu’ Takes Easy Win in the Cage,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, March 11, 2007. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/147Mega-Megu148-Takes-Easy-Win-in-the-Cage-6962>.

early years.<sup>44</sup> After all, the first official stateside women's contest happened in 1997.<sup>45</sup> However, outside of the limited collected histories featured in the literature review, most MMA media websites and online fans treat the beginning of WMMA's emergence as taking place in 2007. Specifically, WMMA emerged on February 10, 2007, when the premium TV channel Showtime aired upstart promotion **EliteXC**'s inaugural show, *Destiny*. *Destiny* featured the first-ever women's pro bout broadcast live, Gina Carano vs. Julie Kedzie.<sup>46</sup> **EliteXC** introduced most MMA media news sources and the sport's online fanbase to WMMA, with nearly two million viewers watching the contest.<sup>47</sup>

## Section 2: The Emergence Begins, Early EliteXC and Baszler's Opinion of Gina Carano

### July 2007- April 2008

This show changed the landscape in which WMMA operated because now women's bouts were being covered by major MMA media outlets. Live televised fights were now an attainable goal for WMMA fighters, and fans across the country were exposed to WMMA for the first time, which caused many a debate on fan forums. Baszler was one fighter who attained a live broadcast fight relatively quickly. She was part of not only **Elite XC**'s (technically **ShoXc Elite Challengers**) second-ever show on July 27, 2007, but also their second-ever WMMA bout when she took to the cage for the twelfth time.<sup>48</sup> The fight occurred in Santa Ynez, California;

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<sup>44</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 12, 2020.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>45</sup> Gentry III, *No Holds Barred*, 356.

<sup>46</sup> "EliteXC- Destiny." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/EliteXC-Destiny-4544>.

<sup>47</sup> Records show *Destiny* achieved a 1.26 Nielsen rating for the 18-49 age demographic. Calculating for the 2006-2007 television season, this equated to roughly between 1.640 million and 1.652 million viewers.

<sup>48</sup> "ShoXC- Elite Challenge Series." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/ShoXC-Elite-Challenger-Series-5243>.

her record was seven victories and four defeats. Baszler matched against the 3-3 Jan Finney,<sup>49</sup> the Queen of Spades submitting Finney with an armbar at 2:40 into the first round.<sup>50</sup> This fight streamed live online; however, no footage remains.

Due to a lack of video footage, analyzing it is impossible. Fan reactions are also sparse as WMMA remained a blip on MMA online forums aside from *Fighter Girls*, a message board primarily utilized by WMMA fighters and coaches during the “emergence.”<sup>51</sup> However, what can be analyzed is media coverage about, and thoughts from, Shayna Baszler herself. *MMA Weekly*,<sup>52</sup> *MMA News*,<sup>53</sup> and *Sherdog* each published articles on the card before and after the Santa Ynez event.<sup>54</sup> *MMA News* posted the card.<sup>55</sup> *MMA Weekly* only covered the five televised fights, simply listing the results of the undercard bouts.<sup>56</sup> *Sherdog* did likewise but at least put a one-sentence statement explaining that “Shayna Baszler (6-3-0) capitalized off a takedown by out-positioning Jan Finney (3-4-0) before scoring an armbar at 2:40 of the first.”<sup>57</sup> Ironically, the most extensive media promotion the fight received came from interviews involving Gina Carano, the subject of one such *MMA Weekly* exclusive.<sup>58</sup> The interviews, which focused on her

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>51</sup> *Fightergirls.com* Accessed September 19, 2020. No citation as website is no longer active.

<sup>52</sup> *Mmaweekly.com* Staff, “SHOXC: JULY 27 ON SHOWTIME,” *mmaweekly.com*, July 10, 2007.

<https://www.mmaweekly.com/shoxc-july-27-on-showtime-2>.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Reichlin, “Detailed Fight Results From ShoXC Debut Show On 7/27,” *Mmanews.com*, July 29, 2007.

<https://www.mmanews.com/detailed-fight-results-from-shoxc-debut-show-on-727>.

<sup>54</sup> Josh Gross and Dave Mandel, “NOONS DOMINATES BERTO ON SHOXC DEBUT.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, July 28, 2007. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Noons-Dominates-Berto-on-ShoXC-Debut-8425>.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Reichlin, “Full Card For ShoXC Debut Set For July 27<sup>th</sup>,” *Mmanews.com*, July 2, 2007.

<https://www.mmanews.com/full-card-for-shoxc-debut-set-for-july-27th/>.

<sup>56</sup> Damon Martin, “SHOXC IN REVIEW: NOONS KNOCKS OUT BERTO,” *mmaweekly.com*, July 28, 2007.

<https://www.mmaweekly.com/shoxc-in-review-noons-knocks-out-berito>.

<sup>57</sup> Josh Gross and Dave Mandel, “NOONS DOMINATES BERTO ON SHOXC DEBUT.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, July 28, 2007. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Noons-Dominates-Berto-on-ShoXC-Debut-8425>.

<sup>58</sup> Damon Martin, “IS THERE ANYTHING GINA CARANO CAN’T DO?,” *mmaweekly.com*, July 28, 2007.

<https://www.mmaweekly.com/is-there-anything-gina-carano-cant-do>.

“modesty,”<sup>59</sup> an emphasized feminine attribute, saw Carano acknowledge: “I guess Jan Finney and Shayna Baszler are fighting this weekend on the internet card for EliteXC . . . so I might fight the winner of them, or I might fight somebody else, I’m not quite sure yet.”<sup>60</sup> Now it’s understandable that the undercard of a non-**UFC/Pride** show would not get much media attention. Still, when an inactive (Carano had not fought since February) competitor for the same promotion receives a one-on-one interview the same day as the Baszler-Finney bout, rather than Baszler or Finney, it might appear that “the sole face of WMMA” was being rewarded for emphasizing femininity.<sup>61</sup>

Baszler was interviewed two times following the fight, first by Percy Crawford of *Fight Hype*,<sup>62</sup> then with Jordan Breen for his self-titled podcast on *Sherdog*.<sup>63</sup> Direct quotes from the Breen interview vanished along with the podcast archives, but I did manage to take some notes when I initially listened to it. A small portion of it has the newly dubbed “Queen of Spades” explaining her strategy to fight Finney and that she was “not slighted but surprised”<sup>64</sup> the bout wound up on the online prelims instead of the televised broadcast. Most of her podcast appearance focused on her opinions regarding Gina Carano. Baszler stated that the more people who watched Gina, meant more people would now watch WMMA overall. She met Carano in person, saying she was a nice person and one that she liked a lot.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Percy Crawford, “FH EXCLUSIVE: SHAYNA BASZLER,” Fighthype.com, August 3, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content588.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Jordan Breen, “Jordan Breen Show- Shayna Baszler,” August 2, 2007, in *The Jordan Breen Show*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Jordan-Breen-Show-Shayna-Baszler-271>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

However, Baszler found it quite frustrating that recently converted WMMA fans thought that the sport began and ended with Gina Carano, while people who were pioneers long before Carano's first pro fight were being "left behind" by WMMA promoters.<sup>66</sup> This goes back to the concept of pioneers representing the true historical emergence of WMMA. At the same time, the Carano-Kedzie fight is considered the cultural emergence of the women's side of the sport. She, either inadvertently or subconsciously, seemed to reiterate what scholar Pam Sailors said about Glamazon roles in emphasized femininity adherence: "women who are different from other women," i.e., being an MMA fighter, "but who also fit societal ideals and gender norms."<sup>67</sup> According to Sailor and Weaving's hypothesis, Carano has agency as long as she realizes she enjoys adhering to those feminine norms because of the oppressive hegemonic masculine system.<sup>68</sup> However, that article failed to address how one person's acceptance can impact everyone else in their chosen field. This applies to WMMA fighters as a collective in this early stage of the sport because Carano's adherence, while being "the sole face of women's MMA," inadvertently holds the entire women's division to her emphasized feminine standards of beauty and actions by media and fans alike, which subverts those who want to be given credit for their technical competence and toughness without being measured by those same standards. Despite Baszler's assurances that Carano was a good person and that there is nothing wrong with using your looks to sell a fight, being the only recognizable face in WMMA while doing so prevented WMMA as a whole from gaining traction. Instead of the sport's fans judging them by their technical competence, Carano conditioned them to primarily focus on whether they found a female fighter attractive, i.e., a fighter's willingness and ability to serve the male gaze.<sup>69</sup> The

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Sailors and Weaving, "Foucault and the Glamazon," 437-438.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> McClearn, "Converging Media," 21.

media furthers the conditioning in a slight hegemonic masculine fashion, while, as I expect to show in the rest of this chapter, the fanbase often reacted with a more toxic dialogue towards WMMA.

For the Percy Crawford interview, Baszler reiterated many of the same points she uttered on the *Jordan Breen Show*, albeit with less focus on Carano. She talked about how she got on the card by sheer happenstance, as her manager: “had been working with another fighter that was on the **EliteXC** show and they kind of threw my name out there and it worked out.”<sup>70</sup> She discussed how: “the sky is the limit” for WMMA.<sup>71</sup> Furthering this argument, she stated: “People like to draw comparisons with the WNBA . . . but the difference is, in MMA, I can do everything that a guy can do. In the WNBA, you're not going to see girls run down the court and do really awesome slam dunks, but in MMA, I can do an armbar that looks just like his. I can kick her in the head just like that guy can kick him in the head. So, we can do exactly the same thing as the guys.”<sup>72</sup> Here, Baszler was subconsciously resisting emphasized feminine norms, praising the technical competence of the armbar submission while also putting forward the image of a damaging moment, i.e., female non-fragility via the kick her in the head analogy.<sup>73</sup> She also speculated whether the **UFC** would add women, positing: “The dollar bill controls Dana. If it's something that he sees can make him money, I think he'll do it. Whether that's in a year, five years, or ten years . . . I don't think it's something that people could ignore.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Percy Crawford, “FH EXCLUSIVE: SHAYNA BASZLER,” Fighthype.com, August 3, 2007.

<http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content588.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

In Santa Ynez, California, Baszler fought her thirteenth pro bout. It occurred on October 26, 2007, against the 3-0 Jennifer “Rosebud” Tate.<sup>75</sup> Unlike her previous fight, Baszler featured on the televised main card. Of note are taped interviews shown before the bout between the two fighters. Baszler’s interview featured a basic metal guitar riff throughout. She stated: “I smash in the ring . . . I go in and finish . . . there can be ten seconds left; I’ve beaten up the girl the whole time, I’m still looking for a way to finish. I have the skill. I’m exciting to watch; everybody remembers my fights . . . I will be the next big thing because when it gets right down to it, I don’t know any other girls that can shred better than me.”<sup>76</sup> With a “hip-hop” song playing in the background, the television productions showed Shayna walking to the cage in a baseball cap with her ESP electric guitar slung across her back.<sup>77</sup>



Figure 4 Shayna Baszler headed to the ring to face Jennifer Tate, October 26, 2007.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> “ShoXC- Elite Challenger Series.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/ShoXC-Elite-Challenger-Series-5688>.

<sup>76</sup> “ShoXC 3: Hamman vs Rosa,” October 26, 2007 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Pro Elite, Inc., video, 59:28, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Photograph taken by Dwight McCann. Western University will not let me visit site due to risk of malware.



The play-by-play announcer called her: “a renaissance woman . . . works with disadvantaged adolescents at a live-in center, but she plays the guitar, she’s a blues guitarist . . . Went to college on a music scholarship . . . was once a cello prodigy; thought she might become the next Yo-Yo Ma . . . she moves towards what she hopes will be stardom in mixed martial arts.”<sup>79</sup> After showing a clip of Baszler submitting Finney, the commentators pontificated: “She’s fought the best female fighters out there, and Tate won’t show her anything she hasn’t seen before”<sup>80</sup> and then concluded: “The former aspiring rock star hopes to strike another power cord tonight.”<sup>81</sup> Jimmy Lennon Jr. announced the bout as a “**ShoXC** special attraction, a women’s featherweight showdown scheduled for three three-minute rounds.”<sup>82</sup> While her introduction concluded, Baszler playfully winked at the camera.<sup>83</sup>

In the first, Baszler grabbed a missed kick and got the takedown, soon locking in an armbar for the quick submission win. She ran around the cage, doing an air-guitar celebration.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> “ShoXC 3: Hamman vs Rosa,” October 26, 2007 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Pro Elite, Inc., video, 59:28, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 5 Shayna Baszler starts her air guitar celebration after submitting Jennifer Tate. October 26, 2007.<sup>85</sup>*

The fight clip then shows Baszler and Tate hugging before the official announcement, the former seeming to advise the latter while the commentators praise her technical submission competence.<sup>86</sup> Before cutting to commercial, the play-by-play announcer called Baszler “one of the most creative submission artists in women’s mixed martial arts.”<sup>87</sup>

Baszler’s victory over Tate is the first prime example in her fighting career where she countered emphasized feminine norms. During her pre-fight interview, Baszler wore her fight gear and cornrows instead of street clothes and makeup.<sup>88</sup> The language she used in the pre-fight video package, such as “I smash” and “There isn’t any girl out there who can shred like I can,”<sup>89</sup> go against adherence to feminine sociability. Her walk to the cage in a baseball cap, her electric

<sup>85</sup> No photographer listed, “Fight night wrapup,” SI.com, ABG-SI LLC, October 29, 2007. <https://www.si.com/more-sports/2007/10/29/mmawrapup>.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “ShoXC 3: Hamman vs Rosa,” October 26, 2007 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Pro Elite, Inc., video, 59:28, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

guitar slung over the back, and some generic “hip-hop” song playing in the background also ran counter to emphasized feminine norms.<sup>90</sup> By exuding these particular displays, Baszler presented a “masculine” identity to the viewing audience, displaying nonadherence, at least according to Connell. Baszler also expressed a youthful cocky exuberance with her playful wink to the camera and her air guitar victory celebration.<sup>91</sup>

However, the commentators unintentionally hinted at emphasized feminine norms. They discussed her work with disadvantaged youth, child raising being considered essential to emphasized femininity.<sup>92</sup> After the fight, the commentator clarified that Baszler is: “One of the most creative submission artists” in WMMA.<sup>93</sup> The signifier, intentionally or not, lowered its value compared to the male counterpart. Also, Lennon Jr., before the contest, calling the bout a “special attraction” and not a fight, similarly disenfranchised the female combatants.<sup>94</sup>

Many major MMA media sources published the final cards, and *Bloody Elbow* even compiled betting predictions for the card, some going further than they did for the Finney fight.<sup>95</sup> The *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, in its giant lengthy format, dedicated a blurb to the contest’s results. Published in their sub-newsletter *Figure 4 Weekly*, Brian Alvarez made an interesting prediction: “Shayna Baszler also beat Jennifer Tate in just 44 seconds . . . and probably will be getting a shot at Gina Carano on the main **EliteXC** show soon.”<sup>96</sup> In a brief two-sentence

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 187.

<sup>93</sup> “ShoXC 3: Hamman vs Rosa,” October 26, 2007 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Pro Elite, Inc., video, 59:28, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Tonight’s ShoXC Betting Odds,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, October 26, 2007. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2007/10/26/18052/309>.

<sup>96</sup> Bryan Alvarez, “F4W~!#645 - COUTURE VS. DANA HEAD-TO-HEAD - NOVEMBER 5, 2007,” *f4wonline.com*, October 31, 2007. <https://members.f4wonline.com/figure-four-weekly/f4w645-couture-vs-dana-head-head-november-5-2007-89686>.

synopsis of the fight, *MMA Weekly* called Baszler's win impressive, concluding with a prediction that she would face Carano next.<sup>97</sup> *Sherdog* did the most in terms of length spent discussing the contest's outcome. Mike Fridley and Dave Mandel reported: "Submission-minded Shayna Baszler didn't disappoint in her 130-pound bout with slugger Jennifer Tate, catching the less experienced fighter with a slick-as-Teflon armbar just 44 seconds into the opening round."<sup>98</sup> They concluded by quoting her post-fight interview in its entirety.<sup>99</sup> There was an absence of hegemonic masculinity, let alone enforcing feminine norms, by the media. By no means were MMA news sites going out of their way to promote the women's fight on the card, but most sites gave equal treatment to their male counterparts. Despite this equity, the fans reacted to this fight in a more toxic manner, with frequent examples of Virtual Manhood Acts.

The fans were not forgiving in the comment section on the fight video uploaded to *YouTube* by MELANOGASTER01 a little less than a year after the bout.<sup>100</sup> First, we have the positive posts. There is a sizable but minority portion from both men and women that proclaimed they found Shayna attractive. LAURA KATHLEEN wrote, "I'm no lesbian or anything (married with kid) but oh my god! Shayna is amazing. She kinda looks like a hot dude. She's so bad!"<sup>101</sup> RUSSELLSPARADOX stated Baszler was "half woman half goddess."<sup>102</sup> While on the surface, these comments are positive and can be viewed as such; they still praise her physical looks, not

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<sup>97</sup> Ricardo Mendoza, "JAVI VAZQUEZ WINS, THEN RETIRES AT SHOXC," *Mmaweekly.com*, October 27, 2007. <https://www.mmaweekly.com/javi-vazquez-wins-then-retires-at-shoxc-2>.

<sup>98</sup> Mike Fridley and Dave Mandel, "'SHOWTIME' CALLS IT QUILTS ON SHOWTIME." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, October 28, 2007. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/147Showtime148-Calls-it-Quits-on-SHOWTIME-9683>.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate," *melanogaster01*, April 15, 2008, video, 8:53. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

<sup>101</sup> Laura Kathleen, 2011, comment on *melanogaster01*, "Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

<sup>102</sup> RussellsParadox, 2009, comment on *melanogaster01*, "Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

her technical competence. She successfully, however, inadvertently titillated some of the male audience, thereby somewhat adhering to emphasized femininity. On the other hand, some commenters mocked her physical appearance and her failure to arouse them. These include PARKMAN35, who espoused: “She’s a half breed (likely referring to her biracial ethnicity).”

KMAXX69 wrote: “Where’s the tits.”<sup>103</sup> BRAD SMITH dubbed **EliteXC**: “carpet munchers fighting asc.”<sup>104</sup> PARKMAN35 argued that she failed to arouse him because he did not find non-white women attractive. In doing so, he exhibited what I will refer to as Toxic Trait 1, or the “devaluation of women” based on Baszler’s ethnicity. KMAXX69 accused Baszler of not satisfying his sexual needs, while BRAD SMITH theorized her possibly being a lesbian, a category of women he disdained.<sup>105</sup> The former displayed examples of Toxic Trait 1 via devaluing women/W MMA as only important if he found the participants physically attractive and engaged in the second kind of VMAs, the sexualization of women. The latter portrayed Toxic Trait 2, participating in homophobia by using a slur towards lesbian women while also utilizing VMA Trait 1, aka the “creation of homosocial, heterosexist space.” However, more accurately, he was mocking WMMA’s lack of being a heterosexist space.

Finally, some comments claimed women do not know how to fight or “cheat” by using a submission, i.e., the “feminine style.”<sup>106</sup> ERNESTO GUERRERO espoused: “Wow iv noticed that kicks for woman don’t work they just unbalance you unless they are super fast and hard they just leave u open for take downs.”<sup>107</sup> MLYNCH357 wrote: “The submission stuff is like, ok -

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<sup>103</sup> Kmaxx69, comment was deleted, comment on melanogaster01, “Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

<sup>104</sup> Brad Smith, 2009, comment on melanogaster01, “Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>. Carpet muncher is a derogatory term for a lesbian.

<sup>105</sup> Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other,” 94-95.

<sup>106</sup> Hirose, “Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit,” 202.

<sup>107</sup> Ernesto guerrero, 2009, comment on melanogaster01, “Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

people rolling around, rolling around some more, ok - the ref just stopped the fight. Apparently somebody won. Woohoo.”<sup>108</sup> He echoes statements made during Baszler’s amateur days, when the crowd would yell as she attempted to grapple: “Get up and fight for real!”<sup>109</sup> cementing the fact that they viewed submissions as not a real victory but a “feminine” one, just as was found in Hirose and Pih’s academic research.<sup>110</sup> These two comments barely avoided utilizing Toxic Trait 1, possibly devaluing women’s contribution to MMA overall.

Some commenters defended Baszler and her fighting/technical abilities. W. DEARTH stated: “These ‘carpet munchers’ would beat the fucking piss out of you. Baszler rules. Learn the sport, son.”<sup>111</sup> However, these posts were in the vast minority, many of which were much cruder comments, some of which YouTube content moderators deleted. What the remaining comments overall show is that while there was some resistance from portions of the MMA fanbase, most viewed this fight through the lens of women needing to arouse men, that women are not built to fight, and that WMMA is boring, i.e., familiar attributes required by emphasized femininity. In addition, toxic masculinity was hardly frowned upon.

Shayna Baszler was interviewed twice by Percy Crawford, once just before her fight with Tate and again a few months after the bout. In the first interview, she said: “Especially with the way this weight class and women's MMA is kind of blowing up, I want to keep my name out

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<sup>108</sup> MLynch357, 2010, comment on melanogaster01, “Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

<sup>109</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast , 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-jericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-je-ric>.

<sup>110</sup> Hirose, “Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit,” 199-202.

<sup>111</sup> W. Dearth, comment deleted, comment on melanogaster01, “Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

there.”<sup>112</sup> Crawford projects a similar mindset as Alvarez, stating that if Baszler defeated Tate, that would probably put her in line for a shot at Carano.<sup>113</sup> Baszler responded, “If I end up fighting Gina, I will already expect her not to make weight and we will have matters taken care of beforehand. I’m not going to go into that without that being straight like a lot of the girls she’s fought; maybe because of lack of experience or maybe they don’t have managers.”<sup>114</sup> Carano, “the sole face of WMMA,” was infamous for never making weight, a stigma which many detractors applied to all female fighters in general.<sup>115</sup>

Baszler accepted congratulations on her victory over Tate in the second interview but argued, “The ultimate goal in **EliteXC** is to fight against Gina and I know that they want to protect her.”<sup>116</sup> In response to what she wanted to achieve in 2008, Baszler stated, “I just want to bring the realization to people that there’s more fighters out there than Gina Carano. I want people to start asking, ‘Hey, who is that girl?’ I want to start popping up in people’s heads . . . I just really want to bring it to light that Gina is not the first great female fighter. She’s a good female fighter, but she’s not the first and she’s not the only one.”<sup>117</sup> Baszler echoed similar sentiments in her previous interview with Crawford following her victory over Jan Finney.<sup>118</sup> Also, besides asking about Carano, the interviewer focused on MMA technical competence in

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<sup>112</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘MY PREDICTION IS SUBMISSION AT THE END OF ROUND 1 OR EARLY IN ROUND 2!’,” Fighthype.com, October 26, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content1197.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Jordan Breen, “CARANO, CONVICTION, AND HEAVYWEIGHT HYPOCRISY.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Carano-Conviction-and-Heavyweight-Hypocrisy-13044>.

<sup>116</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘EVERYBODY IS TALKING ABOUT A FIGHT BETWEEN ME AND GINA CARANO EXCEPT FOR ELITE XC!’,” Fighthype.com, December 4, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/news/article1454.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Percy Crawford, “FH EXCLUSIVE: SHAYNA BASZLER,” Fighthype.com, August 3, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content588.html>.

his line of questions, asking her about her desire to get a KO victory in her career and competing in grappling tournaments.<sup>119</sup>

Baszler also appeared in a post-fight podcast with Jordan Breen and TJ De Santis, proclaiming: “I’ve fought the best; I’m not afraid to lose.”<sup>120</sup> As proof, Baszler gave evidence from her Kelly Kobold bout and emphasized: “She beat the holy snot out of me.”<sup>121</sup> She also did not adhere to feminine social norms by directly calling out **EliteXC**, stating: “They have to offer the Carano fight . . . If the Carano fight goes to the ground, I know it’s my fight; start a stopwatch.”<sup>122</sup> In another podcast for *Fight Opinion*, she stood up for WMMA against the online fans’ decree that: “This is a man’s sport.”<sup>123</sup> In an interview with *Live Audio Wrestling*, **EliteXC** fighter Mike “Quicksand” Pyle complained: “I’m being put behind a woman to be on the undercard. I don’t have time for that man . . . right now; this is a man’s sport. This is a man’s world right now in this game and that’s all there is to it. Who else am I going to be put behind . . . This (Carano) is one out of a handful of those chicks that can really scrap. The rest of them just look like shit . . . I can’t be put behind a woman and I will stand behind that until the day I die.”<sup>124</sup> This, despite the fact no women were fighting on the upcoming November 7 card,<sup>125</sup> although he was on the undercard for **EliteXC**’s February inaugural show, which featured the

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<sup>119</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘EVERYBODY IS TALKING ABOUT A FIGHT BETWEEN ME AND GINA CARANO EXCEPT FOR ELITE XC!’,” Fighthype.com, December 4, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/news/article1454.html>.

<sup>120</sup> Jordan Breen and TJ De Santis, “Beatdown- Palaszewski & Baszler,” October 31, 2007, in *The Beatdown*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Beatdown-Palaszewski-Baszler-370>.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Zach Arnold, “Fight Opinion Radio #68: Shayna Baszler & Ken Shamrock,” November 14, 2007 in *Fight Opinion Radio*, produced by fightopinion.com., podcast, 1:11:13. <https://www.fightopinion.com/podcasts/foradio-11-14-2007.mp3>.

<sup>124</sup> Zach Arnold, “Quotes of the Week,” Fightopinion.com, November 7, 2007. <https://www.fightopinion.com/2007/11/07/quotes-of-the-week/>.

<sup>125</sup> “EliteXC- Renegade.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/EliteXC-Renegade-5687>.



Carano-Kedzie fight.<sup>126</sup> Pyle's quote is the perfect example of a hegemonic masculine reaction. He views MMA as strictly a male preserve, and being put below a woman on the card insults his manhood. It did border on Toxic Trait 1 as he used gender as the sole reason to declare WMMA as lesser than the male counterpart. However, it remains hegemonic as he attacked the sport, not the female gender. When asked about Pyle's masculine remarks, Baszler responded: "It's just something that he has to get over."<sup>127</sup> Thus, Baszler firmly refused to waver and adhered to what Connell would recognize as emphasized femininity.

In early 2008 Rob Sargent wrote an article for the website he founded, *MMA Rising*, which, aside from *Fighter Girls*, was the first almost solely dedicated to WMMA reporting. In his inaugural address, Sargent stated: "Females are often passed off as secondary competitors in mixed martial arts events, and some feel that they do not belong in major promotions like Elite XC, fighting alongside the men. However, the undeniable fact is that women's bouts frequently take fight of the night honors and many of the world's best female fighters are far superior to their male counterparts . . . While they may not be competing in the UFC anytime soon, fans can be thankful that promotions like TKO, HCF, and Elite XC are willing to give the women equal time to display their skills."<sup>128</sup> These remarks suggested that a more female-friendly MMA media was beginning to present itself. To a degree, this is true, but to an even greater extent, it fell short of counterbalancing hegemonic masculine outcries against WMMA's failure to adhere to emphasized femininity in a meaningful way. While he does combat Toxic Trait 1 quite

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<sup>126</sup> "EliteXC- Destiny." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/EliteXC-Destiny-4544>.

<sup>127</sup> Zach Arnold, "Fight Opinion Radio #68: Shayna Baszler & Ken Shamrock," November 14, 2007 in *Fight Opinion Radio*, produced by fightopinion.com., podcast, 1:11:13. <https://www.fightopinion.com/podcasts/foradio-11-14-2007.mp3>.

<sup>128</sup> Rob Sargent, "Women's MMA Division," Mmarising.com., March 13, 2008. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2008031303.html>.

openly, the article does not mention the male gaze or the homophobic lens that many fans view WMMA through. Men's outcries toward WMMA feature heavily amongst audience opinions in later chapters.

Baszler's fourteenth pro MMA bout and last **ShoXC** fight came against Keiko "Tama Chan" Tamai on April 5, 2008. Staged from Table Mountain Casino in Friant, California,<sup>129</sup> Tamai was a veteran of thirty pro contests with a .500 average.<sup>130</sup> Mauro Ranallo was the play-by-play commentator for the fight. He mentioned that Baszler: "Wants to be the most exciting EliteXC fighter, male or female."<sup>131</sup> Baszler entered the cage as she did against Tate, grunting a war cry while wearing a ballcap and carrying her guitar, with heavy metal playing simultaneously.<sup>132</sup> To a sizeable and favorable crowd response, featuring a notable female contingent on hand, ring announcer Mark Lichtenfield said: "Alright, Table Mountain Casino, we got the ladies in the cage."<sup>133</sup> Like Lennon Jr., Lichtenfield announced: "Special attraction women's bout..... we are scheduled for three, three-minute rounds."<sup>134</sup> As Lichtenfield said her name, Baszler bared her teeth and gave the "I'm gonna kill you" throat-slash gesture while pointing directly at Tamai.<sup>135</sup>

Baszler slid behind Tamai in the first round, grabbing her by the waist, then hitting a knee to the head, forcing her to turn her back completely. Then using her core strength, she slammed Tamai into the ground with a pro wrestling style suplex. The crowd loudly acknowledged the knee

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<sup>129</sup> "ShoXC- Elite Challenger Series." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/ShoXC-Elite-Challenger-Series-6996>.

<sup>130</sup> "Keiko Tamai," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed August 26, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Keiko-Tamai-10702>.

<sup>131</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Keiko Tamai 14th Fight," werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 8:59.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs4M44fkbQ&t=135s>.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

by cheering after the suplex. Baszler mounted Tamai's back, landing more punches to the side of the head, before attempting a rear-naked choke. The RNC turned into what at first looked like a neck crank. Baszler got Tamai in a form of a neck crank spinal lock dubbed the Twister, getting the early submission victory.<sup>136</sup>

With her victory, Baszler performed her air guitar celebration again before checking to see if Tamai was ok. Furthermore, there were many cheers, sounding primarily from women in attendance. Ranallo then compared her fighting style to that of male fighters Bas Rutten and Josh Barnett, adding: "I don't think I enjoyed a one-sided fight like this before," showing Shayna grinning happily.<sup>137</sup> There were more female cheers as her name was announced as the winner. The post-fight interviewer challenged her "showwomanship" composure. Shayna retorted: "It was very important because as far as I'm concerned there might be a lot of names thrown around but the Pro Elite (company that owned **EliteXC**) women's division is mine. And until somebody can step in here and say otherwise I'll continue to say . . . this is my division . . . Come in and try to stop me."<sup>138</sup> The fans appeared to appreciate her attitude. She was cheered for her sportsmanship, praising Tamai. Baszler concluded the interview by wishing her dad a happy birthday.<sup>139</sup> Ranallo concluded the video by saying: "Shayna Baszler sending a very loud message to everyone in women's mixed martial arts. The Queen of Spades is ready to rock your world."<sup>140</sup>

In terms of the fighters, for the most part, the bout reflected a definitive contrast to emphasized feminine norms, the lone contrary example being that Baszler constantly went for

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

submissions, “the feminine way to win a fight.”<sup>141</sup> Baszler made a throat slash gesture during the introductions, which was definitely more of a stereotypical masculine display.<sup>142</sup> For example, former WWE wrestler Chris Benoit consistently used this gesture when setting up his signature move, the diving headbutt.<sup>143</sup> Baszler’s knee to the head and the suplex were more masculine, as suggested by Hirose and Pih, and received raucous cheers from the crowd. Additionally, the intricacy of the submission showed great technical competence, which the audience approved. The air guitar celebration again fell under the masculine column. In contrast, the gendered ambiance surrounding the fight appeared to pit Baszler and Ranallo against Lichtenfield, the crowd, and especially the post-fight interviewer for establishing the contest as either abiding with or rebelling against emphasized feminine norms.<sup>144</sup>

Lichtenfield labeled the fight a unique attraction by announcing: “We got the ladies in the cage,”<sup>145</sup> reminiscent of “Who wants to see a chick fight?”<sup>146</sup> The predominantly male crowd hooted and hollered, answering the question. Almost no males in the audience applauded after the introduction of Baszler, the more stereotypically masculine of the two fighters.<sup>147</sup> And, though the men were impressed by the knee, suplex, and submission attempts, as soon as the tap out came, only female responses celebrated Baszler’s victory. In contrast, Ranallo discussed Baszler’s love for rock music and roller derby before the fight. At the same time, his broadcast

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<sup>141</sup> Hirose, “Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit,” 199-202.

<sup>142</sup> “Shayna Baszler vs Keiko Tamai 14th Fight,” werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 8:59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs4M44fkpBQ&t=135s>.

<sup>143</sup> “Royal Rumble 2003,” January 19, 2003 on *WWE Network*, produced by World Wrestling Entertainment, video, 02:38:10, <https://watch.wwe.com/episode/Royal-Rumble-2003-9956>.

<sup>144</sup> “Shayna Baszler vs Keiko Tamai 14th Fight,” werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 8:59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs4M44fkpBQ&t=135s>.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Chris Jericho, “Ep. 289: The MMA Four Horsewomen (minus one),” October 7, 2016, in *Talk is Jericho*, produced by PodcastOne, podcast, 1:18:20, <https://omny.fm/shows/talk-is-jericho/the-mma-four-horsewomen-minus-one-on-talk-is-jericho>.

<sup>147</sup> “Shayna Baszler vs Keiko Tamai 14th Fight,” werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 8:59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs4M44fkpBQ&t=135s>.

partner narrated a highlight reel of her previous two contests, praising her technical competence. Throughout the bout, Ranallo and his color commentator continued their praise, at one point delving deeply into the background of her coach, Josh Barnett.<sup>148</sup> Ranallo then compared her to Bas Rutten, a widely regarded male fighter.<sup>149</sup> However, one tell-tale example of trying to enforce emphasized feminine norms seemingly came when the post-fight interviewer asked: “How important was it for you to not be upstaged by your showwomanship?”<sup>150</sup>

This is an odd question: how does one get upstaged by themselves? Essentially, the interviewer asked: “Women are not supposed to grandstand or showboat, and you are known to do those things, were you worried it would throw you off your game?” Baszler launched straight into a pro wrestling style promo, declaring that this women’s division is hers and if you want it, come and try to take it, get ready for a fight. Ranallo ended the footage by saying, “The Queen of Spades is ready to rock your world.” In other words, take her seriously. She is not for the male gaze. She is here to fight.<sup>151</sup>

The media was equally split between giving the Baszler-Tamai fight its due and the rest of the main event **ShoXC** card. *Sherdog* had the most to say about the event. In a lengthy post-fight review by Jeff Sherwood and Jordan Breen, they noted: “After Tamai opened the bout with a Superman punch, Baszler assumed control and never gave it back. She pounded Tamai on the mat and . . . also kneed her opponent in the face before securing a suplex from a rear waist lock that put Tamai on her face . . . Baszler pulled Tamai back . . . triangling the far leg and cranking

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Tamai's neck to record a spectacular submission victory with the ever-elusive Twister.”<sup>152</sup> Sherwood and Breen were not using demeaning sexualized terms; they treated Baszler as a dominant fighter in both striking and submissions. They entirely focused on her technical competence, not on her appearance. They also gave it significant article space, not simply a one-sentence blurb.<sup>153</sup>

*MMA Fighting*<sup>154</sup> and *MMA Mania*, two of the three Vox Media sites, covered the event, giving sizeable space, albeit smaller than *Sherdog*'s, for each of the five main card fights.<sup>155</sup> *MMA Fighting* gave the women's contest five sentences, stating: “Shayna Baszler wins by neck crank at 2:05 of round one. Every time she steps into a cage, there's sure to be some excitement.”<sup>156</sup> *MMA Mania* gave it three sentences, saying: “That would win submission of the night on any card.” The fan comments attached to the articles ignored the Baszler-Tamai contest.<sup>157</sup>

The *WON* covered the entire card via *Figure 4 Weekly* but only presented a blurb for each fight, including Baszler-Tamai. Alvarez's comments on Baszler-Tamai read: “They had a women's match between Shayna Baszler and Tama Chan (Tamai) . . . Baszler actually suplexed her, then got her back and went for a choke, and when that failed she tapped her out with a neck

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<sup>152</sup> Jordan Breen and Jeff Sherwood, “SUGANUMA PREVAILS IN SHOXC.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, April 6, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Suganuma-Prevails-in-ShoXC-12173>.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *MMA Fighting*, “ShoXC: Hamman vs. Suganuma Review,” *mmafighting.com*, May 7, 2008. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2008/05/07/shoxc-hamman-vs-suganuma-review>.

<sup>155</sup> James Iannotti, “ShoXC Challenger Series event for Suganuma vs. Hamman,” *Mmamania.com*, Vox Media, April 06, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/04/06/shoxc-challenger-series-event-for-suganuma-vs-hamman>.

<sup>156</sup> *MMA Fighting*, “ShoXC: Hamman vs. Suganuma Review,” *mmafighting.com*, May 7, 2008. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2008/05/07/shoxc-hamman-vs-suganuma-review>.

<sup>157</sup> James Iannotti, “ShoXC Challenger Series event for Suganuma vs. Hamman,” *Mmamania.com*, Vox Media, April 06, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/04/06/shoxc-challenger-series-event-for-suganuma-vs-hamman>.

crank.”<sup>158</sup> The sportswriter felt the need to clarify it as a women’s match, but beyond that, it was a basic summary of the fight. Considering the sheer size of a weekly *WON* edition, it is a common practice that both Meltzer and Alvarez use for less important stories.<sup>159</sup>

The only other MMA media outlet to cover the fight was *Fighter Girls*. They announced a women’s match on the card, praising controversial **EliteXC** promoter Gary Shaw who said: “Shayna exemplified once again that women do have a place in MMA.”<sup>160</sup> As for the fight itself, Michael Hess gave a detailed blow-by-blow account of the matchup, which included Baszler’s entrance with an electric guitar. Hess further countered any attempt to describe Baszler in emphasized feminine terms by giving a review of her performance that was void of that ideology. He wrote: “In a pre-fight interview Shayna asked that ‘God have mercy on my opponent, ‘cause I’m not gonna.’” That was precisely how she competed in this fight. “The suplex was vicious and had ill intentions, and after she slammed Tamai’s face into the ground she went to end the fight with powerful strikes and submission attempt.”<sup>161</sup> Calling a woman “vicious,” with “ill intentions,” who expressed having no mercy for her opponent does not sound like a woman adhering to being sociable and demure.

There exists fan reaction to this fight, as well as to Baszler’s presentation as a competitor. However, these are limited to a few threads on *MMA Forum*, reacting primarily to her subsequent interviews with Percy Crawford. On April 7, CPLMAC requested: “I can only find two of her (Baszler) fights on the net, she is my new favorite female fighter ousting Gina . . . I’d

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<sup>158</sup> Bryan Alvarez, “F4W~!#668 - A headline story about MIKE KNOX - April 14, 2008,” f4wonline.com, April 9, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/figure-four-weekly/f4w668-headline-story-about-mike-knox-april-14-2008-89821>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Fightergirls.com Accessed September 19, 2020. No citation as website is no longer active.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

love to see some of her other fights so if anyone has some Shayna action I sure would appreciate it!”<sup>162</sup> On April 22, the same poster commented on the Tamai fight: “The monster suplex and the neck crank sub were awesome, and the sinful (clothing apparel company) shorts were a nice touch. I could do without the trash talk, but I understand the women's division really has to fight for airtime.”<sup>163</sup> The commenter failed to realize that men’s MMA consistently featured trash-talking, some notable examples at the time being the brothers Nick and Nate Diaz, who are still quite popular with MMA fans today.<sup>164</sup> This characterization, in effect, deems Baszler unsociable via her conduct in her post-fight interview, negatively critiquing her defiance of emphasized femininity. On a thread around an April 28<sup>th</sup> interview with Tara LaRosa, ZENDE stated: “I admit I wasn't too into women's mma either but it's winning me over too! I just watched Baszler v Tama chan the other night & Baszler definitely had some skills.”<sup>165</sup> In each of these examples, posters praised Baszler’s technical competence, albeit desiring her to be a bit more sociable. However, a point neither poster explains is why they were not thrilled by WMMA beforehand. The fact that Baszler-Tamai is absent on other forums speaks louder than praise from just two fans on one website. Although not toxic, the absence suggests that the online MMA fanbase has collectively ignored it, establishing their community as a “homosocial, heterosexist space.”

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<sup>162</sup> Cplmac, “\*REQ\* Shayna Baszler videos,” MMAforum.com, April 7, 2008.

<https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/req-shayna-baszler-videos.34161/#post-514330>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>163</sup> Cplmac, “Shayna Baszler: "Tara is the one fight that I really want,” MMAforum.com, April 22, 2008.

<https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/shayna-baszler-tara-is-the-one-fight-that-i-really-want.35048/#post-532456>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>164</sup> Ross Cole, “Eight Crazy Brawls Involving the Diaz Brothers,” lowkickmma.com, August 15, 2008.

<https://www.lowkickmma.com/8-crazy-brawls-involving-the-diaz-brothers>.

<sup>165</sup> Zender, “Tara LaRosa wants Baszler fight,” MMAforum.com, April 28, 2008.

<https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/tara-larosa-wants-baszler-fight.35354/#post-53276>.



Shayna Baszler gave three interviews surrounding the Tamai fight, two for *Sherdog's* major podcasts, followed by one for Percy Crawford.<sup>166</sup> The first *Sherdog* interview came on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, two days before fight night. Baszler barely mentioned Tamai, simply stating that the Japanese veteran was hard to train for as she was only announced as her opponent two weeks beforehand.<sup>167</sup> The second interview aired on April 9, four days after the Tamai bout.<sup>168</sup> In both interviews, Baszler conversed heavily about Gina Carano. In the first interview, she espoused: "It's really frustrating she's the only one they (**EliteXC**) want to push. Gina is great for WMMA but there is more out there."<sup>169</sup> Baszler singled out Kaitlin Young and Tonya Evinger as leapfrogging her to fight Gina despite her feeling that she was more qualified.<sup>170</sup> In the second interview, Baszler was a bit more reserved in her comments, stating that if she did fight Gina, it would be fantastic for the hardcore WMMA fan.<sup>171</sup> However, Baszler pointed out that she would rise to stardom whether she fought Carano or not.<sup>172</sup> Baszler then spoke to the showboating she exhibited after the Tamai contest, arguing that she needed to: "Be myself, not be the average athlete that gets on camera and say 'I just want to show women can fight and represent women's MMA.' That's great but there's a hundred other girls that are saying that too. If I . . . have a bad performance they can find 100 other girls to replace me. But if I go out and be Shayna Baszler

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<sup>166</sup> Percy Crawford, "SHAYNA BASZLER: 'TARA IS THE ONE FIGHT THAT I REALLY WANT TO AVENGE,'" Fighthype.com, April 22, 2008. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content2495.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Jordan Breen, "Jordan Breen Show- Shayna Baszler," April 3, 2008, in *The Jordan Breen show*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays.

<sup>168</sup> Jordan Breen and TJ De Santis, "Beatdown- Roy Jones Jr and Shayna Baszler," April 9, 2007, in *The Beatdown*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays.

<sup>169</sup> Jordan Breen, "Jordan Breen Show- Shayna Baszler." April 3, 2008, in *The Jordan Breen show*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Jordan-Breen-Show-Shayna-Baszler-561>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. Evinger and Young both had records of 4-1 prior to fighting Carano, whereas Baszler was sitting at a record of 10-4.

<sup>171</sup> Jordan Breen and TJ De Santis, "Beatdown- Roy Jones Jr and Shayna Baszler." April 9, 2007, in *The Beatdown*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Beatdown-Roy-Jones-Jr-and-Shayna-Baszler-569>.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

and be 100 percent . . . there is no other Shayna Baszler's out there so they can't replace me.”<sup>173</sup> Baszler was essentially saying that being sociable in a non-fragile way would, in the long run, help her career, although the fact she had to defend her “showwomanship” demonstrated that people within the MMA community were unknowingly enforcing emphasized femininity. It is also clear, Baszler saw Carano as partly responsible for the struggle other WMMA fighters were having in getting promoted by **EliteXC**.<sup>174</sup>

This viewpoint gets further exemplified in her sit-down interview with Crawford, posted on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Crawford posed: “With your activeness and Gina Carano's lack of, do you think you've become the face of **Elite XC**'s women fighters?”<sup>175</sup> Baszler answered: “We'll steal the women's division away from them without having to even fight Gina. That's kind of what we wanted, to draw a lot of attention so people could be like, ‘Yeah, Gina's great, but did you hear about this other girl?’ I understand business-wise if they don't want me to fight Gina . . . but there is no reason they shouldn't be pushing me too or other females. We're kind of forcing it down their throat.”<sup>176</sup> Asked who she wanted to fight next, Baszler said: “I'm going to win and draw attention to the women's division so I don't care . . . but it ain't going to be no more undercard type of stuff for me and I'm going to make sure of that.”<sup>177</sup> The three interviewers' questions lines mostly emulated those submitted to male fighters before WMMA emerged. Nevertheless, Baszler was subconsciously feeling the pressure of emphasized femininity. To clarify, she was not angry with Carano for selling her sex appeal or such appeal because Carano

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘TARA IS THE ONE FIGHT THAT I REALLY WANT TO AVENGE,’” Fighthype.com, April 22, 2008. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content2495.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

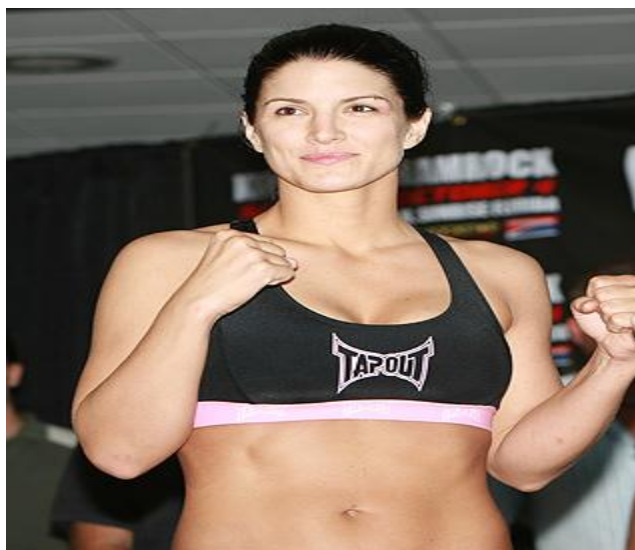
<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

was heavily marketed, more so than the rest of the **EliteXC** women's division combined.<sup>178</sup> She was angry that Carano's overexposure was starting to prevent the greater body of WMMA competitors from making a name in the sport.

These remarks perfectly transition into the overall state of WMMA between the Tamai fight and Baszler's primetime television debut in the summer of 2008. By 2008, the discussion of WMMA almost entirely centered around Carano.<sup>179</sup> When MMA media talked about WMMA, it was about Gina Carano, especially her stereotypically feminine attributes and persona.<sup>180</sup>

### **Section 3: MMA's Fascination with Gina Carano**

**May 2008- June 2008**



*Figure 6 Gina Carano at weigh-ins for her Oct 4, 2008 bout against Kelly Kobold.<sup>181</sup>*

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," sstorm10, February 7, 2010, video, 6:47. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05EReI>.

<sup>180</sup> McClearen, "Converging Media," 21.

<sup>181</sup> Dave Mandel, "Gina Carano." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed January 31, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Gina-Carano-16535>.

For example, in a May 28, 2008 article written by Loretta Hunt, directly before Carano failed to make weight for her bout against Kaitlin Young, the columnist rationalized: “Carano hasn't hidden the fact that she cuts weight -- many of her male counterparts do so under much less scrutiny. She doesn't feel the need to apologize for it, either. None of her bouts have been canceled for her failure to make weight.”<sup>182</sup> In the same article, Hunt used several feminine terms to describe Carano, “quiet but assertive.... Dimple-cheeked ... shy.”<sup>183</sup> When MMA fans discussed WMMA, it was about Carano, both positively and negatively. Hunt still argued: “Yet for every fan that ogles at (Carano), there are detractors, mostly MMA-orientated, who confirm her greatest fear: Carano shouldn't be taken seriously as a fighter.”<sup>184</sup> While this was not toxic, it inadvertently promotes certain emphasized feminine traits as being required for WMMA. First, she frames the fans “ogling” Carano as being the same people who think she is a good fighter, which gives MMA audiences an invitation to participate in the male gaze. Secondly, she sweeps the criticism of Carano’s frequent failure to make weight under the rug, saying men have much more leeway to miss weight. This statement is inaccurate and argues that it is okay for women to miss weight, thereby devaluing the technical competence required to participate in WMMA.<sup>185</sup>

To help hype Carano’s next fight on May 31 against Kaitlin Young (Carano’s third bout in a timespan that saw Baszler fight five times), ESPN aired an hour-long TV special for their program E:60. The special was about Gina Carano specifically, but also featured Baszler and LaRosa discussing the impact Carano was having on WMMA overall.<sup>186</sup> Unfortunately, I could

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<sup>182</sup> Loretta Hunt, “MISS CONGENIALITY,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, May 28, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Miss-Congeniality-12931>.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>185</sup> Jordan Breen, “CARANO, CONVICTION, AND HEAVYWEIGHT HYPOCRISY.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Carano-Conviction-and-Heavyweight-Hypocrisy-13044>.

<sup>186</sup> “Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired),” sstorm10, February 7, 2010, video, 6:47. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05EReI>.

not find a copy of the entire documentary, only finding a ten-minute preview on *YouTube*. In the preview, they gave Carano's background as the girl next door, daughter to former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Glenn Carano.<sup>187</sup> When asked about her detractors, surrounded by footage of her working out, Carano answered: "I don't care how it gets construed I'm making a level for myself."<sup>188</sup> In contrast, Baszler, with no such footage, stated: "The fact she's the only one who gets attention . . . that's a lot more frustrating to female fighters than the fact it's Gina herself."<sup>189</sup> Adding to the negativity was LaRosa, who the documentary called the "best women's fighter in the sport."<sup>190</sup> LaRosa opined: "The girls that have to use their sexuality to sell themselves are obviously compensating for something they're lacking, I do find the sexy and skimpy side disrespectful to the sport, I was really hoping MMA would not go in that direction."<sup>191</sup> E:60 was clearly bringing up the issue of emphasized femininity without labeling it as such. However, the documentary then states, "But even LaRosa and Baszler acknowledge that women's MMA is better off with Carano than without her."<sup>192</sup> With this little available data, the documentary portrayed Baszler and LaRosa as jealous of the pretty girl, praising Carano's achievements while downplaying theirs.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

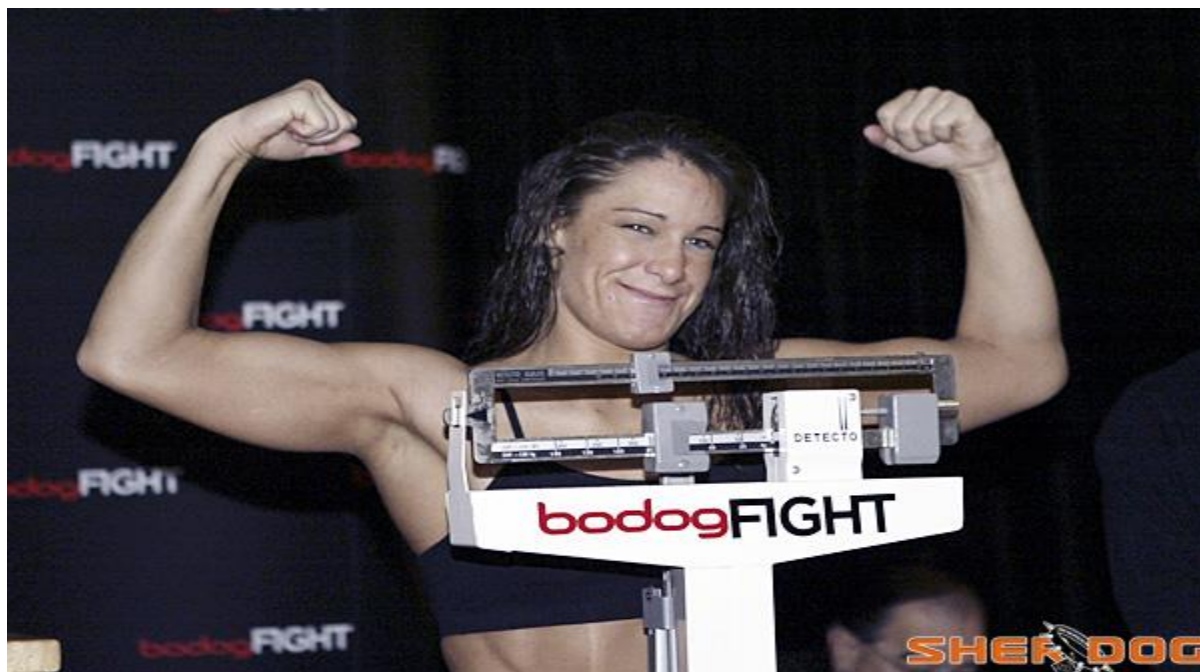


Figure 7 Tara LaRosa weighing in before her December 2, 2006 fight against Julia Berezikova.<sup>193</sup>

Fan and media reaction to Baszler and LaRosa's criticism was not positive and, in fact, definitively reflected MMA fans' toxic masculine behavior towards WMMA. In many of the following comment sections, the online MMA fanbase frequently implemented traits of either toxic masculinity, VMAs, or both. Sstorm10 uploaded the YouTube video two years after the special aired, but I think the comments beneath it are accurate for the times. CHRIS JOHNSON replied: "All of these dude looking fighters are haters because she is beautiful and she is kicking everybody's ass at the same time . . . that's hilarious."<sup>194</sup> ORTHOROCCO wrote: "What the f . . . is the other fighter saying!!! Should women's fighting sports project an image of manly testosterone . . . What is wrong with these people. We are vilifying anything that is natural.

<sup>193</sup> Jeff Sherwood, "Tara LaRosa." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Tara-LaRosa-4227>.

<sup>194</sup> Chris Johnson, 2010, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

That's one of the reasons this world is going down the shit hole!"<sup>195</sup> Most revealing is HI HATER claiming: "These people will always find a way to bring you down, in Gina's case its her looks."<sup>196</sup> CHRIS JOHNSON criticized Baszler/LaRosa for failing to arouse him and the rest of the male fanbase, thereby associating him with Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 2.<sup>197</sup> ORTHOROCCO claimed that the two are not natural women because they do not exhibit fragility via sex appeal in front of men. This remark shifts his masculinity from hegemonic, utilizing Toxic Traits 1 and 2 while openly calling VMA Trait 1 to be adhered to. He does avoid expressing Toxic Trait 3, though his level of vitriol towards masculine women is quite apparent.<sup>198</sup> HI HATER claimed Baszler and Larosa were bullying Carano because she is attractive; however, this remained a hegemonic/emphasized concept, not a toxic one. It remained hegemonic because while subjecting women to the male gaze, it did not devalue them. All three posters applauded Carano's stereotypical femininity. HI HATER took it a step further, claiming that women who complied with male titillation desires were discriminated against, rather than the ones the male audience failed to find attractive.<sup>199</sup> A comment posted in 2012 shows how little attitudes have changed, with BOWMANGANIE arguing: "A lot of the other fighters upset about the "sexuality" of WMMA fighters are also lesbian. Coincidence?"<sup>200</sup> BOWMANGIE cast doubt on LaRosa and Baszler's credibility to speak on this topic because they were lesbians,

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<sup>195</sup> Orthorocco, comment was deleted, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

<sup>196</sup> Hi Hater, 2010, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

<sup>197</sup> Chris Johnson, 2010, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

<sup>198</sup> Orthorocco, comment was deleted, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

<sup>199</sup> Hi Hater, 2010, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.

<sup>200</sup> Bowmanganie, 2012, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>.



which simultaneously had him engaged in Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 1.<sup>201</sup> Ironically, LaRosa was openly straight, and Baszler had no comments on the record regarding her sexual orientation.<sup>202</sup> Facts do not impede the imposition of hegemonic masculinity/emphasized femininity on WMMA. The fans and the writers at *MMA Mania* and *Bloody Elbow* were not much better in this regard.

A May 3, 2008, article on *MMA Mania* announcing the E:60 special featured 46 comments, the vast majority focused on Carano's feminine appearance.<sup>203</sup> For instance, even the sportswriter who wrote the one-sentence article commented: "Tuesday, May 13, at 7 p.m. ET to be exact. Meow," implying there might be a catfight during the broadcast.<sup>204</sup> This comment skirts the line of Toxic Trait 1 while fully embracing VMA 2 and 4, using crass humor to sexualize women to male readers. RAV noted: "Sometimes she looks fine as hell... other times, she looks like too much of a body builder . . . Is she the best female p4p fighter out there? She certainly is the hottest."<sup>205</sup> He also avoids toxicity while enjoying VMA Trait 2. HOWIE remarked: "I'd like to see her debut in a porno."<sup>206</sup> HOWIE expressed Toxic Trait 1 in just nine words while indulging in VMA 2 and 3. In response to several posts implying Carano is either transgender or a man, LYCAN wrote: "You criticize a fine woman with hot looks . . . What a bunch of Que\*ers!"<sup>207</sup> In repudiating comments that featured examples of Toxic Traits 1 and 2, LYCAN engaged in Toxic Trait 2 and expressed VMA Traits 1 and 2. *MMA Mania* readers were

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> "Bodogfight Shayna Baszler vs Tara Larosa," BarbeRousse Bert, Accessed January 6, 2023, video, 10:09. <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2k39u>.

<sup>203</sup> MMAmania.com, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN episode coming soon," MMAmania.com, May 3, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/05/03/gina-carano-e60-espn-episode-coming-soon>.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Rav, May 3, 2008 (5:25 pm), comment on MMAmania.com, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN episode coming soon."

<sup>206</sup> Howie, May 3, 2008 (6:15 pm), comment on MMAmania.com, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN episode coming soon."

<sup>207</sup> Lycan, May 4, 2008 (5:49 pm), comment on MMAmania.com, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN episode coming soon."



willing and able to participate in VMAs, although they shifted between hegemonic and toxic masculinities.

Forty-seven comments were posted on an *MMA Mania* article reminding readers that the ESPN special aired that night (May 13). Many focused on Carano's ability to appeal to a stereotypical male gaze. B.W. wrote: "(boobies) its pretty much all i care about when it comes to womens mma!"<sup>208</sup> BOARDRIDER exclaimed, "Damn, she's freakin' HOT!!! all she needs to do now is.... show some camel-toe!"<sup>209</sup> Both readers expressed Toxic Trait 1 while excitedly sexualizing Carano via VMA Trait 2 and discussing how it appealed their heterosexual male bodies. Two posters, KEVIN and DOM, pointed out that promoters passed over better, less attractive fighters such as Baszler and LaRosa because of their "unfeminine" looks.<sup>210</sup> The two were loudly rebuffed by a mix of comments about the male gaze and how KEVIN and DOM persecuted Gina because she was attractive. In this vein, VIOLENTMIKE opined: "She (Baszler) is just soooooooooo ugly and jealous it pisses me off . . . I'd just like to see Gina beat her face in and who knows, Shayna might actually come out of the fight looking more attractive than when she went in."<sup>211</sup> He is a rarity that delves into Toxic Trait 3, expressing hope for Baszler to be injured and using VMA Trait 4 to express she did not appease his male gaze. TOELOCK concurred: "Those other UGLY bitches are just jealous!! They got into fighting because they had nothing to lose being so ugly, and probably thought they'd meet a guy at the gym . . . Gina just

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<sup>208</sup> B.w., May 14, 2008 (5:29 pm), comment on Iannotti, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update)."

<sup>209</sup> boardRIDER, May 13, 2008 (5:52 pm), comment on Iannotti, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update)."

<sup>210</sup> kevin., May 13, 2008 (7:47 pm), comment on Iannotti, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update)."

<sup>211</sup> ViolentMike, May 14, 2008 (10:59 am), comment on Iannotti, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update)."

loves it and we love her!”<sup>212</sup> The shown usage of Toxic Trait 1 is quite common concerning the Carano-Baszler/LaRosa divide, devaluing their appearance and chosen reasons for fighting.

Still, others focused on either what they perceived to be a lack of fighting prowess in WMMA or that using sex to sell WMMA was the only way the sport would survive. A user with the screenname WAYNE declared: “sex sells period . . . its not her fault most the other girls dont look good enough to get attention . . . if she wasn’t fighting most people wouldn’t watch the other girls except on [the] under card.”<sup>213</sup> CA\$Z stated: “The only reason other fighters are jealous of her exposure . . . is because she is marketable . . . as long as she is a legit fighter, which she is, it is all good for WMMA. She is beautifl and is trying to make the most out of herself, which is the only way she’ll make any decent money anyway as WMMA doesn’t make much money, so what choice does she have?”<sup>214</sup> While these two comments definitely promote emphasized feminine adherence, they do not become toxic like many of those offered by MMA Mania contributors. They failed to shift from hegemonic to toxic because they did not devalue the women involved.

The *Bloody Elbow* counterpart article was more subdued, with only eight comments, two by staff writers. There was a debate on whether LaRosa had the right to criticize Carano’s marketing as DROPKICK101 elaborated: “If Tara wants to say ‘Gina is unproven and based on what I’ve accomplished, I’m the best in the game today’ then that’s fine. But taking shots at her for being sexy? C’mon honey. If Tara Larosa was half as good looking . . . she probably wouldn’t

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<sup>212</sup> ToeLock, May 14, 2008 (4:35 am), comment on Iannotti, “Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update).”

<sup>213</sup> wayne, May 13, 2008 (10:45 pm), comment on Iannotti, “Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update).”

<sup>214</sup> Ca\$z, May 14, 2008 (8:44 am), comment on Iannotti, “Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update).”

be saying that. that's not a shot at Tara but a simple fact. As a fighter you need to not only perform in the cage but be able to market yourself as a viable commodity . . . and Gina's sex appeal helps.”<sup>215</sup> JPONTON countered: “All the hype is on Gina for the simple fact that she is absolutely gorgeous . . . Larosa has proven herself, and Gina still needs to prove herself . . . but in the eyes of many she is already "The best Female MMA Fighter.”<sup>216</sup> All three quotations engage in VMA Trait 2 but remain on the hegemonic side of the hegemonic/toxic masculinity divide, once again due to them not devaluing women.

In June 2008, Jordan Breen published an article on *Sherdog* about how MMA fans were excusing Carano for her consistent failure to make weight despite the same fans being outraged when Travis Lutter missed weight for his **UFC 67** Middleweight title bout against Anderson Silva. Breen wrote: “The fact that Lutter would be cast as Grendel for the rest of his career while Carano escapes scot-free implicitly enforces the idea that male MMA is of an inherently greater value than its female counterpart. The light-hearted reception of Carano's actions would seem to indicate that much of MMA's fan base feels that female MMA has no legitimacy in the first place. Those fans acknowledging female MMA as worthwhile cannot tolerate this kind of complacency . . . Silence and tolerance only affirm the idea that female MMA isn't worth the time, the effort, or the outrage that characterize our reactions to the same irresponsibility from male fighters.”<sup>217</sup>

It was this discrepancy in reactions that prompted harsh words from Baszler. In a June 6, 2008, interview with Percy Crawford, Baszler stated clearly and distinctly that as the face of

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<sup>215</sup> Dropkick101, May 14, 2008 (12:40 am), comment on Thomas, “Video: Gina Carano on ESPN's "E:60.”

<sup>216</sup> JPonton, May 14, 2008 (4:58 pm), comment on Thomas, “Video: Gina Carano on ESPN's "E:60.”

<sup>217</sup> Jordan Breen, “CARANO, CONVICTION, AND HEAVYWEIGHT HYPOCRISY.” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, June 4, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Carano-Conviction-and-Heavyweight-Hypocrisy-13044>.

WMMA, Carano was responsible for representing the sport well to gain traction for the rest of them. She argued:

For people to say, ‘She's fighting out of her weight class,’ well, when she tried to fight at 135, she made 139 and when she tried to fight at 140, she made 144.5 . . . It's her not having what it takes to get down there and it sucks because it kind of traps people . . . you can not take the fight, but everybody knows you have sponsorship deals and you don't get the win bonus . . . A lot of times, fighters are making more money on sponsorship deals than the actual fight. You're kind of stuck taking the fight . . . It is an issue . . . I spent the time to diet down and cut weight and I expect my opponent to respect the fact that I suffered. You think it's easy for me? . . . So I mean, if she wants to be the professional representation of me, then that sucks . . . I heard Dana White on an interview one time say, ‘The reason we'll never have women on the card is because their number 1 girl can't make weight,’ and that sucks . . . whether she chose to or not and whether the rest of us believe . . . or not, that isn't the issue. The issue is that she . . . is the face . . . She's the one they're pushing and with that comes a professional responsibility to make weight.<sup>218</sup>

Baszler also took issue with how **EliteXC** only promoted fighters scheduled to fight Carano, and once they lost, they were forgotten about. She stated: “Look what happened as soon as the fight was over. Have you heard anything about Kaitlin (Young)? Nothing! . . . When the fight is over, you don't hear anything about her opponent anymore. That's what I don't like. I've gone in there and wrecked 3 opponents and I'm still on **ShoXC**.”<sup>219</sup> It becomes clear that Baszler felt Carano was gaining stature because of her perceived physical attractiveness while being given leeway in making weight, and for that to be the main criterion for success in the sport is not fair to the fighters or the sport.

The comments on an *MMA Forum* thread surrounding this particular Baszler interview were full of emphasized feminine overtones. Still, some supported Baszler's stance on **EliteXC**'s preferential treatment towards Carano regarding the weight-cutting issue. Two posters did not like that Baszler was “publicly calling her (Carano) out” because that defied the emphasized

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<sup>218</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘THEY CAN'T KEEP PROTECTING HER,’” *Fighthype.com*, June 06, 2008. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content2495.html>.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* Parentheses mine.

feminine quality of sociability, yet agreed with her comments.<sup>220</sup> ZENDER posited: “I can also see where she's (Baszler) coming from calling her (Carano) out. 6 fights & not making weight. . . That's basically getting away with murder because she's got a nice ass!”<sup>221</sup>

By 2008, WMMA was slightly more than a niche sport, but outside of Gina Carano, namely because of her emphasized feminine appearance, very few female fighters received significant media attention, let alone monetary support. Concerning the imbalance between Carano and the rest of the women’s division, the media and fans enthusiastically supported her stereotypical feminine behavior, albeit with minor yet vocal dissent.<sup>222</sup> Toxic masculine and VMA characteristics were not uncommon dialogues held by online fans yet were absent from news articles.

#### **Section 4: Shayna Baszler Vs. Cris Cyborg**

##### **June 2008**

Regarding Baszler’s next opponent, the *Wrestling Observer* reported on June 23, 2008, that the respective parties were trying to set up a much-anticipated title fight likely between Carano and the Queen of Spades, perhaps sometime in October.<sup>223</sup> However, due to weight class disputes between Baszler’s and Carano’s camps, **EliteXC** wanted Baszler to fight an unnamed opponent for the right to face Carano. The prominent name being bandied about as an opponent

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<sup>220</sup> Cplmac, “Shayna Baszler: ‘They can't keep protecting Gina!’,” MMAforum.com, June 06, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/shayna-baszler-they-cant-keep-protecting-gina.37564/#post-568761>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>221</sup> Zender, “Shayna Baszler: ‘They can't keep protecting Gina!’,” MMAforum.com, June 06, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/shayna-baszler-they-cant-keep-protecting-gina.37564/#post-568761>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>222</sup> Jordan Breen, “CARANO, CONVICTION, AND HEAVYWEIGHT HYPOCRISY.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Carano-Conviction-and-Heavyweight-Hypocrisy-13044>.

<sup>223</sup> Dave Meltzer, “ELITEXC RETURN OF THE KING, UFC BATTLES, AFFLICTION, HOGAN/KING,” f4wonline.com, June 18, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/june-23-2008-observer-newsletter-elitexc-return-king-ufc-battles>.

was Kelly Kobold.<sup>224</sup> On July 2, Dave Meltzer announced that Baszler was officially on a scheduled July **EliteXC** CBS card.<sup>225</sup> On July 8, twenty days before the primetime special dubbed Unfinished Business (free on CBS), Baszler's opponent was announced: Muay Thai specialist Cristiane "Cyborg" Santos (4-1), then wife of Strikeforce fighter Evangelista "Cyborg" Santos.<sup>226</sup> Cyborg had not fought in two years, but outside of a loss in her pro debut to Erica Paes, she had dominated the fight scene in her native Brazil, three of her four victories coming via TKO. Notably, this was the first fight for Cyborg outside of Brazil.<sup>227</sup> Despite the short "lead time" announcement of the bout, it marks the first of Baszler's contests with any build-up in the media. As such, it will receive the same attention as the prior fights but much more in-depth.

Regarding the fight announcement, the media mostly gave an abbreviated summary of Baszler and Cyborg's respective records and skillsets. *MMA News* just stated the fight was happening, with no extra information.<sup>228</sup> *The Wrestling Observer* was much the same, saying: "Shayna Baszler of Sioux Falls (9-4, all wins via submission) . . . will face Cristiane Santos (4-0, with three straight first round knockouts)."<sup>229</sup> That statement is nearly verbatim to that which *MMA Fighting* announced.<sup>230</sup> *Bloody Elbow* made the same observations, positioning Baszler as

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Dave Meltzer, "NIGHT OF CHAMPIONS 08, CMLL PROBLEMS, HART VS. OLIVER," f4wonline.com, July 2, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/july-7-2008-observer-newsletter-night-champions-08-cml-problems-hart>.

<sup>226</sup> Luke Thomas, "Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Cyborg on July 26th CBS EliteXC Show, Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 08, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/8/567233/shayna-baszler-vs-cristian>. After getting divorced in 2011, Cris Cyborg began using her maiden name of Justino.

<sup>227</sup> "Cristiane Justino." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 10, 2020. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Cristiane-Justino-14477>.

<sup>228</sup> Michael Reichlin, "Updated Card For EXC: Saturday Night Fights 7/26," mmanews.com, July 18, 2008. <https://www.mmanews.com/updated-card-for-exc-saturday-night-fights-726>.

<sup>229</sup> Dave Meltzer, "FORREST BEATS QUINTON, RULE CHANGES UFC IGNORES, RING OF HELL," f4wonline.com, July 9, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/july-14-2008-observer-newsletter-forrest-beats-quinton-rule-changes>. Her actual record was 4-1.

<sup>230</sup> MMA Fighting, "Women's bout added to July 26 CBS-EliteXC event," MMAfighting.com, July 8, 2008. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2008/07/08/womens-bout-added-to-july-26-cbselitexc-event>.

the submission expert and Cyborg as the power puncher.<sup>231</sup> The writers featured no deliberate or accidental emphasized femininity in their articles.

The three Vox Media sites and Sherdog were the only media outlets that provided predictions for Unfinished Business.<sup>232</sup> All four websites stated that Baszler was the likely victor (*Bloody Elbow*'s five-man panel narrowly picked Baszler 3-2 as the winner).<sup>233</sup> For *MMA Mania*, Iannotti wrote: "Baszler is just more experienced and better prepared for a high-profile fight like this. She's been in the cage with the best in the world. She won't be intimidated by Santos and should be able to execute and do what she has to do."<sup>234</sup>

The most emphasized feminine pronouncement from the media before fight night came when Baszler criticized Dana White at the pre-fight press conference for not allowing women in the **UFC** for a perceived lack of talent depth in WMMA. Baszler argued: "He wants to question the depth of the female division, but . . . every female fight that Pro Elite has put on has been a showcase of women's talent and has been 'fight of the night' type material."<sup>235</sup>

Michael David Smith of *MMA Fighting* agreed with Baszler but also felt because the **UFC** had too much depth in several male divisions, White had no pressing need to add an extra division for women. **EliteXC**'s male roster was weak in comparison and needed WMMA to

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<sup>231</sup> Luke Thomas, "Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Cyborg on July 26th CBS EliteXC Show, Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 08, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/8/567233/shayna-baszler-vs-cristian>.

<sup>232</sup> Mike Sloan and TJ De Santis, "GREAT SHERDOG DEBATE: LAWLER VS. SMITH II," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, July 26, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Great-Sherdog-Debate-Lawler-vs-Smith-II-13788>.

<sup>233</sup> Luke Thomas, "EliteXC: Unfinished Business, CBS Saturday Night Fights BloodyElbow.com Staff Predictions," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/25/579449/elitexc-unfinished-business>.

<sup>234</sup> James Iannotti, "Elite XC predictions and preview for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/25/elite-xc-predictions-and-preview-for-unfinished-business-on-cbs/>.

<sup>235</sup> Michael Reichlin, "EliteXC Conference Call Quotes w/ Smith, Lawler, And More," MMAnews.com, July 23, 2008. <https://www.mmanews.com/elitexc-conference-call-quotes-w-smith-lawler-and-more>.

bolster viewership.<sup>236</sup> For *Bloody Elbow*, Luke Thomas also opined: “I don't think Dana White's ever been anti-women's MMA. I think he's a little gunshy about bringing them on because . . . there isn't much in the way of value . . . They probably have too many men under contract . . . bringing aboard women could be interesting, but in White's mind isn't worth any potential risks. I'm still a fan, though.”<sup>237</sup> These are reasonable assessments, failing to meet hegemonic or toxic masculine criteria, although both ignored White's many public and vocal disapprovals of WMMA.<sup>238</sup>

*Bloody Elbow's* Brent Brookhouse, however, took a different tack. His article on the importance of Unfinished Business speculated, “We're getting a glimpse at where the sport of MMA (as opposed to just the UFC) sits in the minds of the American public. And if this show fails, we could easily be seeing the beginning of the EXC's fall from a level that they managed to climb to a mere 57 days earlier.”<sup>239</sup> Further, Brookhouse pontificated: “Say what you will about Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Cyborg and how good of a fight it could be, but a women's fight can't carry the marketing of a show.”<sup>240</sup> To Brookhouse, **EliteXC** was not major league MMA, and WMMA was one reason why.<sup>241</sup>

He cited no reason why this was the case other than saying that only Gina Carano could draw a crowd.<sup>242</sup> Brookhouse does not explicitly state that Baszler and Cyborg cannot draw

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<sup>236</sup> Michael David Smith, “EliteXC's Shayna Baszler Defends Women's MMA: 'I Don't Care What Dana White Says',” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 23, 2008. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2008/07/23/elitexcs-shayna-baszler-defends-womens-mma-i-dont-care-what>.

<sup>237</sup> Luke Thomas, “Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/24/578183/shayna-baszler-and-cris-cy>.

<sup>238</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘THEY CAN'T KEEP PROTECTING HER,’” Fighthype.com, June 06, 2008. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content2495.html>.

<sup>239</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “The Importance of EliteXC on CBS Tonight,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/26/579799/the-importance-of-elite-xc>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.



because of a lack of technical competence contrasted to their male colleagues or that they are unattractive compared to Carano. Nevertheless, Brookhouse infers one or the other.<sup>243</sup> *MMA Weekly* even wrote that the only marketable path for the Baszler-Cyborg winner was to fight Carano, arguing: “Whoever wins the fight will be more than likely next in line to fight Gina Carano and right now that is what every women fighter wants because of the media attention that Carano brings to a fight.”<sup>244</sup>

On the day of the fight, the front page of the *Argus Leader*’s sports section read: “Local Ultimate Fighter Ready for Primetime.”<sup>245</sup> The article by Maggie Stehr portrayed Shayna not as a female fighter but as a fighter, period, which Stehr did not go out of her way to make clear: “Shayna Baszler has plenty of reasons to feel intimidated. The mixed martial artist . . . must handle 200-pound sparring partners, flurries of punches aimed at her head, and the pressure of a nationally televised fight. But Baszler enters tonight’s prime time bout . . . just like how she handles any challenge. Without a hint of fear.”<sup>246</sup> Stehr continued: “In a sport striving for mainstream acceptance and nearly devoid of women, Baszler gained respect with a willingness to challenge more seasoned fighters.”<sup>247</sup>

Stehr also interviewed Shayna Baszler again, the article published in the *Argus Leader* the day after the fight. Stehr promoted Baszler as the hometown girl, still a regular woman, yet somehow one of the guys.<sup>248</sup> Stehr described: “Shayna Baszler wraps her hands in athletic tape, looping it through fingers that have a decade of classical cello training. Her smile seems timid,

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ricardo Mendoza, “FIGHT-BY-FIGHT: ELITE XC SATURDAY NIGHT FIGHTS,” MMAweekly.com, July 25, 2008. <https://www.mmaweekly.com/fight-by-fight-elite-xc-saturday-night-fights-2>.

<sup>245</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Local Ultimate Fighter Ready for Primetime,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 26, 2008.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008.

but her punches carry the full weight of her lean, 140-pound frame. Inside the octagon . . . Baszler is known as the ‘Queen of Spades.’ Everywhere else, she’s simply Shayna.”<sup>249</sup> Stehr’s somewhat emphasized feminine portrayal clashes with her description of how Baszler behaves in the gym: “She trades dirty jokes with other fighters and holds her own among former college wrestlers, Army recruits, and MMA medalists.”<sup>250</sup> The article concludes with a Baszler quote: “Fighting is something inside you . . . I can always go back to college or get that desk job if I want . . . Or I could just go with the cello- see where that takes me.”<sup>251</sup> Despite the mixed messages portraying Baszler’s femininity, Stehr rendered a detailed and ungendered history of Baszler’s MMA career. It tracked her from her early amateur days and her reckoning with Kelly Kobold (her third pro fight) to **EliteXC** and Cyborg.<sup>252</sup> Now, while sportswriters kept criticism of Baszler or WMMA for not conforming to what Connell would view as emphasized femininity to a minimum, the same cannot be said for the fans commenting on their articles.

On the two articles posting the Baszler-Cyborg fight announcement with attached comments, the male posters thoroughly expressed the expectation of qualities similar to emphasized femininity from women, with a handful of dissenters. The readership posted forty-eight comments on James Iannotti’s article for *MMA Mania*.<sup>253</sup> However, only fourteen were about the fight or even WMMA in general. The remaining thirty-four had to do with an upcoming **Affliction** (a rival MMA promotion) card and a petition to get former **UFC** light heavyweight champion Quinton Jackson an immediate rematch against Forrest Griffin.<sup>254</sup> There

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.d

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Maggie Stehr, “Baszler defies mold of typical fighter,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 27, 2008.

<sup>253</sup> James Iannotti, “Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 8, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/08/shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-cybor-elite-xc-fight-booked-for-july-26>.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

were articles about both **Affliction**<sup>255</sup> and the Jackson-Griffin dispute. Still, instead of adding to the conversation in the attached comment sections, *MMA Mania* readers talked under the one article dedicated to WMMA.<sup>256</sup> This is a tactic seen throughout the data as a way of saying WMMA is not a worthy topic of discussion, that is, by discussing subjects that have nothing to do with WMMA attached to articles about the women's division.<sup>257</sup> This devalues women/WMMA as not important enough to discuss, fulfilling Toxic Trait 1. This tactic also seemed central to centering online MMA fandom as a "homosocial" environment. The fourteen posts focusing on Baszler-Cyborg further solidified the readers' disapproval of the fight.

MUSCLE DOLPHIN wrote: "Watching women fight does not interest me in the least."<sup>258</sup> In response, OVERHAND RIGHT stated: "I'm very disappointed in this matchup. Not only is Cyborg going to smash Shayna, this means that she gets a shot at Gina Carano in the fall. GARY SHAW, PLEASE DO SOMETHING TO STOP THIS! I WOULD HATE TO SEE GINA CARANO'S BEAUTIFUL FACE AND RACK GET REARRANGED!"<sup>259</sup> This marks a shift from hegemonic masculinity to the toxic variety. While MUSCLE DOLPHIN acknowledges he is not interested in WMMA, OVERHAND RIGHT utilizes Toxic Trait 1 while expressing all the latter three qualities of VMAS.

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<sup>255</sup> Jesse Holland, "Affliction: Paul Buentello vs Aleksander Emelianenko," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, May 13, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/05/13/affliction-paul-buentello-vs-aleksander-emelianenko/>.

<sup>256</sup> James Iannotti, "Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 8, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/08/shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-cybor-elite-xc-fight-booked-for-july-26>.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Muscle Dolphin, July 8, 2008 (6:32pm), comment on Iannotti, "Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26."

<sup>259</sup> OVERHAND RIGHT, July 8, 2008 (7:56pm), comment on Iannotti, "Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26."

To this, DOOMDOOM replied: “this isn’t pro wrestling dude . . . gina is a fighter that’s what happens in fights. go look at playboy or maxim to see hot chicks. grow up.”<sup>260</sup>

OVERHAND RIGHT retorted: “listen dum dum Fight promoters cater to . . . straight males with disposable income. If you don’t believe me, check the ads . . . I like seeing hot girls like Gina Carano. Why do you think 4.9 million people tuned into her fight . . .? She’s a total P.O.A.! She just happens to be a good fighter, and I love it. Women’s MMA combines my 2 favorite things — sex & fighting. This only works if the girls are pretty.”<sup>261</sup> He further opined: “Kyra (Gracie) vs. Gina would be a dream womens MMA matchup. 2 hot P.O.A. Cyborg is terrible for the sport . . . I just want pretty girls to fight.”<sup>262</sup> Both comments devalued Cyborg and sexualized Carano and made statements involving the first three components of VMAs.

While OVERHAND RIGHT posted most of the comments, he stated his need clearly: Only hot women should fight, and none should have any actual punching power for fear of damaging what appeals to the male gaze. Furthermore, fighting technique should not be valued in WMMA, but feminine appearance should be. Even the male poster’s enunciation of WMMA, combining his two favorite things—sex and fighting, shows he prefers looking at a hot woman’s body and having his male desires titillated over discussing Carano’s MMA abilities.<sup>263</sup> These comments directly tie into the concept of emphasized femininity and VMAs, with toxic masculinity being an underlying theme.

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<sup>260</sup> doomdoom, July 9, 2008 (1:32pm), comment on Iannotti, “Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26.”

<sup>261</sup> OVERHAND RIGHT, July 9, 2008 (12:45pm), comment on Iannotti, “Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26.”

<sup>262</sup> OVERHAND RIGHT, July 8, 2008 (8:00pm), comment on Iannotti, “Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

The comments from the fight announcement article at *Bloody Elbow* were much tamer in comparison. Five out of twelve comments posted mentioned Carano and how they were her fans.<sup>264</sup> STEAK\_KNIFE, under the heading “woof,” commented: “Shayna could get really hurt in this fight. I just watched some Cyborg fights on the net. She looks like Wanderlei Silva with cornrows & a sportsbra . . . I just hope she doesn’t rearrange Gina Carano’s beautiful face.”<sup>265</sup> Although he sexualizes Carano and states how even his desire for titillation rejects Cyborg, he does so in more of a hegemonic than toxic fashion. CANNON JACQUES posted two replies to STEAK\_KNIFE, praising Baszler’s skill and saying she deserved the shot. In summary, though there were a few assertions that arousing male fans were required for WMMA, overall, most *Bloody Elbow* readers gave plaudits to Baszler and Cyborg’s technical competence.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Luke Thomas, “Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Cyborg on July 26th CBS EliteXC Show,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 08, 2008.

<sup>265</sup> Steak\_knife, July 08, 2008 (5:26 pm) Comment on Thomas, “Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Cyborg on July 26th CBS EliteXC Show.”

<sup>266</sup> Luke Thomas, “Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Cyborg on July 26th CBS EliteXC Show,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 08, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/8/567233/shayna-baszler-vs-cristian>.



Figure 8 Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg at the weigh-ins for their July 26, 2008 fight.<sup>267</sup>



Figure 9 Wanderlei Silva weighing in before his February 20, 2010 bout versus Michael Bisping.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Dave Mandel, "Shayna Baszler," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed January 31, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>268</sup> Daniel Herbertson, "Wanderlei Silva." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed January 31 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Wanderlei-Silva-209#/slide/171>.

On Iannotti's fight predictions for *MMA Mania*, readers posted fifty-one comments.<sup>269</sup> None of them concerned the Baszler-Cyborg fight.<sup>270</sup> Luke Thomas's fight predictions for *Bloody Elbow* totaled sixteen comments. Six were about the lone women's match on the main card.<sup>271</sup> The only comment remotely hegemonic masculine-sounding was STEAK\_KNIFE referring to Cyborg as She-Wanderlai.<sup>272</sup> By contrast, Thomas's article on Baszler and Cyborg's response to Dana White's questioning the depth of WMMA saw fans overwhelmingly call for female fighters to embrace certain qualities that matched emphasized feminine norms. Of fifty comments posted, most felt that Baszler and Cyborg were overreacting.<sup>273</sup>

Two emphasized feminine positions were held by many. The first was that Baszler and Cyborg were bitter about Carano's success. BRETT JONES opined: "I think Baszler should remove the chip from her shoulder . . . she has been quite vocal in her disdain of Gina Carano's celebrity and her status as the face of women's MMA. Without Gina, it is very likely that Baszler would not have the opportunity to fight in a major organization, let alone in front of a national television audience. You cannot cry foul when a fighter you don't respect is leading the charge for women's MMA yet complain that women's MMA doesn't get proper recognition."<sup>274</sup> This position was echoed by several other commenters. However, as shown in many interviews conducted where Baszler mentioned Carano, she never once said she hated Gina and

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<sup>269</sup> James Iannotti, "Elite XC predictions and preview for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/25/elite-xc-predictions-and-preview-for-unfinished-business-on-cbs/>.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Luke Thomas, "EliteXC: Unfinished Business, CBS Saturday Night Fights BloodyElbow.com Staff Predictions," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/25/579449/elitexc-unfinished-busines>.

<sup>272</sup> Steak\_knife, July 25, 2008 (8:24 pm) Comment on Thomas, "EliteXC: Unfinished Business, CBS Saturday Night Fights BloodyElbow.com Staff Predictions."

<sup>273</sup> Luke Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/24/578183/shayna-baszler-and-cris-cy>.

<sup>274</sup> Brett Jones, July 24, 2008 (11:22 am) Comment on Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA."



acknowledged that it was because of Carano that WMMA was getting popular.<sup>275</sup> Baszler's only issues with Carano were her failure to make weight for most of her fights and that by focusing solely on Carano, **EliteXC** was hurting WMMA because once the only face of the sport leaves, the sport fades from the public eye.<sup>276</sup> As mentioned earlier, facts were not necessary when it came to scrutinizing female fighters. Regardless, BRETT JONES criticized Baszler for not being friendly and timid; Key emphasized feminine traits. The second position argued that feminine attractiveness was required for the male audience to watch. In this context, TOMMY7 admitted: "Maybe it's the fact that when they're fighting you can't tell their girls. Just weird, small looking men."<sup>277</sup> STEAK\_KNIFE echoed: "You're exactly right Tommy—I've said it before, if given the choice to watch ugly girls fight, or men, I'd rather watch the men fight. This is why I'm so amazed by Gina Carano: she can fight, and she's hot."<sup>278</sup> Both TOMMY and STEAK\_KNIFE state the importance of the male gaze, briefly touching upon Toxic Trait 1 and engaging fully in VMA Traits 2 and 3. Essentially, the argument is that to fight in MMA, women must be physically attractive and not fight like men.

The most common replies echoed the author's fairly non-hegemonic masculine reasoning that there were too many male fighters under **UFC** contract to afford to create a women's weight class, a not very marketable weight class.<sup>279</sup> However, some seemed to suggest that women should be content that they are fighting at all. ITCAMEFROMTHESEA remarked: "I find it

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<sup>275</sup> Jordan Breen, "Jordan Breen Show- Shayna Baszler," August 2, 2007, in *The Jordan Breen Show*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Jordan-Breen-Show-Shayna-Baszler-271>.

<sup>276</sup> Percy Crawford, "SHAYNA BASZLER: 'THEY CAN'T KEEP PROTECTING HER,'" Fighthype.com, June 06, 2008. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content2495.html>.

<sup>277</sup> Tommy7, July 24, 2008 (12:49 pm) Comment on Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA."

<sup>278</sup> Steak\_knife, July 24, 2008 (1:06 pm) Comment on Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA."

<sup>279</sup> Luke Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/24/578183/shayna-baszler-and-cris-cy>.



bizarre that these women are so angry about it. Are they being poorly compensated by XC? Shouldn't they just be happy to be performing on CBS come Saturday?"<sup>280</sup> The poster conveniently forgot to add that Baszler and Cyborg were fighting for far less money than most of their male counterparts sharing the main card.<sup>281</sup> RICHARD WADE argued that women should only fight at all-women events, asserting: "I think even if women's MMA became popular, it would still be better served being in its own organization rather than sticking random women's fights in the middle of a card otherwise containing only men."<sup>282</sup> However, the same poster also argued: "That assumes there will ever be a time in which it would make sense to have women in the UFC. I rather doubt that will happen."<sup>283</sup> PUD333 proclaimed: "I don't mind women's MMA. But I find it's the same for Women's basketball or women's hockey. It just doesn't do anything for me . . . As it is, I'm pretty ignorant of the fighters out there, yet surprisingly (or not surprisingly depending on how you see it) I have no real desire to go do any research to find out."<sup>284</sup> All three commenters devalued WMMA but did not devalue women as a whole. They engaged in hegemonic masculinity without shifting into its toxic dimension.

The lone pre-fight fan discussion for this bout occurred on *MMA Forum* the day of the fight. Numbering five comments, most of the commentary centered around who they thought would win. BBJD7 stated: "Cyborg's wife is scary as hell and Baszler trains with Barnett this is

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<sup>280</sup> Itcamefromthesea, July 24, 2008 (2:47 pm) Comment on Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA."

<sup>281</sup> Chris Nelson, "'EliteXC: Unfinished Business' Payroll Released," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 30, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/30/583330/elitexc-unfinished-busine>. Of the eight other fighters on the main card (also including a title fight on the prelims), seven made at least double what Baszler and Cyborg made individually.

<sup>282</sup> Richard Wade, July 24, 2008 (9:17 pm) Comment on Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA."

<sup>283</sup> Luke Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 24, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/24/578183/shayna-baszler-and-cris-cy>.

<sup>284</sup> Pud333, July 24, 2008 (11:25 am) Comment on Thomas, "Shayna Baszler and Cris Cyborg Hammer Dana White on Women's MMA."

one scary match up. Neither of these two are Gina Carano.”<sup>285</sup> Since BBJD7 also praised Cyborg’s power and Baszler’s technique, it is fair to assume the poster is talking about their physical appearance failing to arouse him, whereas Carano is successful.<sup>286</sup> Similarly, T.B. stated: “Cyborg ONLY 23 years old?!?!? She looks WEATHERED to be that young.”<sup>287</sup> However, since this was the ending of the same post which pondered: “I see ‘The Queen of Spades’ winning this fight by taking it to the mat . . . I mean, of Baszler's 11 wins, ALL of them are submissions . . . Though, Santos could just bull rush forward and go crazy . . .she could absolutely win this fight,” it seems like fixating on their appearance and acknowledging their fighting prowess were used in equal measure.<sup>288</sup>

Shayna Baszler’s fifteenth pro bout took place at **EliteXC** Unfinished Business on July 26, 2008, from the Stockton Arena, located in the California city of the same name.<sup>289</sup> Like all her previous Pro Elite fights, Baszler was fighting three three-minute rounds instead of the usual three five-minute rounds. CBS football, basketball, and boxing announcer Gus Johnson provided play-by-play for the evening. His color commentators were former **UFC** middleweight champion Frank Shamrock and former **Pride** English language announcer Mauro Ranallo.<sup>290</sup> In the pre-fight video package, Baszler said: “Anybody whose old school metal fans know the guitar, it’s a battle axe.”<sup>291</sup> She also complimented Cyborg: “What makes Cris Cyborg so tough is her

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<sup>285</sup> Bbjd7, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/#post-621682>.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> T.B., “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/#post-621682>.

<sup>288</sup> Fightergirls.com Accessed September 19, 2020. No citation as website is no longer active.

<sup>289</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>290</sup> “Cris Cyborg vs. Shayna Baszler EliteXC: Unfinished Business,” July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 14:12, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

aggression. I think that sets her apart from the female fighter mold.”<sup>292</sup> Cyborg praised Shayna’s submission game before Baszler responded: “I can pull a submission out of my butt, out of nowhere. I’m bringing the what the heck just happened element.”<sup>293</sup> During the interview, Baszler revels in non-emphasized feminine adherence, as reflected in her tomboy look, her baseball cap, and no makeup, along with showing her crooked front tooth. The promo package then aired Baszler’s suplex against Tamai and her air guitar celebration. Baszler concluded: “I’ve already fought the best in the world; the thing she’s not going to do is break my will like she has her other opponents. If I defeat Cyborg, it will be in spectacular fashion.”<sup>294</sup>

Jimmy Lennon Jr. again labeled the fight “A women’s bantamweight special attraction,” with the canvas still spattered with blood from a preliminary contest. Shamrock declared this would be a showdown of: “Technique vs. raw athleticism and power.”<sup>295</sup>

Cyborg threw a few knees to start the contest, but Baszler brought her to the ground with a pro-wrestling-style figure-four leglock. She held it briefly, but Cyborg escaped and resumed top control. The second round featured a clinching battle where Cyborg outmuscled Baszler into the cage before unloading rights and lefts. Cyborg got more punches off; then, as Baszler tried for a single-leg takedown, the latter got kneed right in the face. This caused Baszler to stagger, allowing the Brazilian to land shot after shot to the face, forcing the former to collapse to the mat. She was still clearly conscious, but Cyborg jumped on top of the cage in celebration before the ref resumed the bout. After a few seconds, Baszler missed with one final desperation right hook before Cyborg’s right hand sent the South Dakotan crumpling to the canvas for the KO

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

victory with just 16 seconds left.<sup>296</sup> Johnson exclaimed: “Cyborg came to North America with plenty of hype. Fans, you can believe that hype.”<sup>297</sup> The camera immediately panned over to Gina Carano, sitting in the front row as a spectator. The commentators started promoting a possible Carano-Cyborg bout down the line, the crowd loudly chanting: “Gina.” A few minutes later, the audience was still chanting her name as they were about to go to a commercial break.<sup>298</sup>

Only two indicators of an emphasized feminine narrative were present during the CBS broadcast. First, Lennon Jr. calling the bout a “women’s bantamweight special attraction,” it felt like the ring announcer was differentiating between the genders, therefore promoting emphasized femininity by lowering fan’s expectations for Baszler-Cyborg because it suggested lesser technical competence would be on display.<sup>299</sup> In fairness, Lennon Jr. called Jake Shields-Nick Thompson “a welterweight attraction”<sup>300</sup> and Nick Diaz-Thomas Denny “a lightweight showdown.”<sup>301</sup> However, neither included the term “special,” a word that generally invokes “away from the norm.”<sup>302</sup> The second involved both the crowd and the broadcast team. As soon as everything settled down post-fight, most of the crowd chanted “Gina” for several minutes, including through the announcement of Cyborg being the winner.<sup>303</sup> The commentators immediately began hyping Carano-Cybo, declaring that Carano was the women’s champion, despite no such title existing in **EliteXC**. The point underscored that Carano was the face of

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> “Cris Cyborg vs. Shayna Baszler EliteXC: Unfinished Business,” July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 14:12, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>300</sup> “EliteXC: Unfinished Business,” July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Pro Elite, Inc., video, 1:22:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/32242/elitexc-unfinished-business>.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> “Cris Cyborg vs. Shayna Baszler EliteXC: Unfinished Business,” July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 14:12, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

WMMA. Shayna Baszler was forgotten entirely during the post-match footage, never shown once on screen after the fight concluded.<sup>304</sup>

Everything else ran counter to the emphasized feminine narrative. Baszler did not put on makeup for her interview, and the broadcast team did not criticize the competitors for being “mannish” during the fight. The preview package focused on violent submissions, knockouts, and Baszler’s air guitar. When Lennon Jr. announced that Baszler-Cyborg would fight three three-minute rounds, Shamrock, believing that women should fight as the men did in five-minute rounds, opined: “They are the exact same as the male athletes,” with Ranallo concurring.<sup>305</sup> The commentators did not treat Cyborg as more masculine by her physical appearance or for going for the knockout instead of submissions. The crowd reacted loudly at all critical moments of the fight. The presentation was positive and accepting of non-emphasized feminine competitors in WMMA.<sup>306</sup> How did the media and fan reaction compare?

The press’s reaction, for the most part, was not equivalent to the hegemonic masculine norm of clamoring for female fighters to express emphasized femininity, at least at first glance. *MMA Mania*’s play-by-play live recap of the fight featured regular commentary for an MMA bout, with no snide comments directed at either fighter. Discussing the fight’s closing sequence, Iannotti wrote: “She (Baszler) throws some lazy punches and then gets drilled with a big right hand and drops straight to the ground. Big knockout for Cyborg. The camera pans to Gina Carano for some nice foreshadowing.”<sup>307</sup> Mike Rome’s counterpoint on *Bloody Elbow* was much

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> James Iannotti, “Elite XC Results July 26 for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/13/elite-xc-results-july-26-for-unfinished-business-on-cbs/>. Parentheses mine.

the same, emphasizing Cyborg's dominant performance. However, Rome also stressed how un-Carano and masculine Cyborg was, proclaiming: "God that is going to be an easy fight to sell. Crazy woman with huge arms called "Cyborg" vs. Gina Carano . . . Gina will beat the crap out of her. She won by overwhelming Shayna, but her technical striking was not much. She really did come off like a female Wanderlei Silva."<sup>308</sup> *MMA Fighting* did a play-by-play; no emphasized femininity narratives were present,<sup>309</sup> as was also the case from *MMA Weekly's* recap.<sup>310</sup> On *Sherdog's Beatdown after the Bell* podcast, the host described the bout as: "a destruction of accomplished Shayna Baszler"<sup>311</sup> and proclaimed: "Cyborg fights like and better than many men."<sup>312</sup> While this comment praised the technical competence of both Baszler and Cyborg, it also inferred that Cyborg belonged in the men's division for safety concerns as Baszler "could have got hurt."<sup>313</sup>

Writing for Bloody Elbow, Mike Rome remarked: "The only way I see them (**EliteXC**) doing a better number is if they do Cyborg/Gina and promote it the right way. In case any of them (**EliteXC** executives) are reading, here is how to do it: 1) show Cyborg murdering Baszler over and over again; 2) show Gina's pretty face and have people talk about the fact that she's never fought someone like this before; 3) have people (including her family) talk about concern for her safety, while focusing on what a physical monster Cyborg is; 4) keep mentioning the fact

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<sup>308</sup> Michael Rome, "EliteXC "Unfinished Business" LIVE Results and Updates," Bloody Elbow, Vox Media, July 26, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/26/580000/elite-xc-unfinished-busine>.

<sup>309</sup> MMA Fighting, "EliteXC 'Unfinished Business' live round-by-round results," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2008/07/26/elitexc-unfinished-business-live-roundbyround-results>.

<sup>310</sup> MMA Weekly Staff, "ELITE XC "UNFINISHED BUSINESS" RESULTS & LIVE PLAY-BY-PLAY," MMAweekly.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaweekly.com/elite-xc-unfinished-business-results-live-play-by-play-2>.

<sup>311</sup> Jordan Breen, "BEATDOWN AFTER THE BELL: ELITEXC." July 27, 2008, in *Beatdown After the Bell*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Beatdown-After-the-Bell-EliteXC-692>.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

that Gina's opponent is nicknamed CYBORG.”<sup>314</sup> Although Rome later exclaims that “Cyborg/Gina is a money fight . . . because it is a big deal for MMA in general, and a big deal for women in the sport,”<sup>315</sup> he already made it clear that the way to market the fight is beauty against brawn, i.e., emphasized femininity vs non-conforming femininity. This article is also interesting because step one of Rome’s suggested marketing plan: “Show Cyborg murdering Baszler over and over again,” essentially makes Baszler a stand-in for emphasized feminine norms by default.<sup>316</sup> In a second op-ed, Rome doubled down on this narrative, opining, “The idea of this freaky strong foreign woman (Cyborg) fighting against the beautiful American girl (Carano) is an incredibly easy sell.”<sup>317</sup>

The journalists who most frequently focused on the fighter’s abilities to appease the male gaze were, surprisingly, Dave Meltzer and Bryan Alvarez, each of whom used Baszler as a feminine foil to Cyborg’s masculine appearance. Alvarez stating Cyborg proceeded to: “KILL SHAYNA WITH DEATH.”<sup>318</sup> Journalistic hyperbole aside, he echoed Rome by saying Gina and Cyborg would be a “MONEY” fight<sup>319</sup> and “has the potential for being the fight that would have the most interest of any women’s MMA fight to date.”<sup>320</sup> However, *WON* made two comments mirroring pro-emphasized femininity talking points, one in each post-fight newsletter. In the first article, when discussing Cyborg’s match attire, Alvarez stated: “I can’t believe I’m mentioning this but it was impossible to not notice. Cyborg was wearing some sort of skirt, and

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<sup>314</sup> Mike Rome, “EliteXC's Fight Promotion Follies,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/28/580793/who-s-in-charge-of-promoti>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Mike Rome, “Pay-Per-View Dilemma for EliteXC,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/7/28/580725/pay-per-view-dilemma-for-e>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>318</sup> Bryan Alvarez, “F4W~!#684 - ELITEXC ON CBS II DOWN NEARLY 50% - JULY 29, 2008,” f4wonline, July 29, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/figure-four-weekly/f4w684-elitexc-cbs-ii-down-nearly-50-july-29-2008-89996>.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

underneath were PANTIES. She's such a beast this just felt wrong."<sup>321</sup> Here he argued that because Cyborg did not meet stereotypical female beauty standards, seeing her wear panties felt unnatural. Then when comparing Baszler and Cyborg's appearances in the second newsletter, Meltzer opined: "Baszler is 27 and could pass for 18. Cyborg is said to be 23 but with that hardcore female bodybuilder face, looks closer to 43."<sup>322</sup> He was not saying that Cyborg should not fight, but he implied that fighting ruins one's femininity. However, he acknowledged Baszler and Cyborg's technical competence, pontificating that the latter made herself a star in that fight.<sup>323</sup> The same narrative balance between hegemonic masculinity standards and recognizing the two women as legitimate fighters mostly echoed in fan opinions posted on news articles, forums, and YouTube videos.

On the *MMA Mania* live results thread, 114 comments were posted during the fight card, with only eight related to Baszler-Cyborg.<sup>324</sup> Interestingly, the posters as a collective whole seemed neutral towards Cyborg's non-normative femininity. DSMITH stated that Cyborg would: "beat Gina's ass."<sup>325</sup> WHIMWHAM espoused: "If i ever run into cyborg in a dark ally im throwin my wallet at her and runnin,"<sup>326</sup> to which KAMA KAZE responded: "LMAO . . . I think she'd do alright against men her weight. SHES AN ANIMAL! RUN FOR YOUR LIIIIIIFE!!!"<sup>327</sup> MUSCLE DOLPHIN, expressed disbelief that someone thought the event was

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Dave Meltzer, "ELITEXC AUGUST SHOW, ADAMLE AS GM, SNME TAPING, PRINZE JR., MORE," f4wonline, August 4, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/august-4-2008-observer-newsletter-elitexc-august-show-adamle-gm-snme>.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> James Iannotti, "Elite XC Results July 26 for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS," Mmamania.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/13/elite-xc-results-july-26-for-unfinished-business-on-cbs>.

<sup>325</sup> DSmith, July 26, 2008 (9:27 pm), Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC Results July 26 for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS."

<sup>326</sup> Whimwham, July 26, 2008 (9:33 pm), Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC Results July 26 for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS."

<sup>327</sup> Kama kaze, July 27, 2008 (1:14 am), Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC Results July 26 for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS."



great, likely because women in combat sports do not adhere to the emphasized feminine norm of fragility.<sup>328</sup> On the Bloody Elbow counterpart live results thread, readers wrote 156 comments, the only relevant one featuring somebody praising Gina for calling out Cyborg post-fight.<sup>329</sup>

Fans posted seventy-two comments under Iannotti's post-show recap on *MMA Mania*.<sup>330</sup> JOHN opined: "I absolutely cant wait for . . . Gina Carrano vs. Kris Cyborg . . . I would even make it the main event of my next show, and have all the dudes fighting on the undercard. That might be the best womans match that has taken place to date."<sup>331</sup> NATURALSHADOW commented: "I actually think the best fight was Cyborg vs. Baszler, although I think someone might want to check for steroids, or to see if that was Wandy in a wig."<sup>332</sup> The first poster stayed clear of hegemonic masculinity altogether, and the second acknowledged Cyborg and Bazler's technical competence as fighters. However, NATURALSHADOW still produced a VMA via Trait 4, using humor to mock Cyborg's alleged masculine features. VIOLENTMIKE complimented Cyborg while focusing on how unfeminine she looked, espousing: "Cyborg is a straight up SCARY woman in the cage. She really knows how to throw a power punch . . . Cyborg looks like a dude when she fights . . . Did you see the muscles in her back . . . ?"<sup>333</sup> He complimented her technical competence but clarified she looked like a dude, thereby not titillating his male desires.

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<sup>328</sup> Muscle Dolphin, July 26, 2008 (11:07 pm), Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC Results July 26 for 'Unfinished Business' on CBS."

<sup>329</sup> Nick Thomas, July 26, 2008 (9:30 pm) Comment on Rome, "EliteXC "Unfinished Business" LIVE Results and Updates."

<sup>330</sup> James Iannotti, "Elite XC recap and final thoughts on 'Unfinished Business,'" Mmamania.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/26/elite-xc-recap-and-final-thoughts-on-unfinished-business>.

<sup>331</sup> John, July 27, 2008 (10:07 am) Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC recap and final thoughts on 'Unfinished Business.'"

<sup>332</sup> Naturalshadow, July 28, 2008 (12:06 am) Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC recap and final thoughts on 'Unfinished Business.'"

<sup>333</sup> ViolentMike, July 28, 2008 (9:56 am) Comment on Iannotti, "Elite XC recap and final thoughts on 'Unfinished Business.'"

On the *Bloody Elbow* recap, only a few comments focused on Baszler-Cyborg. Two expressed they wanted female fighters to adhere to emphasized femininity. TOMMY7 stated: “I’d like to see the men fighting with shirts on tested for steroids myselfs. I think I seen a little omni in his jaw. Gina wins all day.”<sup>334</sup> Having watched every bout featured at Unfinished Business, I can say no male or female fighters wore shirts. The closest were Baszler and Cyborg, who wore sports bras. Therefore, TOMMY7 directly refers to Baszler and Cyborg as men, affirming they do not arouse him. This joke about gender shifts the tone of his post from hegemonic to toxic, primarily via Trait 1. The joke can also be considered a VMA via qualifications 2 and 4.

Attached to Chris Nelson’s article about fighter pay for the **EliteXC** show, CMAD77 wrote: “Damn some of these guys really deserve more money.”<sup>335</sup> MYTHBUSTER replied: “And gals.”<sup>336</sup> JIRRI retorted: “I think Cyborg might be a dude,” firmly utilizing VMA Trait 4.<sup>337</sup> However, while VMAs featured on the Vox Media websites via their readership, most of the reactions regarding Baszler and Cyborg’s adherence/defiance to emphasized femininity were hegemonic, not toxic. This differs significantly from how those posting on YouTube communicated.

The day after the fight, someone uploaded a video to YouTube. However, the video has been deleted since I first examined the comment sections years ago. I do have evidence via transcription that this contained a plethora of hegemonic/toxic masculine posturing and decrying

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<sup>334</sup> Tommy7, July 27, 2008 (11:45 am) Comment on Fagan, “EliteXC CBS Saturday Night Fights "Unfinished Business" Results and Recap.” Weirdly, Cyborg was not wearing a shirt when she fought, but neither were any of the card’s other fighters.

<sup>335</sup> Cmad77, July 31, 2008 (7:35 am) Comment on Nelson, “EliteXC: Unfinished Business’ Payroll Released.”

<sup>336</sup> Mythbuster, July 31, 2008 (7:56 am) Comment on Nelson, “EliteXC: Unfinished Business’ Payroll Released.”

<sup>337</sup> Jirri, July 41, 2008 (10:47 am) Comment on Nelson, “EliteXC: Unfinished Business’ Payroll Released.”

the failure of Cyborg and Baszler to adhere to various emphasized feminine norms. Viewers posted 700 comments to the video, the majority expressing the above sentiments in a particularly toxic fashion and condemning WMMA. TERRA BASS exclaimed: "Women fighting. Fucking retarded. It's for guys who can't get an erection."<sup>338</sup> LOZZA95 echoed: "Women's mma what a stupid ass joke. Even an average guy like me could easily beat the shit out of these weaklings."<sup>339</sup> Both posts questioned WMMA fighters' technical competence. JOSH D described Baszler-Cyborg as: "Dude both of them only landed like 2 out of 100000000 punches. They suck."<sup>340</sup> Cyborg actually landed 48 of 72 punches.<sup>341</sup> WBOWENS82 added the need for male gaze marketing, espousing: "Damn these women look like butch lesbians. Where does Gina Carano fit into this sport? Girl fights are fucking retarded."<sup>342</sup> This poster also condemned Baszler and Cyborg for possibly being gay, with lesbians defying compulsory heterosexuality. UZUMAKI NARUTO added to the tally of those making Baszler feminine by default compared to the perception of Cyborg as masculine. UZMAKI NAURTO stated: "Its not right for a man to be beating on a woman like this!"<sup>343</sup> Neither did Baszler escape FLUFFY FLUFFY's censure: "Head butch, you got knocked the f#c% out!"<sup>344</sup> All five posters were guilty of Toxic Trait 1; two used Trait 2, and one involved Trait 3. VMAs were also quite common in the dataset for the

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<sup>338</sup> Terra Bass, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>339</sup> Lozza95, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>340</sup> Josh d, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>341</sup> "Cris Cyborg vs. Shayna Baszler EliteXC: Unfinished Business," July 26, 2008 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Zuffa, video, 14:12, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/33617>.

<sup>342</sup> Wbowens82, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>343</sup> Uzmaki naruto, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>344</sup> Fluffy fluffy, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

video, with Trait 1 appearing in four of the five selections, one utilizing Trait 2, three engaged in Trait 4, with none featuring Trait 3.

Now, there were several comments which defended both fighters and WMMA. ADAM ACKERMAN argued: “Unless your a professional mma fighter, boxer , kickboxer, or world class grappler I have confidence that both of these women would destroy you. Women kick hard as fuck, they have far more flexible and powerful hips.”<sup>345</sup> THE\_MEISTER agreed, opining: “Women's mma fights are very entertaining when fighters such as these are skilled. Not a bad showing at all.”<sup>346</sup> However, these were in the vast minority of the 700-plus posts. At least on YouTube, emphasized feminine adherence in WMMA was something MMA fans were quite vocal for, in a much more toxic manner than their Vox Media counterparts.<sup>347</sup>

The same cannot be said regarding the few fan forums that participated in discussing the aftermath of Baszler/Cyborg. While an overall summary of the event produced mainly praise for the women’s fight by *MMA Forum* users, one even going so far as to say that they wanted a UFC women’s division, the thread devoted to the contest itself was half gendered analysis and half hegemonic masculine narratives. The commenters did not discuss any perceived masculinity on Baszler’s part. Not so for Cyborg. STEPH05050 exclaimed: “I think we need to DNA that chick (Cyborg).”<sup>348</sup> FOOTODORSs replied: “They do verify sexes right? Cyborg had one deep

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<sup>345</sup> Adam Ackerman, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>346</sup> The\_meister, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>347</sup> Awesomejohnet, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>348</sup> Steph05050, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/#post-621682>. Parentheses mine.

voice.”<sup>349</sup> CPLMAC reiterated: “I’m still a huge Baszler fan, I think Cyborg has to be half man.”<sup>350</sup> Along a similar vein, FEDOR>ALL remarked: “Evangelista is a vain bastard, he picked out a wife that looks just like him!”<sup>351</sup> Even STITCH1Z, whilst calling Cyborg awesome, proclaimed: “The face of women’s MMA just got a little bit uglier.”<sup>352</sup> Each of these comments featured complaining about Cyborg’s inability to comply with their desires for titillation and about her not representing a frail female image. Despite all five postings featuring the “humor” required for VMA Trait 4, only two utilized toxic masculinity via Trait 2. The only negative comments directed at Baszler revolved around her technical competence as a fighter, not a “female fighter.”<sup>353</sup>

In an *Argus Leader* online discussion thread (three posts were printed in the physical newspaper), a subscriber wrote it was okay that Baszler lost as anyone who participates in MMA is automatically a loser.<sup>354</sup> In response, a fan posted a counterargument, reasoning Baszler had nothing to be ashamed of because Cyborg did not abide by emphasized femininity. The poster argued: “Cyborg might have been a man. She had man muscles. Kinda creepy. Shayna shouldn’t feel bad at all. I think cyborg could have beaten a lot of the men in mma right now.”<sup>355</sup> Another

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<sup>349</sup> footodors, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/#post-621682>.

<sup>350</sup> Cplmac, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/#post-621682>.

<sup>351</sup> Fedor>all, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/page-2>.

<sup>352</sup> Stitch1z, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/page-2>.

<sup>353</sup> taiwnezb0i, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/page-2>.

<sup>354</sup> Re: Local Ultimate Fighter Loses Match,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 28, 2008.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

poster similarly espoused: “Baszler deserves a ton of credit. She just fought someone that was on every kind of muscle-enhancement drug known to man. No woman can look like that and not be on some kind of drug. Baszler fought a heck of a fight and should be proud.”<sup>356</sup> This demonstrated that fans viewed some form of emphasized femininity as required in WMMA. At a minimum, aficionados felt that there was a musculature limit a woman could have and still be considered a woman. McClearen’s dissertation brings up this same discussion about transgender MMA fighter Fallon Fox. Both Fox’s detractors and her fans used musculature to debate what made her a woman. Her proponents claimed the amount of estrogen in her system would have diminished the muscle gains she was privy to as a man. Her critics argued this was not true. However, Fox’s detractors and proponents agreed that how she retained and chemically produced muscles would prove her “true” gender.<sup>357</sup>

In all three of the post-Cyborg fight interviews Baszler participated in: Ariel Hawani,<sup>358</sup> Sherdog’s *Beatdown* podcast,<sup>359</sup> and *Fight Opinion Radio*, she never commented about emphasized femininity.<sup>360</sup> Baszler mentioned that she felt her cardio was okay, that it was the pressure of the bigtime exposure, especially with the local media coming to see her train every day at the gym, combined with a self-imposed mission to convert her hometown from an anti-MMA city to a pro-MMA city, that affected her mentally, causing her to gas.<sup>361</sup> Baszler also

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> McClearen, “Converging Media,” 113-120.

<sup>358</sup> “Rated Exclusive: Shayna Baszler Post-Fight,” mmarated, August 12, 2008, video, 4:05.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCr0m0PCkzI>.

<sup>359</sup> TJ De Santis and Jordan Breen, “BEATDOWN: JOSH BARNETT AND BASZLER,” July 30, 2008, in *Beatdown*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays.

<https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Beatdown-Josh-Barnett-and-Baszler-698>.

<sup>360</sup> Zach Arnold, “Fight Opinion Radio #87: Josh Barnett & Shayna Baszler,” August 03, 2008 in *Fight Opinion Radio*, produced by fightopinion.com, podcast, 23:39. <https://www.fightopinion.com/podcasts/foradio-8-04-2008.mp3>.

<sup>361</sup> TJ De Santis and Jordan Breen, “BEATDOWN: JOSH BARNETT AND BASZLER,” July 30, 2008, in *Beatdown*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Beatdown-Josh-Barnett-and-Baszler-698>.

commented there was “no shame” in losing to an opponent like Cyborg and that she failed to execute submissions readily available to her during the first round.<sup>362</sup> All three interviews were simply a fighter explaining what happened during the bout and why. Gender and hegemonic masculinity/emphasized femininity did not factor into Baszler’s comments.

As stated earlier, the Carano-Kedzie fight changed everything. **EliteXC** became a solid home for WMMA fighters to ply their trade, albeit to a substantially less financially successful degree than company favorite Carano. In so doing, almost singlehandedly, the company brought forth more WMMA fights and online coverage of WMMA, which exposed the general MMA fans to the female side of the sport. More people were watching, reading, or talking about the sport. Because of the sports’ increased awareness, this made emphasized feminine adherence/defiance against hegemonic masculine agendas present both within and outside the sport easier to spot. It also allowed for the shifting from hegemonic/emphasized dialogue into toxic and VMA counterparts to be much more visible. During her first three **EliteXC** fights, she definitively put forth a masculine persona,<sup>363</sup> a persona primarily left untouched by the media or the fans.<sup>364</sup> However, due to still limited fan interaction with female fighters not named Gina Carano, the little online response generally refrained from toxic masculine discussions. However, when Baszler began directly targeting Carano, the toxic reaction grew both in number and toxicity.

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<sup>362</sup> “Rated Exclusive: Shayna Baszler Post-Fight,” mmarated, August 12, 2008, video, 4:05.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCr0m0PCkzI>.

<sup>363</sup> “Shayna Baszler vs Keiko Tamai 14th Fight,” werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 8:59.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs4M44fkpBQ&t=135s>.

<sup>364</sup> Zender, “Tara LaRosa wants Baszler fight,” MMAforum.com, April 28, 2008.

<https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/tara-larosa-wants-baszler-fight.35354/#post-53276>.

Baszler introduced a specific counter-narrative espoused in various interviews, a narrative regarding how the sole marketing of Gina Carano, primarily utilizing her feminine physical appearance, hurt the marketability of WMMA fighters as a collective whole.<sup>365</sup> The media somewhat echoed Baszler's posture.<sup>366</sup> Yet, Baszler was largely derided by the fans for these views and her alleged "masculine" physical appearance, with comments on both YouTube and the Vox Media sites toxically criticizing her and LaRosa for not "titillating" them like Carano.<sup>367</sup> During the build-up and the aftermath of her fight with Cris Cyborg, calls for WMMA to adhere to emphasized femininity were loud from large sections of the fanbase and some corners of the media.<sup>368</sup> Toxic masculinity was almost considered a prerequisite for discussing either the fight or Baszler and Cyborg as individuals by the online fandom, mostly devaluing them for not arousing certain commenters. While there were some toxic fan comments which managed to focus on either of the other two emphasized feminine traits- sociability over technical competence and female fragility, most postings that contained toxic masculine and/or VMA traits centered around fighters' ability to attract "male desire." These trends grew as WMMA expanded and appeared in more fight promotions in the coming years.

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<sup>365</sup> Percy Crawford, "SHAYNA BASZLER: 'THEY CAN'T KEEP PROTECTING HER,'" Fighthype.com, June 06, 2008. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content2495.html>.

<sup>366</sup> Jordan Breen, "CARANO, CONVICTION, AND HEAVYWEIGHT HYPOCRISY." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Carano-Conviction-and-Heavyweight-Hypocrisy-13044>.

<sup>367</sup> ViolentMike, May 14, 2008 (10:59 am), comment on Iannotti, "Gina Carano E:60 ESPN segment to debut tonight (Video update)."

<sup>368</sup> Bryan Alvarez, "F4W~!#684 - ELITEXC ON CBS II DOWN NEARLY 50% - JULY 29, 2008," f4wonline, July 29, 2008. <https://members.f4wonline.com/figure-four-weekly/f4w684-elitexc-cbs-ii-down-nearly-50-july-29-2008-89996>.



## Chapter 4

### “Just Like the Guys!”: 2009-2011

#### Strikeforce, Regional WMMA, and Ronda Rousey’s Arrival

“Women being injured and/or significantly bloodied during televised MMA participation due to excessive fatigue . . . may be a spectacle that crosses the line for many. Just how many may determine the fate of WMMA.”- Dr. Johnny Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

#### Section 1: From EliteXC to Strikeforce FC and Government Dealings

##### October 2008- June 2009

Though much of the interim period between the aftermath of **EliteXC** Unfinished Business and Shayna Baszler’s next pro fight for **Strikeforce FC** just under a year later reflected small changes in the fan perception of WMMA, two specific elements were significant. First, the willingness of major MMA promoters to feature female fighters on their cards, and second, the fact that more combat sports media dedicated coverage to the women’s game. Shortly after holding two shows in October 2008, **EliteXC** folded, with many prominent WMMA fighters still under contract.<sup>2</sup> Some fans and media outlets felt this doomed WMMA as **EliteXC** was the only major North American promotion hosting women’s bouts.<sup>3</sup> The comment section under James Iannotti’s article for *MMA Mania* was filled with posts lamenting that viewers would not get to see the Carano-Cyborg fight. A surprising number seemed disappointed that WMMA might miss its opportunity to “take off” in popularity from such a fight. Just as many were hopeful that Carano might pose for *Playboy* since her fighting career seemed over, making those commenters

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Johnny Benjamin, “Ask the Doc: Why is Dr. Benjamin against five-minute rounds in women's MMA?,” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 22, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/06/ask-the-doc-why-is-dr-benjamin-against-five-minute-rounds-in-womens-mma>.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Leidecker, “WHERE SHOULD ELITEXC’S TOP FIGHTERS GO?,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, October 22, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Where-Should-EliteXCs-Top-Fighters-Go-14875>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

guilty of Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 2.<sup>4</sup> DON exclaimed about **EliteXC**'s closure: "About time! I wonder if I can have Gina wrestle me if I come up with 10K."<sup>5</sup> DON perpetuated Toxic Trait 1, reducing women solely for their ability to please him sexually, also engaging in VMA Traits 2, 3, and 4. *Sherdog*'s Tim Leidecker figured this was a crossroads for WMMA. He grumbled, "Where are centerpiece Gina Carano and the army of other ladies gunning for her going to be plying their trade in the future? There are strong rumors right now that either Affliction and/or CBS will snag them up. If this isn't the case, it will likely be back to smaller shows."<sup>6</sup>

Other media outlets, however, figured somebody would pick them up. *Bloody Elbow*'s Cannon Jacques revealed that Dana White was considering bringing WMMA to his minor league promotion, **World Elite Cagefighting**. Jacques wrote, "The proposed scenario would be a major modification to Zuffa's approach in promoting MMA . . . Not only would this be their (Zuffa's) first foray into female fighting, but the experiment would not involve a full division of fighters but only Carano fighting various challengers as they materialize. Zuffa has the ability to take female MMA to the next level if they effectively deploy the significant resources at their disposal."<sup>7</sup> The fan's comments underneath the article mirrored their *MMA Mania* counterparts but with far fewer fans expressing promotion of emphasized feminine norms. WHO ME articulated: "The WEC is the best place for women's MMA in Zuffa. It helps build the WEC as a sister organization that offers something different instead of a second tier promotion and feeder

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<sup>4</sup> James Iannotti, "Report: Pro Elite and Elite XC 'shutting its doors effective immediately'" Mmamania.com, Vox Media, October 21, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Don, October 21, 2008 (1:21 pm) Comment on Iannotti, "Report: Pro Elite and Elite XC 'shutting its doors effective immediately.'"

<sup>6</sup> Tim Leidecker, "WHERE SHOULD ELITEXC'S TOP FIGHTERS GO?," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, October 22, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Where-Should-EliteXCs-Top-Fighters-Go-14875>.

<sup>7</sup> Cannon Jacques, "Gina Carano in the WEC?," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, November 19, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/11/18/664858/gina-carano-in-the-wec>. Parentheses mine.

for the UFC and it helps fill out the WEC's lack of divisions. Carano also gives them a big draw."<sup>8</sup> *MMA Fighting* writer Michael David Smith also proposed the **WEC** route and suggested the upstart American/Russian promotion **Affliction** quickly sign Cyborg and Carano.<sup>9</sup>

The staff at *MMA Junkie* argued the division had already earned its place at the elite level. Delving into the rich history of Jeff Osborne's **HooknShoot** promotion, they delivered the following message:

As far as the public not wanting to see women fight, the evidence couldn't contradict the notion more. There have only been five MMA matches in history that have gained one million new viewers to a television show from the previous match. Two of them have been Carano's two fights on CBS . . . The unanswered questions are whether the ratings and popularity are unique to her, and whether her popularity is more a short-term novelty of a woman with a great look for television who can fight, as opposed to the idea people as a general rule will care about woman fighters. The Christy Martin phase of boxing would argue one way. Osborne's experience as an MMA promoter is a strong argument the other way.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the WMMA media optimists' forecasts seemed to come to fruition, albeit from a promotion they were not expecting. In November 2008, **Strikeforce FC** announced its interest in signing Carano, who had fought for them back in 2006 against Elaina Maxwell.<sup>11</sup> On February 6, 2009, **Strikeforce** CEO Scott Coker announced the purchase of most of the fighter contracts still owned by **EliteXC**, including Carano's.<sup>12</sup> They committed to a Carano-Cyborg title bout but did not announce when the fight would occur.<sup>13</sup> Cyborg even competed on the first

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<sup>8</sup> who me, November 18, 2008 (9:32 pm) Comment on Jacques, "Gina Carano in the WEC?."

<sup>9</sup> Michael David Smith, "EliteXC Folds: What Happens to Gina Carano? Women's MMA Takes a Hit," MMAFighting.com, Vox Media, October 21, 2008. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2008/10/21/elitexc-folds-what-happens-to-gina-carano-womens-mma-takes-a>.

<sup>10</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "Women's MMA has earned its place," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, October 31, 2008. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2008/10/womens-mma-has-earned-its-place>.

<sup>11</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "Strikeforce also interested in female star Gina Carano," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, November 23, 2008. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2008/11/strikeforce-also-interested-in-female-star-gina-carano>.

<sup>12</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "Strikeforce a legit contender after EliteXC deal," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, February 6, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/02/strikeforce-a-legit-contender-after-elitexc-deal>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

**Strikeforce** show of 2009, taking on Japan's Hitomi Akano on the main card of the April 11 Showtime live television broadcast.<sup>14</sup> WMMA had found its new home to help promote the growing sport, yet MMA media and fans still debated their presence.

Two months before Shayna Baszler's next fight, Mike Rome wrote an article for *Bloody Elbow* entitled: "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."<sup>15</sup> There was a conception amongst MMA fans at the time that aside from those two fighters, WMMA did not draw money and was shallow in talent depth. Carano was an allegedly rare commodity that combined a physically attractive woman who could fight. Cyborg was a draw due to her unbridled physicality and the "freakshow" nature of her physique. According to this fan theory, all other female fighters were not physically attractive enough to titillate male desires, nor had the size advantage to make them a marquee name without adhering to emphasized feminine norms. Rome felt this line of thinking was inaccurate and misguided, stating: "The idea that there is just one fight or one fighter people want to see is ridiculous as the fans went nuts for Cyborg in San Jose (the Akano fight). It's also not as if Gina came into this sport as a former American Idol contestant or as an ex-pro wrestler. She had a fighting background, had the first female fight on Showtime, and won a very exciting fight that stole the show. It didn't take anything masterful. It's time for this argument to go away."<sup>16</sup> In making this argument, however, he completely ignores the popularity Carano gained for her emphasized

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<sup>14</sup> "Strikeforce-Shamrock Vs. Diaz," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed May 20, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Strikeforce-Shamrock-vs-Diaz-9628>.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 14, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/4/14/838061/theres-plenty-left-for-womens-mma>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Parentheses mine.

feminine adherence. Rome only looked at the numbers Carano and Cyborg drew, ignoring the likely reasons why the fight generated high viewership ratings.<sup>17</sup>

Over 100 comments were attached to the article, most dismissing WMMA.<sup>18</sup>

DUMBWHITEGUY asked: “Does anyone really like women’s MMA or is it more of an equality thing? Because all the fights are not very good.”<sup>19</sup> While this comment does feature VMA Trait 4, it sidesteps utilizing toxic masculine tropes, likely because it solely focused on the emphasized feminine trope of sociability over technical competence rather than the male gaze.

RAINMAKER6 espoused: “I’m of the old school in the sense that I somehow don’t think girls should be fighting each other (as stated in someone’s earlier post, biologically they’re not made for it). So for me the attraction is a) hot girl or b) non-human monster.”<sup>20</sup> This heavily promotes emphasized femininity as it perpetuates the notion that women are fragile based on their biology and should not be in combat sports unless they either appeal to the male gaze or are a physical anomaly. It avoids toxic masculine tropes and the closest the quote comes to resembling a VMA is via Trait 1, as it treats MMA as an exclusively male preserve. There were dissenting opinions. ORCUS opined: “I get why some people have problems watching two women going at it, but if you look past that, you should really see that it’s nothing more than two athletes going at it.”<sup>21</sup>

However, the comment section was quickly overwhelmed by PHANTOM OF KRANKTOR and MIKE ROME, along with other posters, who discussed the merits of WMMA. MIKE ROME stated: “Girls will move up in weight to fight the superstars

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Dumbwhiteguy, April 14, 2009 (10:08 pm) Comment on Rome, “There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos.”

<sup>20</sup> Rainmaker6, April 14, 2009 (10:36 pm) Comment on Rome, “There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos.”

<sup>21</sup> Orcus, April 14, 2009 (10:36 pm) Comment on Rome, “There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos.”

that's naturally the way things go. For women the sport is in its complete infancy. It's nowhere near ready for full divisions of contenders, but men's wasn't always filled out either. You have to start somewhere."<sup>22</sup> PHANTOM OF KRANKTOR countered: "The winner of cyborg/carano will go back to atrocious crap like cyborg/akano until the field of female talent eventually catches up to where it should be."<sup>23</sup> STEVEOC24 expressed: "I only care to see Carano/Santos. I really don't care if womens MMA survives. If it does, keep it on the undercard."<sup>24</sup> Continuing the trend, STEVEOC24 avoided utilizing toxic masculine tropes while engaging in VMA Trait 1 again, trying to exclude WMMA from the main event scene. GOGOPLATTER presented a nuanced idea: there is merit to female fighting, but the sexism present is too complex a problem to solve. They wrote:

If these top fighters continue to not make weight the division becomes a joke. I don't remember off hand if the announcers said anything about Cyborg missing weight, but if this becomes a habit, it is really bad for the division. I don't know what can be done to help this, but something needs to happen. Furthermore, I'd literally cut off a finger to see Gina Carano naked. That is not hyperbole . . . That is a problem though as it takes legitimacy away from the sport itself. I know so many people are going to jump on this and say that I'm a pig or jack ass for not looking past that, but do me a favor. Next time you're at a sports bar go around and ask what Maria Sharapova's, Anna Kournikva's, Jenny Finch's, etc. accomplishments or even sports are. At some point, they become bigger than the sport, and in turn no longer provide any real promotion to said sport."<sup>25</sup>

In another post, GOGOPLATTER elaborated on his finger remark:

I was trying to convey was the fact that in the male dominated sports market, female athletes, successful or not, will become sex symbols before they become sports symbols. At first, yes it draws attention to the sport, but eventually, they become their own entity. When your entire market is driven by testosterone filled. libido driven men, it's sort of just a natural effect. Female

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<sup>22</sup> Mike Rome, April 14, 2009 (10:29 pm) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>23</sup> Phantom of Kranktor, April 14, 2009 (10:32 pm) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>24</sup> Steveoc24, April 14, 2009 (10:22 pm) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>25</sup> Gogo Platter, April 15, 2009 (12:16 am) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos." Maria Sharapova and Anna Kournikova are professional tennis players and Jenny Finch is a former Olympian in softball.

athletes are rarely polarizing for their talent anymore, but their beauty . . . I'd love to see female fights, as a deeper division will only increase competition, but I don't think it'll ever be anything that will significantly help the sport.<sup>26</sup>

Essentially, GOGOPLATTER acknowledged that they want more WMMA fights to help grow that side of the sport but that it would not help WMMA in the long run because, in the end, the testosterone-filled libido-driven men will only care if the combatants appeal to their male desires. While he is not making any toxic masculine or VMA-centric remarks (outside a brief instance of VMA Trait 2 when he talks about cutting off his finger to see Carano naked), he comes close to excusing such statements, calling sports fans discussing female athlete's physical appearances in terms of the male gaze: "just a natural effect."<sup>27</sup> He also seems to argue that there is no point in focusing on a WMMA fighter's skills, saying he doubts technical competence will "ever be anything that will significantly help the sport."<sup>28</sup> To clarify, he is not saying that women cannot be talented fighters but that the general MMA fanbase will not care about WMMA, qualified or not. DIRTYML provided a similar sentiment, explaining:

Most casual fans aren't even excited to think about a 135 vs 145 bout between male fighters, much less female. Once female fighters stop being awarded main card events based on their Myspace sexy pictures then perhaps their identity in the sport will evolve as well. I think the foundation exists in some places, but I do not think there is the substance to warrant a general appreciation for the female version of the sport at this point, only the denouement of overall skill that seems to be lacking in the female division."<sup>29</sup>

Like GOGOPLATTER, DIRTYML thought WMMA could find its identity if the industry stopped promoting fights based on looks, which defies emphasized femininity. However, they also felt that WMMA should not be getting coverage as most female fighters allegedly lacked the skill found in men's MMA. DIRTYML wanted the women's division to

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<sup>26</sup> Gogo Platter, April 15, 2009 (9:15 am) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> DirtyML, April 15, 2009 (3:01am) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos." MySpace is a social media platform created in 2003.

reach that skill level before giving their events media coverage, questioning their technical competence. He seems to blame the fighters instead of the MMA hierarchy, insinuating it is their fault for the stereotypical attractive competitors receiving main event paydays instead of their more talented counterparts.

To counter their pessimism, D.E.O. listed a few ways they felt WMMA could grow and become popular. Some of his suggestions, as will be shown in later chapters, were hated by MMA fans who embraced hegemonic/toxic masculinity and its views on women fighting. D.E.O. offered:

1. Get some solid weight Classes . . . instead of the constant catchweight fights. 2. The UFC needs to incorporate Women, and not just as Ring Girls. 3. A Reality TV Show. TUF Season 14 or 15 should be a WMMA Edition. It brought Men's MMA into the Spotlight, and it blew up. I guarantee that it'll do the same for WMMA. 4. They need to stop marketing WMMA as a side attraction (3 Minute Round BS, promoting Gina Carano for her looks and not her skill, etc.), and treat them like regular Matches.<sup>30</sup>

D.E.O. touched upon the emphasized feminine adherence that WMMA was forced to undergo: The “unprofessionalism” of being allowed to miss weight, their absence from the largest MMA promotion on the planet, and marketing fighters based on physical appearance instead of technical competence. D.E.O. is a rare fan from this period who not only stood against hegemonic/toxic masculinity in MMA but also understands it was holding back the women's game.<sup>31</sup> And unlike GOGOPLATTER and DIRTYML, D.E.O. felt that the battle in marketing WMMA skill instead of physical appearance was winnable if the **UFC** and the media did their respective parts. D.E.O. was far from the only online fan who felt this way towards WMMA, the rest of this chapter seeing a handful of similar examples, even more in Chapters 5 and 6.

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<sup>30</sup> D.E.O., April 15, 2009 (7:22 am) Comment on Rome, “There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



However, the marketing of Shayna Baszler's next fight showed that even in a bout involving neither Gina Carano nor Cris Cyborg, the media would still make the WMMA discussion about the "hot girl" and the "non-human monster."<sup>32</sup>

## Section 2: Baszler, Kaufman, and Five-minute Rounds

### June 2009

**Strikeforce** booked Shayna Baszler to face Canadian Sarah Kaufman at the June 19<sup>th</sup> Challengers event after the latter beat Miesha Tate in a May 15 bout to decide who would meet the Queen of Spades.<sup>33</sup> The most significant talking point about the fight was that it would be the first in live televised North American WMMA history to go five-minute rounds. The Washington and California state athletic commissions approved this decision a week prior<sup>34</sup> in preparation for the Gina Carano/Cris Cyborg super fight two months later in August. **Strikeforce** decided to give the new time limits a test run with Baszler's fight.<sup>35</sup> Many news outlets covering Baszler-Kaufman seemingly did so because it led to Carano-Cyborg. As mentioned, this bout was still over two months away, but the emphasized feminine-adhering press talked more about the sole faces of WMMA than they did Baszler or Kaufman. *Wrestling Observer Newsletter's* Dave Meltzer, two days before Baszler-Kaufman, announced:

The Gina Carano vs. Cris Cyborg fight is going to be five minute rounds and not three minute rounds. This is going to play a major difference because these women are used to nine minute fights and now they are going 25. That's huge. They can't go out and fight the pace they are used to. Not sure who it will affect more but the winner is going to likely end up being the one in

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<sup>32</sup> Rainmaker6, April 14, 2009 (10:36 pm) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>33</sup> Mike Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 14, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/4/14/838061/theres-plenty-left-for-womens-mma>.

<sup>34</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "Nick Thompson vs. Tim Kennedy added to June 19 Strikeforce Challengers," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, May 26, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/05/nick-thompson-vs-tim-kennedy-added-to-june-19-strikeforce-challengers>.

<sup>35</sup> "STRIKEFORCE WOMEN TO FIGHT 5-MINUTE ROUNDS," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 16, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/pressreleases/STRIKEFORCE-WOMEN-TO-FIGHT-5MINUTE-ROUNDS-18005>.

better condition, where as in a nine minute fight, the winner was probably going to be the one who imposed their will and technique early. If they come out and do the fight that would have been expected, they'll be dying late in the fight . . . I don't think the switch of both number of rounds and time of rounds this abruptly is a good idea.. Strikeforce went to both the Washington state commission and California, and got approval for the women to do five minute rounds, which is how it should be. The Sarah Kaufman vs. Shayna Baszler fight this week, designed for the winner to become the top challenger for the Carano-Cyborg winner, will be the first women's fight with five minute rounds.<sup>36</sup>

While praising the move overall, Meltzer felt it was a change that should have been slowly implemented over time, not unilaterally imposed on WMMA fights across the board. His abrupt switch portrayal when all four fighters involved had fought five-minute rounds earlier in their careers showed the sportswriter guilty of buying into the female fragility myth and doubting their technical competence.<sup>37</sup> Also, the focus on the fight in two months instead of the fight in two days shows how in Meltzer's eyes, WMMA was simply a two-person show, one based on emphasized feminine appearance and the other for the sheer level of defying this appearance.<sup>38</sup> *MMA Junkie's* John Morgan wrote: "Indicating a possible upcoming change in policy for Strikeforce, the organization has slated a June 19 bout between . . . Shayna Baszler (9-5) and Sarah Kaufman (9-0) for five-minute rounds . . . just days after the organization announced a first-ever women's title fight between Gina Carano and Cristiane "Cyborg" Santos would also use five-minute rounds."<sup>39</sup> While the article specifically focused on **Strikeforce's** policy in

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<sup>36</sup> Dave Meltzer "MISAWA TRAGIC DEATH, UFC 99, TRUMP ANGLE, TRIPLEMANIA, SYLVIA," f4wonline.com, June 22, 2009. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/june-22-2009-observer-newsletter-misawa-tragic-death-ufc-99-trump>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> John Morgan, "Strikeforce's June 19 Baszler vs. Kaufman fight also set for five-minute rounds," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 15, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/06/strikeforces-june-19-baszler-vs-kaufman-fight-also-set-for-five-minute-rounds>.

general, Baszler and Kaufman were not mentioned again outside of this opening paragraph, even though Carano and Cyborg were noted.<sup>40</sup>

*Sherdog* printed an official **Strikeforce** press release that outlined why the promotion was going with five-minute rounds for WMMA bouts.<sup>41</sup> “We are proud to be leading this movement in Mixed Martial Arts,” said Scott Coker, Founder and CEO of STRIKEFORCE. “This will allow the women competing at the elite professional level ample time to set up and fully execute a particular fight strategy. This is another great day for all of us in MMA.”<sup>42</sup> In the same press release, Gina Carano said: “I feel Strikeforce is taking female fighters seriously, which means we will be seeing some amazing fights in the future and I am honored to be a part of it.”<sup>43</sup> Sarah Kaufman stated: “I am always ready to go five-minute rounds and I know Shayna will also be ready. More importantly, this is long-awaited recognition that we are competing at the highest level of the sport.”<sup>44</sup> Finally, **Strikeforce** rules director Cory Schafer clarified: “Use of this standard will level the playing field for (the) female athletes in providing them with the time necessary to develop and execute their striking and grappling strategies in each round.”<sup>45</sup> Unlike the MMA media, **Strikeforce** seemed to be giving both Carano-Cyborg and Baszler-Kaufman equal billing of importance. Also, Coker and Schafer’s respective statements acknowledged that the time discrepancy of rounds between male and female fights was unfair to WMMA athletes. For the most part, **Strikeforce** refrained from promoting emphasized feminine norms in the press release. The press release featured no quotations about female fragility or lack

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “STRIKEFORCE WOMEN TO FIGHT 5-MINUTE ROUNDS,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, June 16, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/pressreleases/STRIKEFORCE-WOMEN-TO-FIGHT-5MINUTE-ROUNDS-18005>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

of technical competence.<sup>46</sup> The lone exception was Coker absolving the California State Athletic Commission of gender bias, stating that he believed their assertion that the three-minute round rule was “introduced for ‘beginning’ athletes, male, and female, to allow them to compete and gain experience.”<sup>47</sup>

There were four interviews with Baszler posted in the leadup to her fight with Kaufman. This study focuses on two of them. One of these two interviews featured Baszler talking to *MMA Weekly*.<sup>48</sup> Baszler spent most of the interview essentially marketing the bout to readers. The Queen of Spades emphasized: “I think Sarah Kaufman is a perfect return match for me . . . “She’s not a ‘gimme’ opponent, not an easy opponent, she’s one of the best in the 135 (division) . . . On top of that I think it’s great she had that fight with Miesha Tate not too long ago that was televised, because people saw how good she is and solid her game is – it will make my win that much more exciting and that much more relevant to people.”<sup>49</sup> Here, Baszler is stating just how good WMMA is beyond Cyborg and Carano, openly addressing the fact that the media coverage Kaufman-Tate received for their May 15<sup>th</sup> bout would help her promotion as the Canadian’s next opponent. Towards the end of the interview, Baszler discussed her strategy for the fight, exclaiming: “You’re going to see me really damaging when it hits the ground. Whether I’m beating the snot out of her or attacking a limb, she’s going to be all defensive when it hits the ground.”<sup>50</sup> Baszler defies emphasized femininity as she expresses pleasure at beating up another woman (in the context of sport), which fails to adhere to feminine sociability. She also brought

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> MMAWeekly.Com Staff, “BASZLER GUNS FOR KAUFMAN’S UNBEATEN STREAK,” MMAWeekly.com, June 16, 2009. <https://www.mmaweekly.com/baszler-guns-for-kaufmans-unbeaten-streak-2>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

up the concept of damage, one often contended by WMMA detractors.<sup>51</sup> Many readers argued in multiple comment sections that a primarily male audience, whether sitting in the arena or watching on television, would be repulsed by a female fighter taking visible physical damage, having been raised to believe violence against women is wrong. As such, WMMA is sometimes compared to domestic abuse, and that male fans who enjoy watching the female side of the sport get accused of being aroused by battered women.<sup>52</sup> Ironically, the comparison to domestic abuse is ripe with toxic masculinity and VMA components. It revels in Toxic Trait 1, presenting women as frail creatures in need of protection from men, as well as VMA Trait 1, as it tries to pressure fans of WMMA out of the general online MMA conversation.

Baszler's last pre-Kaufman interview came in a sit-down discussion with *MMA Fighting's* Ariel Helwani.<sup>53</sup> Once again, she used Kaufman's fight with Tate to promote her bout, articulating: "I also think that she (Kaufman) performed really well, and I'm actually really glad that she got an opportunity to be on TV and be exposed to American fans before we fought, because I think that makes this fight that much better for me. People know who she is now, whereas before, this was going to be her first really televised footage in the US of her, and when I win it, it wouldn't have been as exciting as it will be now in people's minds."<sup>54</sup> Like many of the articles surrounding the fight, this interview focused on the change of WMMA rounds from three to five-minutes. Baszler calls the move: "important to the identity of the sport."<sup>55</sup> She clarified that most combat sports fans associate five-minute rounds with MMA, just as they

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Thetakeover, August 14, 2009 (5:12 pm) Comment on Rome "Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay."

<sup>53</sup> Ariel Helwani, "Shayna Baszler: Kaufman Predictable Like a 'Video Game Character Boss'," *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, June 18, 2009. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2009/06/18/shayna-baszler-sarah-kaufman-predictable-like-a-video-game-cha>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

associate three-minute rounds with boxing. With that in mind, why should women have less time than their male counterparts when that time allotment is critical to MMA's identity? Keeping rounds shorter for women's fighters would associate their bouts in the minds of hardcore MMA fans as being lesser than a male contest.<sup>56</sup>

Helwani, like his media counterparts, also delved into the Carano-Cyborg narrative, asking: "What do you make of Strikeforce billing "Cyborg" vs. Carano as the battle between the two best female fighters in MMA?"<sup>57</sup> Baszler responded: "Pound-for-pound, I think that there are a few girls out there that should be in that lineup ahead of them. But I do think that the "Cyborg" and Gina fight is very important for women's MMA, because it's going to be very visible and they are the two most well-known fighters to the general public. So, I think that things like making weight and not making excuses about it is going to be really important. It's going to be a huge step forward or step backwards for us."<sup>58</sup> As will be shown later, Baszler echoed the sentiment many fans held, that for them to take WMMA seriously, they needed to overcome the same challenges as the men, namely, making weight. Helwani also asked: "(With Gina posing in *Maxim* and Miesha Tate in *Fight Magazine*, does posing provocatively take away from the sport?"<sup>59</sup> Baszler responded:

I think that as long they can fight -- and I think that Gina and Meisha can both fight -- I think . . . that to use it as a side note to push yourself over, it's fine. I don't like it when someone just sucks as a fighter, and they get in there because they are hot or something like that. But I think that it's fine to use that because what it's going to do is it's going to attract fans -- obviously male fans, especially -- they are going to go, 'Oh, sweet. That's that chick that was in *Maxim*? I'm totally watching her fight. Yeah!' And they will get into a fight they otherwise wouldn't have watched. And then, when they tune and see that this chick can actually throw down, then I think it opens their eyes to a lot of other things.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Baszler acknowledged both the pros and cons of emphasized femininity being allowed some presence in WMMA. On the one hand, Baszler recognized that physically attractive women would bring in the heterosexual male MMA fan to watch their fights. However, she clarified that posing for men's life and entertainment magazines should be a "side note" to promote a fighter's true passion for MMA. Being a good fighter with technical competence is her prerequisite for being allowed to do that sort of marketing. If one cannot fight, they should not use their looks to help them promote a combat sports career. Because while such promotion does attract male fans, it does nothing to convince them of WMMA's legitimacy when the women posing for magazines cannot show technical competence as fighters. It only further convinces them of the notion that women do not belong in combat sports.<sup>61</sup> A point Baszler did not mention but seemingly implied was that marketing a fighter based on looks helps that fighter, not WMMA itself. And by **Strikeforce** solely promoting Carano, not WMMA, based on the viewership brought to their product due to marketing her physical appearance, they, too, only seemed to care about the heterosexual male audience.<sup>62</sup>

Most important to the issue of Helwani's questions concerned Cyborg blaming "female problems" for failing to make weight in her **Strikeforce** fight against Hitomi Akano two months prior.<sup>63</sup> Baszler responded:

Here's the thing about that: before the fight, in her interviews and stuff, she's like, "I just want to show that women can fight just like the men." And then after the fight, she . . . says crap like that. And the thing . . . is that all of us have to deal with the same female problems. So that's a garbage excuse . . . It's a piss-poor excuse that's, like, trained in guys that when that issue is brought up, it's like, 'Ok. Cool. That excuses everything.' It gives us a reason to throw tantrums

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Gogo Platter, April 15, 2009 (9:15 am) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

for no reason, gain weight and not make it, and they don't question it. You know, like, culturally, if you know what I'm saying . . . It's like a 'get out of jail free' card.<sup>64</sup>

In the above quote, Baszler was firmly defying feminine norms. First, she calls out Cyborg for wanting to be treated like a male fighter regarding technical competence. However, she hides behind female physiology, and the emphasized feminine notion of fragility to not abide by the same rules as male fighters. Ironically, Cyborg, who probably faces the most criticism of any WMMA fighter for not appealing to the male gaze from fans and the media, used hegemonic stereotypes of femininity to argue it was permissible for her to miss weight. Second, Baszler criticized the masculine hegemony by saying it is “trained in guys . . . culturally” to excuse a woman’s behavior while she is on her period.<sup>65</sup>

Luke Thomas published a reprint of the last quote for *Bloody Elbow*, with seventeen comments left under the article. Around half of the comments agreed with Baszler, while others used it to question Cyborg’s masculine physique.<sup>66</sup> DEXERION opined: “I totally agree w/ Baszler . . . There is no way Cyborg or any other female fighter should get a pass because of this. They should adjust their weight to compensate for the worst circumstances. If that means coming into fights light, so be it. All fighters are expected to make weight. There should be ZERO excuses.”<sup>67</sup> DEXERION aligns with Jordan Breen on this issue that WMMA fighters must meet the male criteria for being allowed to fight; otherwise, female participants will not be taken as

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<sup>64</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Shayna Baszler: Kaufman Predictable Like a 'Video Game Character Boss',” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, June 18, 2009. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2009/06/18/shayna-baszler-sarah-kaufman-predictable-like-a-video-game-cha>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Luke Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, June 18, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/18/913555/quote-of-the-day-shayna-baszler>.

<sup>67</sup> DEXERION, Jun 18, 2009 (1:03pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems.”



seriously as their male counterparts.<sup>68</sup> VLAD echoed this sentiment, stating: “Props to Shayna. If I were a lady fighter, I’d be upset about stuff like that, too. It’s hard enough for her to be taken seriously as-is.”<sup>69</sup> JOHNDOE12 echoed emphasized femininity to agree with this claim, espousing: “Why take a fight if you know its gonna happen? 3rd week of every month, sorry Im booked. Its like, I know Im going to get the shits if I eat Chinese buffet, so I dont schedule a pick up basketball game right after.” He argued that women should memorize their menstrual cycles so they know when it will be hard to cut weight.<sup>70</sup> Rather than wilfully being caustic and toxic, JOHNDOE12 shows his male privilege and resulting ignorance as he seemingly does not understand how the menstrual cycle impacts female athletes. SAM CUPITT provided a more hegemonic masculine approach, thinking: “Everytime I hear this discussion I just remember back to when Gina Carano missed weight the first time and blamed it on the same thing. Maybe the event can be called, Strikeforce: Women Problem.”<sup>71</sup> SAM CUPITT categorized every WMMA fighter with Carnao and Cyborg, sounding like they expected any female participant to miss weight based on that small sample size. In doing so, he also engaged in Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 4.

At this point, the comments primarily focused on the perception of Cyborg’s lost femininity. FIATJUSTITIARUATCAELUM pondered: “What are the chances that cyborg still has her period? i’ve known a lot less masculine female athletes miss their period due to a lack of estrogen (female athlete triad) and in all seriousness i’m sure santos’s estrogen levels are as low

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<sup>68</sup> Jordan Breen, “CARANO, CONVICTION, AND HEAVYWEIGHT HYPOCRISY.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Carano-Conviction-and-Heavyweight-Hypocrisy-13044>.

<sup>69</sup> Vlad, Jun 18, 2009 (6:14pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg’s Female Problems.”

<sup>70</sup> JohnDoe12, Jun 18, 2009 (1:08pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg’s Female Problems.”

<sup>71</sup> Sam Cupitt, Jun 18, 2009 (1:33pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg’s Female Problems.”

as it gets. just look at her or listen to her talk.”<sup>72</sup> While they bring up a real medical condition female athletes face, it is doubtful this commenter cared about Cyborg’s health when he critiques her unfeminine physical appearance and masculine-sounding voice. AJB furthered this notion, positing: “Genetics, hormone levels, diet, environment – they all play a role. Hell, even something like birth control pills creates a type of ‘false menstration’, and we don’t know necessarily what kind of medications she has/is taking.”<sup>73</sup> FUZZY WUZZY emphatically responded: “She doesn’t have her periods man,” taking the conversation firmly back into the realm of emphasized feminine adherence.<sup>74</sup> FIAT and AJB avoided utilizing toxic masculine behavior; however, FUZZY WUZZY did not, as his comment reads as a joke to oppress more masculine-looking women, meaning he featured VMA Trait 4.

Finally, as usual, at least one comment turned into a sexual query, with BADB wondering: “Is it weird that I kinda want to bang Cris Cyborg?”<sup>75</sup> BADB (seriously or sarcastically) stated he found Cyborg physically attractive, which caused him to ask his commenting peers if he was straying too far from what was heteronormatively acceptable. When asked if he would have intercourse with Cyborg instead of Carano, BADB replied that no, in that case, he would pick Gina.<sup>76</sup> This discourse was filled with toxic and VMA attributes, as BADB exhibited Toxic Traits 1 and 2, reducing both Carano and Cyborg to appeal to his sexual gaze

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<sup>72</sup> FiatJustitiaRuatCaelum, Jun 18, 2009 (4:10pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems.”

<sup>73</sup> AJB, Jun 18, 2009 (7:01pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems.”

<sup>74</sup> Fuzzy wuzzy, Jun 18, 2009 (9:17pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems.”

<sup>75</sup> BadB, Jun 18, 2009 (6:53pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems.”

<sup>76</sup> BadB, Jun 18, 2009 (11:51pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg's Female Problems.”

and questioning if his attraction to Cyborg possibly made him homosexual. BADB and the commenters engaging with his initial post presented all four VMA traits.

The weigh-in article on *MMA Mania* resulted in eight comments; half focused on discussing a fan who did not know about Kaufman,<sup>77</sup> and two more focused on the male audience's desire for titillation in WMMA. APEX103 said: "Personally i love gina carano and kim couture, the two most beautifull women in the world and their fighters too, how [expletive] hot hot is that !! c'mon guys back my ass up here – who wants to be caught in a triangle by either one, when there completely naked of course : )."<sup>78</sup> Here, APEX103 is solely concerned with a female fighter's looks appealing to his sexual interests, to the point where he did not discuss either Baszler or Kaufman. As a result, he adheres to Toxic Trait 1 and all four VMA components. Relevant to the "women problems" discussion in other articles, JB wrote: "wow. both chicks made weight. Weird."<sup>79</sup> They viewed making weight as something supposedly unachievable by WMMA participants (thanks in part to the frequency of Carano and Cyborg missing weight). Rather than praise Baszler and Kaufman for doing so, he treated their accomplishment as an anomaly rather than proof that women could make weight consistently as their male counterparts, downplaying their technical competence. His comment arguably avoids being toxic, but because he sarcastically hyper-focused on Baszler and Kaufman's menstrual cycles as the primary takeaway for them making weight meets the criteria for VMA Trait 4.

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<sup>77</sup> Bryan Levick, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' weigh in results," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, June 18, 2009. <https://www.mmamania.com/2009/06/18/strikeforce-challengers-villasenor-vs-cyborg-weigh-in-results>.

<sup>78</sup> Apex103, June 18, 2009 (7:35am) Comment on Levick, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' weigh in results." Parentheses are not mine.

<sup>79</sup> JB, June 18, 2009 (2:34pm) Comment on Levick, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' weigh in results."

Shayna Baszler's sixteenth pro MMA bout took place on June 19, 2009, from the ShoWare Center in Kent, Washington, as part of **Strikeforce** Challengers: Villasenor vs. Cyborg (Evangelista Santos, aka the female Cyborg's then-husband).<sup>80</sup> The Queen of Spade's record now stood at 10-5, and Kaufman had a perfect 9-0 start to her pro career. The "Bipolar Rock n Roller" Mauro Ranallo was back doing play-by-play duties, with former **UFC** welterweight champion Pat Miletich and Stephen Quadros providing color commentary.<sup>81</sup> Ranallo, running down the card, announced: "KO queen Sarah Kaufman faces her toughest test in a submission technician, Shayna Baszler. That fight will be contested over five minutes rounds: just like the guys!"<sup>82</sup> In examining the card Baszler vs. Kaufman, listed as a "women's bout," Ranallo espoused: "The Princess of Pain, Sarah Kaufman takes on the Queen of Spades Shayna Baszler, who always stacks the deck with slick submissions."<sup>83</sup>

In the prefight video package, Baszler, in her black bandana, cornrows, spade necklace, and no makeup, at first took a more informative approach and explained both the meaning of her nickname and what training with Barnett had taught her before going into a joking wrestling promo. She stated: "I'm Shayna, the "Queen of Spades" Baszler. Like to do sleight of hand card magic, and the spades is the death card, so I'm the Queen of Spades . . . Training with Josh Barnett has taught me fighting is fun . . . I can be a rock star and be a fighter at the same time . . . In the cage, we are going to be trying to beat the snot out of each other; it's not gonna matter; I'm gonna try and cave her face in. And my prediction is win by TKO because I'm going to

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<sup>80</sup> "Strikeforce- Challengers 2," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed May 20, 2021.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/Strikeforce-Challengers-2-10201>.

<sup>81</sup> "Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villasenor vs Cyborg," June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>. Bipolar Rock N' Roller is Mauro Ranallo's self-given nickname, done to give awareness to mental health issues, with Ranallo suffering from bipolar affective disorder bbbbbb

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

handcuff her to the cage and run her through with my guitar.”<sup>84</sup> This was interspersed with shots of Baszler performing card tricks. Kaufman, by contrast, seemed to be wearing a bit of eye makeup with her corn rows. She emphasized: “Shayna . . . is fun to hang out with . . . makes it that more fun that afterwards we’re still gonna be friends and hang out and have a good time. . . I could knock her out; she could knock me out; same with submissions, it could go either way.”<sup>85</sup>

Baszler and Kaufman started the first round by exchanging punches before the former took the latter to the mat. Ranallo stated: “Baszler looks in phenomenal shape. . . Baszler’s credentials as a submission artist are definitely something to reckon with.”<sup>86</sup> Most of the round’s remaining time was spent on the mat as Baszler tried locking in submission holds. Ranallo announced: “By the way, that clock is not a mistake, counting down from five minutes,” shortly before Baszler locked in a north/south choke on Kaufman with her arm, simultaneously squeezing down on her opponent’s throat with her knee.<sup>87</sup> Eventually, Kaufman reversed into top position, throwing punches. Baszler countered with punches of her own.<sup>88</sup>

The second round began much like the first; punches exchanged between the fighters along with Muay Thai kicks. After an attempted takedown, Baszler got caught with a stiff right hand to the face, followed by Kaufman repeatedly catching her with one-two combinations. The crowd got louder and louder with each combination thrown. After one such exchange, Ranallo commented: “Baszler may be showing more courage than smarts here, wanting to get in a firefight with Kaufman.”<sup>89</sup> For the remainder of the round, Ranallo expressed confusion as to

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

why Baszler would not attempt a takedown, where arguably she would have the experience edge.<sup>90</sup>

The third round opened with Baszler attempting a takedown which Kaufman stopped, but the former wrapped all her limbs around the latter's leg. The entire time they were rolling for position on the ground, the referee kept saying: "Action!"<sup>91</sup> In MMA, to prevent lay and pray tactics, fighters are separated and brought to their feet to encourage combative exchanges.<sup>92</sup> After getting back to their feet, Kaufman scored a takedown. More striking combinations followed before Baszler attempted a knee bar. When the final bell rang, the two fighters hugged each other. During announcing the judges' score cards, Shayna was wearing a shirt that said Hitman Fight Gear with a bloody hockey mask and two blood-covered axes adorning it. The judges awarded Kaufman the unanimous decision, and in her post-fight interview, the Canadian asked the audience to give Shayna and her corner a round of applause.<sup>93</sup>

The video package before the fight showed slightly contrasting portrayals of Baszler and Kaufman. Visually, Shayna was expressing masculinity with the cornrow haircut, her black bandana tied around her head, her sleeveless top, and her steel necklace.<sup>94</sup> Also, she had no desire to fix the crooked tooth in her smile, despite it being something detractors would later heavily focus on regarding her physical appearance.<sup>95</sup> While not disrespecting Kaufman, all of Baszler's comments showed a non-social swagger to them. For example, she mentioned how

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Jordy McElroy, "MMA: The Falsities of Lay and Pray," Bleacherreport.com, Turner Broadcasting System Inc., November 2, 2010. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/507366-the-falsities-of-lay-and-pray>.

<sup>93</sup> "Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villasenor vs Cyborg," June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Wolfman13, July 28, 2012 (9:31pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28)."

the Queens of Spades is her logo/nickname because the spade (or the Ace of Spades) is culturally considered the death card.<sup>96</sup> Part of this stems from the historical rumor that U.S. forces would leave Ace of Spades cards on the bodies of dead Viet Cong soldiers.<sup>97</sup> Although the origin of her having the nickname is tied to a simple card trick, Baszler also implied it represents her as a deadly, destructive force, something not usually associated with emphasized femininity, stating remarks about how she and Kaufman would be “beating the snot out of each other” and that Baszler was going to try and “cave her (Kaufman’s) face in.” This contrasts with the feminine ideals of sociability and fragility.<sup>98</sup> These notions were further defied when Baszler ended the segment by stating she would stab Kaufman with her guitar.<sup>99</sup>

Kaufman, while also displaying cornrows, definitely presented more emphasized feminine traits. She looked like she was wearing eye makeup, was soft-spoken, and focused more on how awesome hanging out with Baszler was than discussing the actual fight. Even when asked who would win the contest, Kaufman was noncommittal, saying either could walk away victorious. This adhered to feminine sociability as Kaufman refused even to state she would emerge victorious.<sup>100</sup> Again, the simple fact she participated in the fight defied emphasized femininity, but her appearance before showed anything but.

For the most part, the commentary team kept the fight broadcast free of emphasized feminine narratives. Ranallo and Miletich kept the discussion animated and based on technical

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<sup>96</sup> “Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villasenor vs Cyborg,” June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>97</sup> Fred Childs, “Ace of Spades,” *CHARLIE COMPANY VIETNAM 1966-1972* (blog), August 31, 2018. <https://charliecompany.org/2018/08/31/ace-of-spades/>.

<sup>98</sup> “Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villasenor vs Cyborg,” June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>. Parentheses mine

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

competence. For example, Ranallo praised Baszler's technical prowess while questioning her strategy of not attempting to take the fight to the ground. They also hyped up the fact women in **Strikeforce** were now fighting five-minute rounds, such as when Ranallo emphasized: "No, that graphic is not a mistake, counting down from five minutes."<sup>101</sup> However, they fail to mention on the broadcast that Baszler's fights with **Bodogfight** were five-minute rounds.<sup>102</sup> The broadcast team claimed history was being made for something that had been common practice for years in WMMA. This omission ignores the technical competence of Baszler and Kaufman's predecessors. Overall, however, the broadcast presented Baszler-Kaufman, in terms of the ruleset, as "just like the guys." After the fight, the commentators reassured the audience that this proves women can go five-minute rounds, which goes against female fragility as women are supposedly more susceptible to physical overexertion.<sup>103</sup>

The kind of fight the bout turned into was also non-emphasized feminine when viewed from the lens of fighting styles. Outside of the first round, where Baszler attempted several submission attempts and ground transitions, most of the fifteen-minute contest was fought on the feet with strikes, primarily punches.<sup>104</sup> Returning to Hirose and Pih's work on how the MMA community tends to view submissions as the feminine or cheating way to win a fight, this contest displayed mainly the masculine or "real" way of fighting.<sup>105</sup> The announcers expressed incredulity that Baszler seemed unwilling to take the fight to the mat and wanted to "stand and bang" with Kaufman. The commentators never belittled submission-style fighting, but the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Amanda Buckner Rise to UFC," FightXtreme, September 11, 2013, video, 17:15. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU8W9N\\_1dw8&t=17s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU8W9N_1dw8&t=17s).

<sup>103</sup> Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villasenor vs Cyborg," June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Hirose, "Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit," 199-200.



combatants' insistence on trading punches and kicks downplayed the submission or stereotypically "feminine style."<sup>106</sup>

Finally, after the fight, Baszler and Kaufman were again contrasted in terms of emphasized femininity, minus the embracing after the bell. The video footage of the bout on *UFC Fight Pass* skipped over the two contestants' respective walks to the cage and their introductions by the ring announcer. What is most striking, however, is the shirt Baszler was wearing. It showed one of her sponsors, Hitman Fight Gear. During the announcement of Kaufman's unanimous decision, Baszler's shirt featured a blood-stained hockey mask, invoking the image of slasher movie icon Jason Vorhees. Behind the mask are two similarly stained axes.<sup>107</sup> As shown by her entrance in a photo from Sherdog, the back of the shirt is most defiant of emphasized feminine norms.

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<sup>106</sup> Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villasenor vs Cyborg," June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 10 Shayna Baszler walks to the cage for her June 19, 2009, bout against Sarah Kaufman.<sup>108</sup>*

On the back, along with two more axes, the shirt loudly boasts the words “KILL KILL KILL,” with blood spattered all over the letters.<sup>109</sup> This image contrasts heavily with the emphasized feminine concept of female sociability. Baszler’s clothing proclaimed she is fighting in a very violent sport,<sup>110</sup> reminiscent of a shirt she wore during her **Bodogfight** days which read: “You’ll never take me alive.”<sup>111</sup> Baszler is not stating that she would attempt to kill Kaufman but that you must get violent in fighting. And getting violent for fun is no longer just for men.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Tom Martinez, “Shayna Baszler,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed May 20, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Strikeforce-Challengers-2-10201#/slide/45>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> “Shayna Baszler vs Roxanne Modaferrri Rise to UFC,” FightXtreme, September 9, 2013, video, 3:35. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VchBwQoDp0Y>.

<sup>112</sup> Tom Martinez, “Shayna Baszler,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed May 20, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Strikeforce-Challengers-2-10201#/slide/45>.

When Baszler fought Tamai in **EliteXC**, she loudly proclaimed the promotion's women's division as hers, not sociable in the feminine sense. She did not disrespect Tamai but added cocky swagger to the post-fight discourse.<sup>113</sup> Conversely, after pummeling Baszler for most of the three rounds, Kaufman reverted to being soft-spoken, polite, and friendly. She quietly asked the audience to applaud Shayna, explained her strategy during the fight, and then said: "Thank you." By participating in the contest, Kaufman defied emphasized feminine norms and tried to regain some of her feminine credibility afterward.<sup>114</sup>

The play-by-play blows from the various MMA websites mostly seemed about the same regarding adhering to or defying emphasized feminine norms. Brent Brookhouse for *Bloody Elbow* summarized the third round: "As Baszler is working for a throw she is warned for action but Kaufman takes her down and lands a punch and stands back up. Kaufman is really working distance, closing in when she wants to land . . . It's been a really impressive performance . . . They're still going hard with a minute left, this is a clear indication that women deserve 5 minute rounds."<sup>115</sup> Brookhouse applauded Kaufman's technical competence and spoke against the myth of female fragility.

*Bloody Elbow* was the lone MMA media website to do a live stream of the fight card where fans could discuss amongst each other while watching the show; readers posted 742

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<sup>113</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Keiko Tamai 14th Fight," werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 8:59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs4M44fkpBQ&t=135s>.

<sup>114</sup> "Strikeforce: Challengers 2: Villaseñor vs Cyborg," June 19, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce video, 1:20:20, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31461/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>. This was Kaufman's tenth pro fight.

<sup>115</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Strikeforce Challengers: Villaseñor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Mandatory, June 19, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/19/918972/shomma-strikeforce-challengers>.

comments during the event.<sup>116</sup> Nearly 190 of them focused on the Baszler-Kaufman fight; however, the vast majority of the posts either criticized the broadcast team (namely Mauro Ranallo) for being annoying<sup>117</sup> or admonishing the referee for constantly breaking up the fight due to “lack of action.”<sup>118</sup> Most comments praised Baszler and Kaufman during the prefight promo package, such as CANNON JACQUES remarking: “I like her (Baszler’s) submission game, and she seems pretty cool in interviews.”<sup>119</sup> Many comments focused on the fight rather than the fighters failing to adhere to emphasized feminine norms.<sup>120</sup> However, such posts were by no means absent from the live stream, including writers for the website. Brent Brookhouse, the stream’s moderator, joked: “Two ladies who not only made weight but came in a little light...guess we just got lucky in terms of scheduling.”<sup>121</sup> Brookhouse essentially made a menstrual cycle or “women problems” joke, calling into question the technical competence and formidability of WMMA fighters.<sup>122</sup> This attempt at humor skirts the line of Toxic Trait 1 while fully engaging in VMA Trait 4. Mike Fagan, another *Bloody Elbow* staff writer, stated he regretted betting on Baszler because she carried a guitar during her entrance, i.e., too much

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<sup>116</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Mandatory, June 19, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/19/918972/shomma-strikeforce-challengers>.

<sup>117</sup> Riney, June 19, 2009 (11:20pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>118</sup> Brent Brookhouse, June 19, 2009 (11:32pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>119</sup> Cannon Jacques, June 19, 2009 (11:20pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>120</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Mandatory, June 19, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/19/918972/shomma-strikeforce-challengers>.

<sup>121</sup> Brent Brookhouse, June 19, 2009 (11:24pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>122</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Shayna Baszler: Kaufman Predictable Like a 'Video Game Character Boss',” *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, June 18, 2009. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2009/06/18/shayna-baszler-sarah-kaufman-predictable-like-a-video-game-cha>.

showmanship and not enough feminine sociability.<sup>123</sup> He also remarked: “Those cornrows are nasty looking.”

Replying to Fagan, REALIRISH labeled Baszler and Kaufman: “Paper bag job(s),” a term which essentially describes a woman a male is willing to have sex with but finds her face ugly.<sup>124</sup> He was engaging in several toxic masculine and VMA attributes, precisely Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 4. Fagan also made a sexual joke regarding the referee’s constant calls for action, saying the official likely gets sexually aroused ordering around women.<sup>125</sup> P BRADY responded: “Must be married.”<sup>126</sup> In just three words, P BRADY managed to involve Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 4, as he insinuates that all married women do is order their husbands around, hence why a male would get enjoyment from bossing around females for a change. When Baszler locked in the north/south choke on Kaufman in the first round, PATRICK79X announced: “And the crowd goes wild for the 69.” This pronouncement involved Toxic Traits 1 and 2 along with VMA Traits 2 and 4, insinuating that a regular move in MMA must be a lesbian sexual act in WMMA.<sup>127</sup>

Some even doubted that WMMA participants could make it through one five-minute round, let alone three. REALIRISH pondered: “Anyone think they will make it the whole five mins without looking wrecked??”<sup>128</sup> However, Baszler and Kaufman had supporters in the

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<sup>123</sup> Mike Fagan, June 19, 2009 (11:19pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>124</sup> ReallIrish, June 19, 2009 (11:23pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>125</sup> Mike Fagan, June 19, 2009 (11:30pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>126</sup> P Brady, June 19, 2009 (11:31pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>127</sup> Patrick79x, June 19, 2009 (11:27pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>128</sup> ReallIrish, June 19, 2009 (11:30pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

comment section. When NITRO asked: “Am I the only one who cant stand womens mma?”<sup>129</sup> four different screen names chastised them, stating that he was the only one.<sup>130</sup> For example, MYFISTYOURFACE responded: “Nothing wrong w/women’s MMA. It is sometimes sloppy but usually exciting.”<sup>131</sup> When another commentator asked why the fighters were “stood up” by the official,<sup>132</sup> TONLEY sarcastically stated: “Because their poor fragile women lungs were going to explode,” a rare example during this period of a fan mocking hegemonic masculinity’s fixation on female fragility.<sup>133</sup> Finally, MYTHBUSTER concluded: “And this answers the question about whether women can handle 5 minute rounds. At the end of round 2, they looked a lot fresher than many male fighters.”<sup>134</sup> For as many posters arguing WMMA lacked technical competence, there were more stating that the opposite was true.

The MMA media’s portrayal of the fight the following day, for the most part, defied emphasized feminine norms. *MMA Mania*’s recap provided by Jesse Holland only gave a handful of sentences to each of the main card fights, with a single line given to Kaufman and Baszler.<sup>135</sup> *MMA Fighting*’s Michael David Smith gave readers more detail: “Sarah Kaufman showed off very impressive striking to beat Shayna Baszler by unanimous decision. The win improved Kaufman's record to 10-0, and although she's smaller than Strikeforce's top two female

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<sup>129</sup> Nitro, June 19, 2009 (11:22pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>130</sup> RoyalB, June 19, 2009 (11:23pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>131</sup> MyFistYourFace, June 19, 2009 (11:24pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>132</sup> A tommy point, June 19, 2009 (11:29pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>133</sup> Tonley, June 19, 2009 (11:30pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>134</sup> Mythbuster, June 19, 2009 (11:39pm), Comment on Brookhouse, “Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary.”

<sup>135</sup> Jesse Holland, “Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' results and quick recap,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, June 20, 2009. <https://www.mmamania.com/2009/06/20/strikeforce-challengers-villasenor-vs-cyborg-results-and-quick-recap>.

stars, the next step in Kaufman's career might be to move up in weight and take on the winner of the August 15 Gina Carano-Cris Cyborg fight.” He gave Baszler-Kaufman the same amount of text space in the article as the other main card fights.<sup>136</sup>

Mike Whitman for *Sherdog* gave a solid paragraph covering each main card bout.

Baszler-Kaufman was no exception. Whitman wrote: “Fighting in spite of a large mouse over her right eye, Kaufman was able to dictate the pace of the second round, landing straight shots to Baszler’s mug and peppering her left thigh with leg kicks. In round three, a bloodied Baszler tried to take the fight to the mat, but each time Kaufman landed in top position and stood up.”<sup>137</sup>

Whitman’s recap focused on the violence of the fight and the physical damage left on each of the combatants and yet is not decrying this apparent failure to adhere to the emphasized feminine norm of female fragility. Mug is a term used to describe the face of a male boxer, so it was interesting to see it applied to Baszler’s face. In addition, he portrayed Kaufman as fighting through the eye injury, again questioning the concept of female fragility. In contrast, Dave Meltzer only focused on the five-minute rounds aspect<sup>138</sup> and how the winner would face the victor of Carano-Cyborg.<sup>139</sup> In his mind, WMMA only mattered if the fight involved one of the latter two combatants.

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<sup>136</sup> Michael David Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Villasenor, Rockhold, Kaufman, Gurgel, Kennedy Win,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, June 19, 2009. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2009/06/19/strikeforce-results-villasenor-rockhold-kaufman-gurgel-kenn>.

<sup>137</sup> Mike Whitman, “VILLASENOR TAKES SPLIT NOD OVER ‘CYBORG’,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 20, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Villasenor-Takes-Split-Nod-Over-Cyborg-18085>.

<sup>138</sup> Dave Meltzer “MISAWA TRAGIC DEATH, UFC 99, TRUMP ANGLE, TRIPLEMANIA, SYLVIA,” f4wonline.com, June 22, 2009. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/june-22-2009-observer-newsletter-misawa-tragic-death-ufc-99-trump>.

<sup>139</sup> Dave Meltzer, “JULY 1, 2009 OBSERVER NEWSLETTER: PART II OF MISAWA BIO, BIG MATCH HISTORY, NEWS UPDATES ON TNA, WWE,” f4wonline.com, July 1, 2009. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/july-1-2009-observer-newsletter-part-ii-misawa-bio-big-match-history>.

Readers posted twenty comments to Holland's *MMA Mania* recap, a mixed bag of admiring or decrying Baszler-Kaufman.<sup>140</sup> NAMENOTREQUIRED praised the latter's technical competence, opining: "Sarah Kaufman – there's some technical striking. She showed good footwork, combos, head movement, measured pressure – just absolute brilliance. Can't wait until she finds her accuracy."<sup>141</sup> DUSTYGINA, by contrast, felt neither was a good fighter, seemingly based solely on the fact they were women, declaring: "OMG that girl fight was so dumb!! I could have beat those 2 girls up!"<sup>142</sup> DUSTYGINA featured the first and third Toxic Traits, devaluing their technical competence excessively and bragging that he could beat up two women. HELLAHECTIC took offense to DUSTYGINA's comments, espousing: "dgina sarah Kauffman would rip out your spinal cord and rnc you with it . . . it was the first time seeing a womens match with 5 minute rounds and they didnt disappoint . . . im glad theyve decided to do that for the women."<sup>143</sup> HELLAHECTIC credited Kaufman for her technical competence while defying female fragility with his suggestion that she rip out DUSTYGINA's spinal column with her bare hands. Like D.E.O earlier in the chapter, he believed that WMMA had plenty of talented fighters amongst its ranks and countered emphasized feminine notions in the process. Unlike D.E.O, he directly targeted a specific hegemonic male commenter, standing as a voice of support for WMMA, protecting the sport from toxic fans.

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<sup>140</sup> Jesse Holland, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' results and quick recap," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, June 20, 2009. <https://www.mmamania.com/2009/06/20/strikeforce-challengers-villasenor-vs-cyborg-results-and-quick-recap>.

<sup>141</sup> NameNotRequired, June 20, 2009 (5:52pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' results and quick recap."

<sup>142</sup> DustyGina, June 20, 2009 (9:56am) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' results and quick recap."

<sup>143</sup> HellaHectic, June 20, 2009 (11:09pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' results and quick recap." RNC is shorthand for Rear naked choke.



Two articles posted to *Bloody Elbow* post-fight involved Baszler-Kaufman. The first, entitled Snapshot of the Day, was published the day after the fight:



Figure 11 Sarah Kaufman shows off her battle scars following her fight against Shayna Baszler, June 20, 2009.<sup>144</sup>

The fact that *Bloody Elbow* and Showtime showed how a woman looked in the aftermath of a fight, without referencing emphasized feminine norms, clearly defied them. There is no criticism about how unnatural this was to see a woman with her eye puffed out, swollen, and bruised or that women did not belong in combat sports.<sup>145</sup> In fact, of the nine attached user comments, all but one focused on the fight itself rather than the photograph.<sup>146</sup> MYTHBUSTER stated: “Kudos to both for a fine performance and proving that their gender is capable of lasting five minutes. I expect all womens MMA to be 5 minute rounds now.”<sup>147</sup> E. SPENCER KYTE commented on the photo: “That’s the look of a winner right there! Congratulations Sarah.”<sup>148</sup> SPLITBREAST, complaining that the **Strikeforce** commentary team was overhyping Kaufman’s

<sup>144</sup> Esther Lin, “Snapshot of the Day: Sarah Kaufman,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, June 20, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/20/919729/snapshot-of-the-day-sarah-kaufman>.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Mythbuster, June 20, 2009 (5:01pm) Comment on Thomas, “Snapshot of the Day: Sarah Kaufman.”

<sup>148</sup> E. Spencer Kyte, June 20, 2009 (5:58pm) Comment on Thomas, “Snapshot of the Day: Sarah Kaufman.”

striking, argued: “They don’t have to repeat that she is an elite striker over and over for 2 consecutive fights when she has nothing.”<sup>149</sup> Outside of SPLITBREAST, the comments were pro-WMMA and did not promote emphasized femininity.

The second article, covering the week of June 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, highlighted interesting quotes either spoken, written, or tweeted by figures in the world of MMA. Staff writer Mike Fagan gave his opinions on them.<sup>150</sup> Fagan included in this analysis Shayna Baszler’s statement to Ariel Helwani criticizing Cyborg for using her menstrual cycle as an excuse for missing weight in her April bout against Hitomi Akano. Fagan, firmly complying with hegemonic masculine norms, labeled this article section: “How to Make Enemies with Estrogen.”<sup>151</sup> Specifically, he highlighted two of Baszler’s remarks: ““It gives us a reason to throw tantrums for no reason, gain weight and not make it, and they (men) don't question it,”” and ““It's like a 'get out of jail free' card.”<sup>152</sup>

In response to the first statement, Fagan replied: “Well, I wouldn't say we don't question it. I've never seen anything push otherwise reasonable-minded females into temporary bouts of insanity than having men blame their behavior on their period. Young men out there, don't make this mistake.”<sup>153</sup> The author perpetuates a misogynistic notion playing into the emphasized feminine attribute of fragility. He asserts that whenever a woman allegedly gets unreasonably angry at or unfairly disagrees with someone, they must be on their period.<sup>154</sup> Fagan also suggested the mistake men make in doing so is not in thinking the period is causing the dispute

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<sup>149</sup> SplitBreast, June 20, 2009 (8:20pm) Comment on Thomas, “Snapshot of the Day: Sarah Kaufman.”

<sup>150</sup> Mike Fagan, “The Week in Quotes: June 14th - 20<sup>th</sup>,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, June 21, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/21/920274/the-week-in-quotes-june-14th-20th>.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ravji Desai, “PMS-ing May Be a Sexist Stereotype, but It’s Also a Real Thing,” theswaddle.com, Swaddle Projects, March 12, 2020. <https://theswaddle.com/pms-ing-may-be-a-sexist-stereotype-but-its-also-a-real-thing/>.

but in saying so out loud to the woman/women in question. Labeling the alleged moods brought on by having their menstrual cycles brought up during a disagreement as “temporary bouts of insanity,” women are further reduced in terms of suspected biological female fragility. To the ‘get out jail free card,’ Fagan surmised, “and it regenerates every month. Jealous!”<sup>155</sup> Here, Fagan implies that most women enjoy having this monthly excuse and deliberately use it to their advantage. The entire premise of his article (along with its misogynistic title) exemplified Toxic Trait 1, devaluing what going through a menstrual cycle entails while featuring numerous examples of VMA Traits 2 and 4. In the parts of the quote the author left out, Baszler posits that most men get culturally taught to accept this excuse and that just one WMMA fighter using “female problems” to downplay missing weight makes it harder for all WMMA fighters to be taken seriously.<sup>156</sup>

Outside of the recap articles, which focused on the complete **Strikeforce** card, most post-fight writings discussing Baszler-Kaufman concentrated on five-minute rounds for women. For instance, Loretta Hunt, mentioned in Chapter 3 for giving Gina Carano excuses for not making weight,<sup>157</sup> does the exact opposite in terms of where she stands on emphasized femininity in her two op-ed pieces written for *Sherdog*.<sup>158</sup> The first, “Killing Me Softly,” hyperbolized what five-minute rounds for WMMA meant for the sport.<sup>159</sup> Hunt wrote the same evening as the fight, “God bless five-minute rounds. What a pleasure it was to watch Shayna Baszler and Sarah

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<sup>155</sup> Mike Fagan, “The Week in Quotes: June 14th - 20<sup>th</sup>,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, June 21, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/21/920274/the-week-in-quotes-june-14th-20th>.

<sup>156</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Shayna Baszler: Kaufman Predictable Like a 'Video Game Character Boss',” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, June 18, 2009. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2009/06/18/shayna-baszler-sarah-kaufman-predictable-like-a-video-game-cha>.

<sup>157</sup> Loretta Hunt, “MISS CONGENIALITY,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, May 28, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Miss-Congeniality-12931>.

<sup>158</sup> Loretta Hunt, “Killing Me Softly,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 19, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/blog/Killing-Me-Softly-18081>.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

Kaufman both enjoy the upper hand for a time in their 15-minute tryst. Those extra six minutes allowed an intriguing story to unfold between the pin-point accurate striker and inventive grappler — one that would likely have been stilted by the previously abbreviated rounds. The bout also silenced any doubts that women aren't capable of performing in the same time frame allotted the men."<sup>160</sup> After giving a three-sentence summation of the bout's back-and-forth nature, Hunt concluded: "I watched the first all-female card in the U.S. in 2002, and I noted that the softer side of the sport was at least five years behind its male counterpart. I don't think that anymore. Watching tonight, I saw two distinct personalities and combative styles emerge — and, just like with the men, that's what will keep fans coming back."<sup>161</sup> She openly questioned the notion of female fragility, arguing that it allowed fans to become more invested in a WMMA fight due to it being longer. Holding female fighters to the same endurance standards as the men would only help draw fans to WMMA, not drive them away, because it gave women more time to display their technical competence and physical fitness.<sup>162</sup>

Her second, a piece penned on June 24, told the history of women's five-minute rounds from many perspectives.<sup>163</sup> Hunt's main interviewees were Gina Carano, Sarah Kaufman, Scott Coker, New Jersey State Athletic Commission's deputy attorney general Nick Lembo, California State Athletic Commission's assistant executive officer Bill Douglas, and New Jersey/New York ringside physician Sherry Wulkan, respectively.<sup>164</sup> Hunt repeatedly straddles the line in the article between criticizing the emphasized feminine notions of fragility imposed on WMMA and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Loretta Hunt, "Separate but Not Equals?" Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 24, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Separate-But-Not-Equals-18160>

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

being okay with women fighters not trying to fight against these notions, namely Gina Carano.<sup>165</sup> She quoted the former Maxim cover girl, who stated: “I shy away from the whole discrimination thing, just because I feel things need to progress and we should be thankful but at the same time try and push for those five-minute rounds . . . It’s baby steps. I’m one for closing my mouth and working hard.”<sup>166</sup> Carano’s statement contradicts itself in two sentences. Saying she shies away from “The whole discrimination thing,” implies Carano did not want to get involved with advocating for five-minute rounds. However, Carano’s notion, “we should be thankful but . . . try to push for those five-minute rounds” implies she expects the rest of WMMA to advocate for a cause she refuses to support. She wanted the benefits of defying emphasized femininity without fighting it herself.<sup>167</sup>

Scott Coker gave similar reasoning as Carano. The **Strikeforce** CEO recalls how, in 2006, when Gina Carano-Elania Maxwell marked the promotion’s first-ever WMMA bout, CSAC imposed a two-minute round time limit. CSAC’s then-CEO Armando Garcia told Coker, “That’s just the way it is,” when he asked Garcia about the gendered time differential. According to Hunt, Coker “didn’t want to rock the boat” as this was only the fourth time **Strikeforce** worked with the California agency. Through Coker’s silence, he became complicit in hegemonic masculinity, thus perpetuating female fragility.<sup>168</sup> Hunt pointed out how inaccurate **Strikeforce**’s pre-Baszler-Kaufman press release was, which told readers: “Until now, three-minute rounds were the norm for most female fights in the United States.”<sup>169</sup> Hunt countered with: “That statement was misleading, as numerous states have and still allow five-minute

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

rounds for its female MMA competitors, including Washington . . . And contrary to public perception, five-minute rounds are nothing new.”<sup>170</sup> Nick Lembo further emphasized: “The unified rules passed in New Jersey in 2001 never called for lesser round times or a lesser number of rounds for female mixed martial arts contestants. New Jersey made no distinction between male and female participants.”<sup>171</sup> Lembo also clarified that a WMMA bout was only allotted less time if the promotion asked to shorten them. He further opined: “There is absolutely no reason why female MMA fighters should not be able to fight five-minute rounds . . . There’s no plausible argument available that I’ve ever heard of why they should not.”<sup>172</sup> Lembo does not believe in the emphasized feminine tenet of female fragility.

Sherry Wulkan underscored this point of view. From her credentials as having served over hundreds of MMA matches as a trained medical professional, she reasoned: “From a cardiovascular and physiological point of view, there’s no reason why a woman wouldn’t have enough stamina to do a five-minute round at all.”<sup>173</sup> In defense of CSAC’s 2006 position, Bill Douglas emailed Hunt, clarifying: “Three-minute rounds were introduced for ‘beginning’ athletes, male and female, to allow them to compete and gain experience.”<sup>174</sup> However, Hunt countered that perspective, emphatically stating: “While the practice might have been born from the best intentions, it has created confusion in the sport. Numerous female athletes have fought in California under three-minute rounds, regardless of the fact that they have established records that hardly classify them as ‘beginners.’ And that has perpetuated a stance that women fighters are in some way less equipped to handle MMA’s battlefield than the men.”<sup>175</sup> Hunt attacked the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

cultural belief of female fragility embedded in California's 2006 rulebook, pointing out the state held men and women to different standards of what classified a fighter as a beginner. Kaufman argued: "that when specific promotions request three-minute rounds, it sends out the wrong message . . . From that point, it's looking more like you're trying to push forward a particular fighter or a particular style, as opposed to promoting all females that put on good fights."<sup>176</sup> Like Wulkan and Lembo, Kaufman called out the inaccurate fallacy of female fragility. However, Hunt fails to note the irony that Kaufman underscored- how it seems like **Strikeforce** was trying to push forward a particular fighter, likely Gina Carano, who Hunt refused to criticize. Despite the Carano favoritism, Hunt got her point across that WMMA practitioners should fight the same amount of time as their male counterparts and that the sport's history had shown they could do this well before Baszler-Kaufman.<sup>177</sup>

There was also a *Sherdog* article entitled "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," the name of a monthly segment where staff writers ranked key moments in MMA over the previous month.<sup>178</sup> For the June 2009 edition, one of the moments under the "good category" was entitled: "Fifteen Minutes for Females." The anonymous author stated: "Strikeforce CEO Scott Coker knew it, as did fighters and hardcore fans: women can fight for 15 minutes -- or more. Gina Carano's stock skyrocketed and with it went the popularity of female MMA. Bantamweight Sarah Kaufman scored a decision victory against Miesha Tate in a bout contested over three three-minute rounds at ShoMMA . . . The non-stop action the match featured served as a tipping point. At the second ShoMMA installment just a month later, Strikeforce featured female MMA's first major 15-minute match between Kaufman and Shayna Baszler. The unbeaten Kaufman again won by

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> MONTH IN REVIEW: JUNE'S GOOD, BAD AND UGLY," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, June 30, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Month-in-Review-Junes-Good-Bad-and-Ugly-18252/>.

unanimous decision.”<sup>179</sup> The article is a decidedly simplistic history of how WMMA had changed and evolved because of and despite Gina Carano. It simply focused on her being a pioneer and that it was only a matter of time before women earned five-minute rounds. It further simplified by implying that Carano and the Kaufman-Tate fight were the only reasons WMMA achieved five-minute rounds. The article overall avoids hegemonic masculine behavior because the author stated that five-minute rounds are what WMMA deserves. However, it promotes the emphasized feminine narrative of the sole face of the sport, as arguably, the writer could have penned this piece without mentioning Carano once.<sup>180</sup>

On June 22, an orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Johnny Benjamin, wrote an article for *MMA Junkie* regarding five-minute rounds in WMMA. Benjamin frames the debate by asking this question of himself: “Doc, why do you hate women’s MMA and are against five-minute rounds?”<sup>181</sup> By appearing defensive while implying a broad generalization of those not sharing his views, Benjamin seemed to be trying to portray his detractors as unfair, directing the narrative of this “debate.” Benjamin elaborated:

So when I say that I am not a fan of WMMA, I’m just being honest and not a woman-hater. I will await Gina Carano vs. Cris “Cyborg” Santos with great anticipation, but most any other contest that doesn’t include one of those two athletes hardly piques my interest. A true fan is someone who follows the sport . . . with regularity and genuine interest and not for sexual gratification. Most of the comments regarding WMMA pertain to physical appearance or sexual innuendo, not talent level. These are true fans? Remember when Carano had to strip to weigh in? I rest my case.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Dr. Johnny Benjamin, “Ask the Doc: Why is Dr. Benjamin against five-minute rounds in women's MMA?,” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 22, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/06/ask-the-doc-why-is-dr-benjamin-against-five-minute-rounds-in-womens-mma>. Dr. Benjamin was sentenced to life in prison in the summer of 2018 for writing opioid prescriptions for drug dealers, which resulted in a woman overdosing.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.



At first glance, this seems to be against emphasized feminine norms in WMMA. Benjamin criticized much of the then-current discourse by fans shown towards WMMA. As seen in this study, many online comments on MMA news articles were either about wanting sex with female fighters or criticizing fighters' physical appearances. However, one can argue that Dr. Benjamin is doing the reverse. He seemed to imply that there are no true fans of WMMA, only those who do not say anything and those who disregard it with dismissive sexual terminology.<sup>183</sup> In doing so, he severely downplays women's technical competence. Benjamin's referral to Carano having to strip to weigh-in arguably portrays the incident out of context.<sup>184</sup> Carano had to strip during the weigh-in before her October 2008 fight against Kelly Kobold because she had missed weight. In most MMA promotions, fighters, regardless of gender, will take to the scale with their clothes off, with a towel held to cover them, in a last-ditch attempt to make the weight limit.<sup>185</sup> Johnny Hendricks<sup>186</sup> and Khabib Nurgamedov are two male **UFC** fighters who stripped to make weight.<sup>187</sup> For those fans watching the Carano-Kobold weigh-in, Carano stripping down undoubtedly titillated many men's desires. Still, there was a non-emphasized feminine reason for doing so: to make weight and not forfeit her share of the fight purse. Dr. Benjamin could refer to all the hegemonic masculine comments in articles about strip weigh-ins. However, as his other

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Jesse Holland, Cynthia Calvillo calls out 'Karate Hottie,' blames Peeping Toms for weigh-in debacle," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 19, 2018, <https://www.mmamania.com/2018/11/19/18102269/cynthia-calvillo-calls-out-karate-hottie-blames-topless-show-weigh-in-debacle-mma>.

<sup>186</sup> Andrew Pearson, "Midnight Mania! Johnny Hendricks goes on bizarre rant at media before making weight- "No negative!," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 4, 2017. <https://www.mmamania.com/2017/11/4/16605566/midnight-mania-johny-hendricks-goes-on-bizarre-rant-at-media-before-making-weight-no-negative>.

<sup>187</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "UFC 254 weigh-in results: Khabib needs the towel, but makes weight for title fight," MMAjunkie.usatoday, USA Today, October 23, 2020. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2020/10/ufc-254-khabib-nurgamedov-justin-gaethje-weigh-in-results-video-stream>.

statements show, contradicting himself is common in his writing.<sup>188</sup> His reducing the appeal of WMMA outside of Carano/Cyborg to fans as having to be sexual devalues female fighters, heavily engaging with Toxic Trait 1.

Dr. Benjamin further opined: “American society’s tolerance of women in direct combat (be it military or sport) continues to be a sensitive matter. Women being injured and/or significantly bloodied during televised MMA participation due to excessive fatigue . . . may be a spectacle that crosses the line for many. Just how many may determine the fate of WMMA.”<sup>189</sup> Here, Dr. Benjamin again mentions a hegemonic masculine view of femininity, specifically regarding alleged female fragility. He attempted to shift blame from himself by labeling it “American society’s tolerance,” one that might view WMMA as “a spectacle that crosses the line,” not that he necessarily views the sport that way.<sup>190</sup>

Benjamin also delved into his alleged medical reasons for being against MMA time equity, espousing: “I am not a fan of five-minute rounds for WMMA because studies have suggested that the likelihood for injury significantly increases as athletes (male or female) tire, especially with contact and combat athletes. In most of the WMMA contests that I have watched, fatigue becomes a major factor with the current three-minute rounds. Five-minute rounds may be acceptable for the elite competitors. But to increase the potential duration of three-round fights by 67 percent and five-round fights by 178 percent across the board may be jeopardizing fighters’ safety.”<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Dr. Johnny Benjamin, “Ask the Doc: Why is Dr. Benjamin against five-minute rounds in women's MMA?,” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 22, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/06/ask-the-doc-why-is-dr-benjamin-against-five-minute-rounds-in-womens-mma>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

This paragraph promotes emphasized feminine norms in technical competence and female fragility. First, the studies Benjamin mentioned, according to his statement, showed a significant increase in the likelihood of injury for both male and female athletes as they tire. However, Benjamin did not advocate for reducing time for male fighters, while conversely saying that increasing the fight time for WMMA “may be jeopardizing fighter safety.”<sup>192</sup> As such, looking to keep women’s fights at three minutes while not advocating to reduce male bouts from five minutes suggests he was worried about female fragility. Second, relative to this same duality, he stated that five-minute rounds are satisfactory for the elite competitors in the sport.<sup>193</sup> Because he is solely requesting that WMMA have shorter rounds, Benjamin either suggests that all male fighters, regardless of skill, are elite competitors or there are next to no elite female fighters, all of which question female technical competence.

Benjamin then shifts precisely to the upcoming Carano-Cyborg fight: “With a vote soon to occur on the floor of the New York Assembly, I would hate to hear the critics if this fight has a mishap.”<sup>194</sup> He was referring to the ongoing legal battle to get the sport of MMA officially sanctioned in New York state, which had reached a vote in the state legislature in 2009.<sup>195</sup> He argued that if Carano or Cyborg was severely injured/bloodied in their title bout, it could destroy MMA’s chances of becoming legalized in arguably America’s biggest sporting market. Benjamin forgot this was not supposed to be a discussion about legalizing MMA in a specific state. His thesis statement, supposedly based on his expertise as a medical professional, was to clarify why he felt women should not fight more than three minutes per round. Referring to the New York State Assembly was not relevant. Second, Benjamin heavily implied that advocates

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

for WMMA were selfish in arguing for five-minute rounds. If either Carano or Cyborg received severe injuries in their August fight, it could cost fighters of both genders the lucrative New York MMA market. Benjamin insinuated “natural” female fragility would be to blame.<sup>196</sup>

Benjamin also made a questionable claim, stating: “In smaller local and regional promotions, where cash is always tight and fighters have limited experience, a trend to significantly increase the duration of WMMA contests may create the potential for excessive fatigue and subsequent injury . . . The promoter and not necessarily the commission may choose to increase the duration of a fight.”<sup>197</sup> According to Hunt’s article cited above, the only times the New Jersey Commission decreased round lengths for women’s fights were when the promotions asked them to. The commission’s rulebook dictated no difference between genders regarding the time allotted. California did indeed differentiate between the genders, but it was the commission’s decision, rendering Benjamin’s scenario a “strawman situation.”<sup>198</sup> Why? Because in states where MMA was regulated by state athletic commissions, as implied by Hunt’s article, the commission set a maximum limit for the time limit of rounds, not the promotion. The commission would have first to approve the request for increased time; otherwise, the organization could not proceed.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, Benjamin’s scenario was improbable and illegal if such instances occurred, perpetuating the emphasized feminine myth of biological female fragility.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Loretta Hunt, “Separate but Not Equals?” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 24, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Separate-But-Not-Equals-18160>.

<sup>199</sup> Dr. Johnny Benjamin, “Ask the Doc: Why is Dr. Benjamin against five-minute rounds in women's MMA?,” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 22, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/06/ask-the-doc-why-is-dr-benjamin-against-five-minute-rounds-in-womens-mma>.

Despite a deceiving first glance, Dr. Benjamin supported emphasized feminine norms in WMMA, specifically regarding female fragility. On many occasions, while discussing physical dangers that he admits apply to both men and women, he only criticizes women fighting five-minute rounds. Also, the fact that he puts the blame entirely on women's shoulders if MMA remains barred in New York because his ideal society looks down upon women, even in an athletic setting, inflicting physical damage to one another, is misogynistic.<sup>200</sup>

An *MMA Underground* thread featured comments discussing Dr. Benjamin's article, many surprisingly censoring the orthopedic surgeon for his apparent sexist views. Like D.E.O. and HELLAHECTIC previous to them, these commenters directly combated what they saw as a toxic masculine perspective from an MMA media member. WHATHAPPENED remarked: "The good doctor just lacks the proper perspective. Put him in a cage with erin toughhill for 25 mintues."<sup>201</sup> KIRIK posted how many of Dr. Benjamin's points were highlighted for the longest time by physicians and the male athletic culture to prevent women from long-distance competitive running, citing the case of Katherine Switzer, who ran in the 1967 Boston marathon.<sup>202</sup> KIRIK also compared Benjamin's statements to a quote from the movie, *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, which parodied sexist remarks about women having smaller brains than men.<sup>203</sup> KEITHKIZER mentioned how women's boxing still tries to lobby for rounds longer than three minutes.<sup>204</sup> MAD\_XYIENTIST was the only commentator to cite

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Whathappened, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women," <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>202</sup> Kirik, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women," <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. The line from *Ron Burgundy* was: "I'm a man who discovered the wheel and built the Eiffel Tower out of metal and brawn. That's what kind of man I am. You're just a woman with a small brain. With a brain a third the size of us. It's science."

<sup>204</sup> KeithKizer, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women," <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

Baszler-Kaufman, stating: “I think Sarah Kaufman and Shayna Baszler helped their own cause by putting on a great 15 minute fight this last week.”

MELISSA, a rare female forum member, opined: “What the hell kind of BS is he spewing saying women in MMA have had trouble with cardio going 3 min rounds ?”<sup>205</sup> CRAZY ZIMMERMAN posited: “I guess he keeps his women in the kitchen barefoot and pregnant so they won’t develop carido.”<sup>206</sup> MISEDUKATD joked: “The problem with 5 minute rounds in female MMA is that their tops start chafing their skin. I think there is a solution to this problem that doesn’t involve 3-minute rounds. Seriously, though, the guy is a cretin.”<sup>207</sup> While MISEDUKATD agrees that Dr. Benjamin is sexist, he still finds it acceptable to sarcastically argue for women to fight with their breasts exposed, appealing to the male gaze, invoking VMA Traits 2 and 4. TOMATO CAN stated: “The whole thing is BS on face value. The very same ‘fatigue’ reasoning he uses could be applied to men’s MMA, but he doesn’t take it in that direction for reasons he never quite articulates.”<sup>208</sup>

However, there were also calls for emphasized femininity in WMMA or for women not to participate, namely from two posters. SQUARED CIRCLE complained: “Women’s MMA shouldn’t go on for five rounds because it wastes time on the show. Those extra rounds are 2/3 of men’s fight that could have been broadcast. I advocate for a move to one round for women’s

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<sup>205</sup> Melissa, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>206</sup> Crazy Zimmerman, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>207</sup> Misedukatd, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>208</sup> Tomato Can, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

MMA.”<sup>209</sup> He later compares WMMA fighters to be delicate like porcelain dolls<sup>210</sup> and refers to Cyborg as “that dude that fought the pretty girl from Maxim.”<sup>211</sup> SQUARED CIRCLE utilizes Toxic Trait 1 and features VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4. These comments clearly show the commenter thinks WMMA fighters have little technical competence, that he believes in the myth of female fragility, and enjoys women only when they appeal to the male gaze. CHARLIE GORDON echoed: “Women fighting is stupid. Beauty contests, porn and all that stuff is great but lets face it. Who fucking cares? The only reason Gina is popular is because she’s still attractive.”<sup>212</sup> Like SQUARED CIRCLE, he doubts women can be technically competent in MMA and that women instead belong in beauty pageants and porn, two industries that heavily utilize the male gaze. He fully engages in Toxic Trait 1 while adhering to VMA Traits 1 and 2. In some places, such as this forum thread, these views were a loud minority. In others, they were held by a just as loud majority.

There was only one post-Kaufman fight interview with Shayna Baszler that I could find on the major MMA sites, and it was a second-hand account of the interview. *Blog Talk Radio* interviewed Baszler and Kaufman, and an anonymous writer working for *Fighter Girls* recounted the podcast’s highlights. First, the interview defies emphasized feminine norms as Kaufman and Baszler were highly detailed in their respective game plans going into and during the bout, again underscoring technical competence.<sup>213</sup> Baszler discussed her third-round strategy, commenting: “I wasn’t tired in the way that you’d think. I was tired of being punched in the face

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<sup>209</sup> Squared Circle, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Charlie Gordon, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

<sup>213</sup> Fighter Girls, “Post Fight Analysis: Baszler and Kaufman Weigh-in,” *Fightergirls.com*, July 15, 2009. <https://www.fightergirls.com/post-fight-analysis-baszler-and-kaufman-weigh-in-marq-piocos/>.

. . . I knew all I had to do is get mean and go at her. But I couldn't flip the switch. It has nothing to do with us being friends; I just couldn't pull the trigger. I was flat."<sup>214</sup> Here, Baszler emphasizes how sociability played no factor in the fight, that she was too exhausted to launch a successful counterattack by bringing the match to the ground.

Arguably, the biggest defiance of emphasized feminine norms came in both fighters reveling in the scars they accumulated in the fight, which scrapes against appealing to the male gaze and perpetuating female fragility. Kaufman stated: "I had a wicked black eye . . . The side of my face was all swollen . . . It really did look like E.T. on the side of my face. And then a week later it started draining downward, so the whole left side of my face is grey and green. It was awesome."<sup>215</sup> Baszler responded: "I was a little jealous because my sister's wedding was a week after that and I was a bride's maid, so I was all healed up by the time that . . . came around. I bet Sarah has the gross green looking bruising around her eye. It's awesome to have at a wedding."<sup>216</sup> Baszler was lamenting that she had no visible injuries to show off, especially in the case of the loss. A famous apocryphal hegemonic masculine quote says: "Chicks dig scars," implying women find men attractive who are wounded in the heat of a victorious battle.<sup>217</sup> Both Kaufman and Baszler seemed to find their scars just as attractive, expressing a form of masculinity.

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> DAILY MAIL REPORTER, "Women find scarred men attractive when looking for a fling," Dailymail.co.uk, Associated Newspaper Ltd, November 18, 2008. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1086969/Women-scarred-men-attractive-looking-fling.html>.



### Section 3: Gina Carano vs. Cris Cyborg

#### August 2009

Less than two months later, the biggest fight in WMMA history regarding viewership occurred as Gina Carano took on Cris Cyborg to crown the inaugural Strikeforce Women's Featherweight Champion.<sup>218</sup> As alluded to previously, a significant reason Baszler-Kaufman received the amount of coverage it did had less to do with the fighters involved and more with **Strikeforce** testing the waters of WMMA five-minute rounds in preparation for Carano-Cyborg. A preview article, "Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay," was posted on Bloody Elbow as a lead-in to the fight.<sup>219</sup> Mike Rome, the writer, argued:

Skeptics of women's MMA argue that if Cyborg wins the sport is dead. They couldn't be further from the truth. It would be a very temporary setback in a sport where new girls get into gyms across the country every day to train to be professional fighters. There will be a wave of new girls ready to compete in a few years as a result of Gina Carano's success, and that wave will bring the sport to new heights . . . Regardless of the result, the sport of women's MMA will be fine . . . The fact that this fight would be so big was not inevitable, nobody in the U.S. really knew Cyborg before she killed Shayna Baszler. All it took was a dominant performance with Gina at ringside to get fans salivating for a big fight. There will be other girls.<sup>220</sup>

While not denying emphasized femininity is present in the MMA media towards WMMA, Rome felt that someone like Cyborg, who did not adhere to feminine norms, would not kill the sport. He argued that at the end of the day, people enjoy dominant performances,

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<sup>218</sup> "Gina Carano." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed May 22, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Gina-Carano-16535>.

<sup>219</sup> Mike Rome, "Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 14, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/8/14/989727/regardless-of-the-result-of-gina>.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

regardless of appearance. Nevertheless, Rome acknowledged that Cyborg winning would cause a “very temporary setback,” whereas Carano winning would not slow WMMA’s growth.<sup>221</sup>

Fans posted seventy-five comments under the article, a near-even split between those who disagreed with Rome’s positions and those who echoed his sentiments.<sup>222</sup> THETAKEOVER used female fragility as his reasoning for why Cyborg could ruin the sport, stating: “The reason it has the potential to kill the sport of female MMA is because an opponent who doesn’t look like a ‘natural woman’ may end up beating Gina to a bloody pulp, which could look a little too much like domestic battery. I think there is a lot of scary downside to this fight for Showtime, Gina, and Women’s MMA.”<sup>223</sup> Many MMA fans accused Cyborg of no longer being a woman due to her steroid abuse, which is likely why THETAKEOVER felt confident in his domestic battery comparison. The commenter was trying to stir up imagery of a man beating on a woman, which, if associated with WMMA, would tarnish its public image. Rome responded: “All of this kind of reeks of condescension to women. ‘The media’ will be outraged by her getting beat up. It just seems like a number of continuous excuses from people who don’t want the sport to succeed.”<sup>224</sup> Again Rome is complaining, knowingly or not, about the hegemonic masculine environment enforcing feminine adherence in WMMA. A back-and-forth discussion emerged throughout the comment section, with some showing contempt for WMMA while others openly accepted women in the sport. SHOWMAN 56 declared: “This fight is the death of womans mma.”<sup>225</sup> ALLELBOWS countered: “Gina said in an interview she hopes that this gets women to train

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Thetakeover, August 14, 2009 (5:12pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>224</sup> Michael Rome, August 14, 2009 (5:16pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>225</sup> SHOWMAN 56, August 14, 2009 (5:14pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

because knowing how to fight is empowering—whether or not you compete, having that self-confidence, that kind of calm, is a wonderful thing.”<sup>226</sup>

Several posters commented that women’s boxing failed to be a money-drawing enterprise, using that assertion as enough evidence to pronounce WMMA a failure before the fight.<sup>227</sup> ALWAYSRELAXING agreed, saying: “I can’t really see women flocking to MMA gyms to fight. The main sports MMA pulls from . . . Women’s Wrestling is basically non-existent. The striking arts have some but not many females. And BJJ has some. Not to mention women want to have babies and stuff.”<sup>228</sup> He expresses that because women do not participate in those combat sports in large numbers (while ignoring the lack of such programs for women) that the gender as a whole does not enjoy fighting, likely because it takes away from the emphasized feminine mode of child-rearing. He was one of many doubters who questioned Rome’s prediction of WMMA growth.

AJB countered ALWAYSRELAXING’s reasoning, recalling that of the two MMA gyms he trained at since picking up the sport, one had 25 percent female membership, and the other had a “significant number of women.”<sup>229</sup> MMALOGIC questioned the level of technical competence among WMMA fighters and their male gaze adherence, wondering: “Who wants to watch 13 year old boys fight? its the same thing... WNBA has a niche but its like watching a boys high school basketball game.”<sup>230</sup> This comment sparked multiple responses between

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<sup>226</sup> Allelbows, August 14, 2009 (5:23pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>227</sup> SHOWMAN 56, August 14, 2009 (5:47pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>228</sup> AlwaysRelaxing, August 14, 2009 (8:18pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>229</sup> AJB, August 15, 2009 (8:41am) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>230</sup> Mmalogic, August 15, 2009 (12:36am) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay.”

MMALOGIC and others about whether this was a fair comparison.<sup>231</sup> It is a common argument in hegemonic masculine discourse about women's sports that the top female adult athletes are, at best comparable to male middle school or high school athletes. MADIQ questioned emphasized feminine norms, opining: "In MMA, there is no reason why the women can't do everything that the men can do, in the same fashion as the men. They're not competing against the men, nor are they competing against a course that is scaled to male dimensions. Weight classes are balanced. That means that ALL you are seeing is woman vs. woman, mano-a-mano, unarmed combat, and the better, tougher athlete will come out on top."<sup>232</sup>

What is important to note is that the fight, at least from a viewing standpoint, was clearly seen through a hegemonic masculine lens on femininity. The event, which drew 13,976 in attendance and over half a million watching the bout on Showtime TV, showed this by a quick watch of the broadcast.<sup>233</sup> The crowd booed when the camera was on Cyborg and cheered when it was on Carano. Mauro Ranallo, the night's play-by-play commentator, referred to Carano as "the undisputed star of MMA (not WMMA but MMA)."<sup>234</sup> The fight was a back-and-forth affair, with Cyborg showing clear dominance in striking and grappling. With one second left in the first round, Cyborg rained down punches on the side of Carano's head, claiming a TKO victory. Carano had turtled, offering no resistance to the punches, hence the stoppage.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Mike Rome, "Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 14, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/8/14/989727/regardless-of-the-result-of-gina>.

<sup>232</sup> Madiq, August 15, 2009 (11:24am) Comment on Rome, "Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women's MMA Will Be Okay."

<sup>233</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, ""Strikeforce: Carano vs. Cyborg' draws 13,976 spectators for \$736K live gate," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, August 18, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/08/strikeforce-carano-vs-cyborg-draws-13976-spectators-for-736k-live-gate>.

<sup>234</sup> "Cris Cyborg vs. Gina Carano Strikeforce: Carano vs. Cyborg," August 14, 2009 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Strikeforce, 17:07, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/31868/cris-cyborg-vs-gina-carano-strikeforce-carano-vs-cyborg>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

At first glance, it might seem like this was a fight that would make Shayna Baszler's career much easier. It was the biggest WMMA draw in history, and **Strikeforce** now had two women's divisions (Featherweight and Bantamweight/Welterweight),<sup>236</sup> whereas **EliteXC** only offered a women's division.<sup>237</sup> Baszler had only had one fight in **Strikeforce**, a loss to a quality opponent in Kaufman. In still a small women's division, surely Baszler could have fought one more time for the promotion. Baszler had stated in interviews before the Kaufman fight that she wanted to get in one more fight before the end of the year.<sup>238</sup> However, Baszler's next bout would not occur until January 30, 2010, the start of a pivotal year for the Queen of Spades. It would be her most successful year in terms of victories, 4-0, but it would be done almost entirely out of the spotlight and, as revealed later, almost for naught.<sup>239</sup> This middle section of the chapter attempts to show another problem with having just the sole face of WMMA. More WMMA fights may occur, and more women may be active in the sport, leading to further professionalization. Still, Baszler and many other women got left behind outside of websites already dedicated to WMMA, such as *Fighter Girls* and *MMA Rising*.

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<sup>236</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "'Strikeforce: Carano vs. Cyborg' draws 13,976 spectators for \$736K live gate," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, August 18, 2009. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2009/08/strikeforce-carano-vs-cyborg-draws-13976-spectators-for-736k-live-gate>.

<sup>237</sup> Tim Leidecker, "WHERE SHOULD ELITEXC'S TOP FIGHTERS GO?," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, October 22, 2008. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Where-Should-EliteXCs-Top-Fighters-Go-14875>.

<sup>238</sup> Jordan Breen, "Beatdown- Shayna Baszler," June 15, 2009, in *The Beatdown*, produced by Sherdog, podcast, No time length given as the audio file no longer plays. <https://www.sherdog.com/radio/Beatdown-Palaszewski-Baszler-370>.

<sup>239</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

## Section 4: Baszler's Return to Regional MMA and Strikeforce Tournament

### December 2009- August 2010

In late 2009, *MMA Rising*'s founder and lead writer, Rob Sargent, addressed the fact that two **Strikeforce** women's tournaments, one for bantamweights and one for featherweights, were canceled, speculating the reason for their cancellation was because Carano lost the fight to Cyborg.<sup>240</sup> Sargent reflected: "Billed as 'The Face of Women's MMA,' both Strikeforce and the now-defunct EliteXC promotion placed considerable pressure on Carano's shoulders. Following Carano's loss to Santos, speculation and questions arose about whether the proposed tournaments would go ahead as planned. Less than one month later, **Strikeforce** announced that it was postponing its women's tournaments."<sup>241</sup> Sargent implied that because Cyborg did not adhere to emphasized feminine norms, interest in their women's divisions might shrink. In the same article, Sargent also announced the 2010 **Freestyle Cage Fighting's** Women's Bantamweight Grand Prix, with **Strikeforce** having decided to outsource their women's tournament to **Freestyle Cage Fighting**, a regional Oklahoman promotion. Sargent summarized: "Dubbed the 2010 FCF Women's Bantamweight Grand Prix, it will showcase eight of the best 135-pound female fighters in the world. The winner of the tournament will receive a guaranteed spot on the Strikeforce roster and may challenge for a title."<sup>242</sup> At this early stage, Sargent had the dates already announced for the three stages of the tournament, along with the names of Shayna Baszler and the other seven women competing in it.<sup>243</sup> Essentially, *MMA Rising*

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<sup>240</sup> Robert Sargent, "Exclusive: 2010 Women's Grand Prix Announced," MMArising.com, December 22, 2009. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2009/12/22/exclusive-2010-womens-grand-prix-announced/>.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

portrayed women's fights as a part of MMA that deserved to be taken seriously. Covering a regional tournament in such detail and depth was proof.

On January 6, Sargent posted the brackets for the tournament along with a paragraph concerning the background and skillset of each of the eight fighters. For Baszler, he commented: "Arguably the top female submission fighter in all of mixed martial arts. All nine of her victories have come by tapout and very few opponents have been able to hold their own with Baszler if she takes the fight to the mat. The . . . veteran has met with challenges when faced with superior strikers, but Baszler can hold her own on the feet . . . She will be perfectly content if the fight hits the ground."<sup>244</sup> Despite qualifying the top submission fighter comment by including the word female, Sargent praised her technical competence in MMA overall. This was further exemplified on January 26 when he pontificated: "Baszler showed improved striking in her Strikeforce bout with Sarah Kaufman, but her game plan will be clear here and that will be to take the fight to the ground. . . Baszler is incredibly focused and will be looking to return to an elite standing in the division."<sup>245</sup>

On January 19, *MMA Rising* announced that FCF would stream the fights live online on their website for \$9.99.<sup>246</sup> In the same article, Sargent wrote: "The event marks a significant step forward for women's MMA and has garnered considerable attention. Experienced veterans will clash with rising young stars and additional women's bouts in FCF have already been proposed."<sup>247</sup> This was a bit of a misnomer as **Strikeforce** did nothing visibly apparent to

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<sup>244</sup> Robert Sargent, "Exclusive: FCF Women's Grand Prix Brackets," MMArising.com, January 6, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/01/06/exclusive-fcf-womens-grand-prix-brackets/>.

<sup>245</sup> Rob Sargent "FCF Women's Bantamweight Grand Prix Preview," MMArising.com, January 26, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/01/26/fcf-womens-bantamweight-grand-prix-preview/>.

<sup>246</sup> Robert Sargent, "FCF Women's Grand Prix To Stream Live Online," MMArising.com, January 19, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/01/19/fcf-womens-grand-prix-to-stream-live-online/>.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

promote the tournament, despite the prize allegedly being a **Strikeforce** contract.<sup>248</sup> In addition, previewing the **FCF** tournament only featured on two additional MMA news outlets, *MMA Fighting*, which printed only six sentences,<sup>249</sup> and *Fighter Girls*, which conducted short individual interviews with each of the eight fighters.<sup>250</sup> The interviews, however, had little data worth analyzing.

Only three MMA media outlets covered Shayna Baszler's seventeenth pro-MMA bout, the **FCF** tournament's first-round affair against Megumi Yabushita, on January 30, 2010 from Shawnee, Oklahoma. There is no available video footage for this bout, though evidence exists that it was available as nonworking links in the accompanying *MMA Rising* article. Rob Sargent was present in the arena, live commenting on the show for the website.<sup>251</sup> As will be shown further in Chapter 5, Sargent is arguably the most detailed in his analysis of WMMA fights compared to other MMA sportswriters. His entire play-by-play of Baszler-Yabushita stated: "Baszler punched from the top, then stood up and rained down more punches. Baszler landed elbows and short punches to the body from partial back control. Baszler rolled Yabushita over and tried for a twister. Yabushita defended well, but Baszler continued to work for the twister and finally got it. Yabushita tapped out within seconds."<sup>252</sup> The level of detail shows how much Sargent respected Baszler's technical competence and did not treat it as a sideshow compared to

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<sup>248</sup> Rob Sargent, "Shayna Baszler Wins FCF Women's Grand Prix," MMArising.com, June 13, 2010.

<sup>249</sup> Ray Hui, "135-Pound Women's Grand Prix Begins Jan. 30," MMAfighting.com Vox Media, January 12, 2010. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2010/01/12/eight-woman-fcf-tournament-begins-jan-30>.

<sup>250</sup> Fighter Girls, "Road Super Saturday Shayna Baszler MMA," Fightergirls.com, January 29, 2010. <https://www.fightergirls.com/road-super-saturday-shayna-baszler-mma/>.

<sup>251</sup> Robert Sargent, "Freestyle Cage Fighting 39 Live Results," MMArising.com, January 30, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/01/30/freestyle-cage-fighting-39-live-results/>

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.



the nine male fights on the card.<sup>253</sup> Because this style of writing is frequent in Sargent's tournament coverage, only a few remaining quotes were examined.

*Sherdog* presented the results of the tournament bouts in an article of Brian Knapp's weekly column called *Weekend Rundown*, which covers minor league/regional MMA promotions worldwide.<sup>254</sup> The results of the **FCF** opening round were also mixed in with coverage of promotions **Beast from the East** from Holland and **Valley Fight League** out of Pennsylvania. Baszler's was the only fight of the four quarterfinal matchups to be given any significant article space, with the other three summed up in two sentences.<sup>255</sup> Knapp wrote: "Baszler dominated the fight from start to finish. She softened Yabushita with a standing knee, a soccer kick to the ribs and punches from the top position. Ultimately, Baszler worked herself into position for the submission." This was not as detailed as Sargent's rundown, but it showed Knapp's respect for Baszler's technical competence and legitimacy as a fighter. However, the fact that the major MMA news site considered the tournament and **Valley Fight League** on the same quality level suggests that Knapp's editors did not feel much about regional WMMA's technical competence.<sup>256</sup>

Ten days before the **FCF** tourney started, *Bloody Elbow* reported that **Strikeforce** bantamweight and featherweight WMMA tournaments were scheduled for April, citing a *Sherdog* article by Loretta Hunt.<sup>257</sup> Most of the forty-one fan comments on the *Bloody Elbow* article applauded the news and thought it made sense and would deepen the two women's

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Brian Knapp, "WEEKEND RUNDOWN: YAMAGUCHI CAPTURES KOTC CROWN," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, February 1, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Weekend-Rundown-Yamaguchi-Captures-KOTC-Crown-22394>.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Loretta Hunt, "STRIKEFORCE WOMEN'S TOURNEYS LAUNCH IN APRIL," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, January 20, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Strikeforce-Womens-Tourneys-Launch-in-April-22155>.

divisions.<sup>258</sup> PHILDO summarized: “The majority of SF fans have no clue who these women are, a tournament is a very easy way to build hype and create some contenders. The winner gets a huge bump, the top 4 will get a win that people will see and can then fight each other for the next shot, and the people that lose in the first round can either get lost or have a little bit of exposure and try to move on up the ranks after/during the tournament.”<sup>259</sup> In the end, neither tournament happened in April, or even at all. And yet more news sites covered this story than the **FCF** Grand Prix. The only significant occurrence in WMMA between January and the **FCF** semi-finals scheduled for March was **Strikeforce’s** February 26<sup>th</sup> show, headlined by Sarah Kaufman and Takayo Hashi squaring off for the inaugural bantamweight title.<sup>260</sup>

Initially, Shayna Baszler, in her second tournament fight, was set to compete against Jennifer Tate, a rematch from 2007.<sup>261</sup> However, under a month away from the bout, Tate announced she was pregnant, eventually being replaced by Canadian Alexis Davis, as *MMA Rising* reported on March 13.<sup>262</sup> Sargent gave Davis the same detailed background he had for the original eight fighters in the tournament: “Davis (7-2-0) made her mixed martial arts debut in April of 2007 against Kaufman and took the current number one-ranked bantamweight to the limit in a three-round battle . . . Davis has won seven of her last eight fights.”<sup>263</sup> He published a more in-depth preview on March 25, continuing his trend of acknowledging the technical

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<sup>258</sup> Anton Tabuena, “Strikeforce to Host Women's Bantamweight and Featherweight Tournaments Starting This April,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 20, 2010.

<sup>259</sup> Phildo, January 20, 2010 (11:35am) Comment on Tabuena, “Strikeforce to Host Women's Bantamweight and Featherweight Tournaments Starting This April.”

<sup>260</sup> Nick Thomas, “Sarah Kaufman to Battle Takayo Hashi For First Strikeforce Women’s 135 Pound Title,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 22, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/1/22/1265896/sarah-kaufman-to-battle-takayo>.

<sup>261</sup> Robert Sargent, “Davis Replaces Tate In FCF Women’s Grand Prix,” *MMArising.com*, March 13, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2010/03/13/davis-replaces-tate-in-fcf-womens-grand-prix/>.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

competence present in WMMA, especially Baszler's.<sup>264</sup> However, now almost seven years into Baszler's professional career, does one man's appreciation of her skills matter when most media and online fans had no idea the tournament was even taking place?

Shayna Baszler's eighteenth pro MMA bout occurred on March 27, 2010, against Alexis Davis for **FCF** at the Firelake Grand Casino in Shawnee, Oklahoma.<sup>265</sup> Originally streamed online from **FCF**'s website, the video footage was found on YouTube.<sup>266</sup> Because the mainstream MMA media primarily ignored this tournament, there are only three things to note. The first is that Baszler is reduced to the regional scene, with nowhere near the same amount of production available that she had working for **EliteXC** or **Strikeforce**. The camera used to stream the fight live was handheld, with no time clock or play-by-play commentary.<sup>267</sup> By contrast, Baszler's bout in another regional promotion against Samantha Anderson in 2007 featured commentary and a stationary camera.<sup>268</sup> Second, most of the contest occurred on the ground, called the "feminine" fighting style. Submission attempts and reversals comprised all three rounds. In between rounds, bikini-clad ring girls did their usual schtick.<sup>269</sup> After three rounds of back-and-forth action, the judges gave a 29-28 unanimous decision victory to Baszler. Third, Baszler adhered to and defied feminine sociability in her post-fight promo, espousing: "I need to say something. Alexis Davis took this fight on two weeks' notice, and we sat here and battled each other for three rounds in one of the best fights I ever had. And, come out June 12,

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<sup>264</sup> Robert Sargent, "FCF Women's Grand Prix Semi-Final Preview," MMArising.com, March 25, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/03/25/fcf-womens-grand-prix-semi-final-preview/>.

<sup>265</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>266</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Alexis Davis part1," No Surrender Productions, April 15, 2010, video, 5:33. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6V6pMGDcL0>.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Samantha Anderson 11th Fight," werevertubalta, August 25, 2020, video, 3:06. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adaV940VKP8>.

<sup>269</sup> "Shayna Baszler vs Alexis Davis part2.mov," No Surrender Productions, April 15, 2010, video, 5:18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LA2qbHe1g3g&t=2s>.

watch me win this whole thing. If you guys scream loud enough, I'll smash another one (guitar) for yah.”<sup>270</sup> She gave kudos to Davis, recognizing her technical competence and showing that cocky, bold, masculine attitude.<sup>271</sup> The comments section of the three relevant YouTube videos were not analyzed as most were posted years after the fight and primarily focused on a fighter not present, Ronda Rousey.<sup>272</sup>

*MMA Rising* did not provide live play-by-play commentary, but Sargent wrote a recap article the next day. He stated: “Baszler (11-6-0) faced late replacement Alexis Davis in the main event . . . Davis . . . once again put on a game performance and showed exactly why she is one of the top prospects at 135 pounds. While some expected Baszler to cruise to another easy submission victory, she was forced to go the distance in a competitive bout.”<sup>273</sup> Once again, Sargent is praising female technical competence in MMA. Brian Knapp wrote another *Weekly Rundown* column for Sherdog, outlining the results of the **FCF** semi-finals and fight cards from Californian company **King of the Cage**, Minneapolis promotion **Seconds Out**, and British organization **Ultimate Challenge MMA**.<sup>274</sup> Knapp also praised the Queen of Spade’s fighting skills and acumen, proclaiming: “Baszler outpointed Alexis Davis . . . Scores were 29-28 across the board for the EliteXC and Strikeforce veteran, who has rattled off back-to-back wins since her unanimous decision defeat to the unbeaten Sarah Kaufman in June.”<sup>275</sup> Despite Sargent and Knapp’s acknowledgments, most WMMA fans, let alone MMA fans in general, had no

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<sup>270</sup> “FCF 40 Shayna Baszler vs Alexis Davis part3.mov,” No Surrender Productions, April 16, 2010, video, 6:16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZTtkJiKz3A>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Robert Sargent, “Baszler, Finney Advance In FCF Grand Prix,” MMArising.com, March 28, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/03/28/baszler-finney-advance-in-fcf-grand-prix/>.

<sup>274</sup> Brian Knapp, “WEEKEND RUNDOWN: ATT PROSPECT SNAPS LOPEZ STREAK AT 16,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, March 29, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Weekend-Rundown-ATT-Prospect-Snaps-Lopez-Streak-at-16-23526>.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

consciousness that this tournament was happening. Even *MMA Rising* seemed to be losing interest.

*MMA Rising* was the only media outlet covering the leadup to the **FCF** tournament final of Shayna Baszler vs. Adrienna Jenkins, publishing a single article. The article announced that **Strikeforce** needed a contender to take on Cyborg, the Brazilian set to defend her featherweight title in late June. They offered the title shot to Baszler's original tourney opponent, Jan Finney, which meant Jenkins had to take her place in the **FCF** final. Again, Sargeant gave a detailed history of Cyborg and Finney<sup>276</sup> but surprisingly failed to preview Baszler vs. Jenkins.<sup>277</sup>

*MMA Rising* failed to provide live play-by-play, but Sargent did recap the decidedly quick fight, writing: "Baszler . . . made an emphatic statement by submitting the 21-fight veteran in just over two minutes. Baszler took the fight to the ground and controlled position, then transitioned into an armbar to pick up her 11th career win by submission . . . With the win, Baszler receives a guaranteed contract with Strikeforce . . . She will either be part of the upcoming Strikeforce women's tournament or be pegged as the next title challenger for the winner of the upcoming bout between Kaufman and Roxanne Modafferi."<sup>278</sup> *Sherdog's* Brian Knapp echoed these sentiments, writing about Baszler's win in the same article as **Shooto Brazil** and Indiana's **Hoosier Fight Club**.<sup>279</sup> However, despite the two sportswriters' assurances,

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<sup>276</sup> Rob Sargent, "Cris Cyborg vs Jan Finney Planned For June 26<sup>th</sup>," *MMArising.com*, May 15, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2010/05/15/cris-cyborg-vs-jan-finney-planned-for-june-26th/>.

<sup>277</sup> "Shayna Baszler." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>278</sup> Rob Sargent, "Shayna Baszler Wins FCF Women's Grand Prix," *MMArising.com*, June 13, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/06/13/shayna-baszler-wins-fcf-womens-grand-prix/>.

<sup>279</sup> Brian Knapp, "WEEKEND RUNDOWN: 'FORMIGA' DEFENDS SHOOTO CROWN," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, June 14, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Weekend-Rundown-Formiga-Defends-Shooto-Crown-25075>.

Baszler did not fight for **Strikeforce** again; the company treated her with abject silence.<sup>280</sup>

Baszler's Twitter timeline noted that **Strikeforce** repeatedly refused to sign her during 2010 and 2011.<sup>281</sup>

Another **Strikeforce** event that Shayna Baszler was not involved in but was still crucial to understanding the place of WMMA at the time was the promotion's four-woman 135-pound tournament to determine a number one contender to bantamweight/welterweight champion Sarah Kaufman, set for August 2010.<sup>282</sup> Initially reported by *MMA Rising* on July 2, an eight-woman tournament that was supposed to happen in April was now happening "in the summer" with no date provided.<sup>283</sup> Sargent confirmed four of the eight women competing: Dutch kickboxer Marloes Coenen, Japanese veteran Hitomi Akano, Finnish newcomer Maiju Kujala, and Brazilian Carina Damm.<sup>284</sup> In the article, Sargent speculated: "Other rumored and probable tournament participants include . . . Freestyle Cage Fighting Women's Bantamweight Grand Prix Champion Shayna "The Queen of Spades" Baszler . . . Baszler may bypass the tournament entirely and face the winner of the upcoming title fight between Sarah Kaufman and Roxanne Modafferi, but that is also not confirmed."<sup>285</sup> However, Scott Coker admitted he had not invited Baszler to participate.<sup>286</sup> On July 10, Sargent announced that **Strikeforce** changed the tourney into a four-women affair, Coenen dropping out to face Kaufman for the

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<sup>280</sup> "Twitter Search: (@QoSBaszler) until:2011-12-31 since:2011-01-01," accessed May 22 2021. [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(from%3AQosbaszler\)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3AQosbaszler)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed_query).

<sup>281</sup> "Twitter Search: (@QoSBaszler) until:2011-12-31 since:2011-01-01," accessed May 22 2021. [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(from%3AQosbaszler\)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3AQosbaszler)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed_query).

<sup>282</sup> Robert Sargent, "Strikeforce Women's Tournament Update," *MMArising.com*, July 2, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2010/07/02/strikeforce-womens-tournament-update/>.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

bantamweight/welterweight belt in October. **Strikeforce** awarded Miesha Tate Coenen's slot. The tournament now determined who fought the winner of Kaufman-Coenen.<sup>287</sup> This restructuring effectively removed Baszler from the tournament. It could be argued that Coenen was given the bye due to her perceived physical attractiveness and emphasizing feminine norms, i.e., considered more marketable than the other competitors. In an *MMA Mania* article discussing the tournament, writer Jesse Holland referred to Coenen as the "dazzling Dutch damsel."<sup>288</sup> One of the usages of damsel comes from the phrase damsel in distress, which conveys the meaning: "a young woman who is in trouble and needs a man's help."<sup>289</sup> As such, damsel is an emphasized feminine term to refer to any woman, particularly one who makes a career in combat sports. Despite being a fighter by trade, it is implied she still needs a "male protector."

*Sherdog*,<sup>290</sup> *MMA Fighting*,<sup>291</sup> *MMA Mania*,<sup>292</sup> *Bloody Elbow*,<sup>293</sup> and *MMA Junkie* all began covering the tournament in late July.<sup>294</sup> This was the polar opposite of the media attention given to the **FCF** Grand Prix, where only two sites covered the entire tournament, and only one

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<sup>287</sup> Robert Sargent, "Lineup Set For Strikeforce Women's Tournament," MMArising.com, July 10, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2010/07/10/lineup-set-for-strikeforce-womens-tournament/>.

<sup>288</sup> Jesse Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 22, 2010. <https://www.mmamania.com/2010/7/22/1582504/strikeforce-confirms-four-woman>.

<sup>289</sup> "A Damsel In Distress," dictionary.cambridge.org, accessed May 22, 2021. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/a-damsel-in-distress>.

<sup>290</sup> Joe Myers, "STRIKEFORCE TOURNEY WOMEN BREAK DOWN THE FIELD," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, August 12, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Strikeforce-Tourney-Women-Break-Down-the-Field-26240>.

<sup>291</sup> Matt Erickson, "Strikeforce Confirms Visa Issues for Carina Damm," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2010. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2010/07/29/strikeforce-confirms-visa-issues-for-carina-damm-tourney-replac>.

<sup>292</sup> Jesse Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 22, 2010. <https://www.mmamania.com/2010/7/22/1582504/strikeforce-confirms-four-woman>.

<sup>293</sup> Nate Wilcox, "Strikeforce Tournament Caps Big Weekend for Women's MMA," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 13, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/8/13/1621259/strikeforce-tournament-caps-big>.

<sup>294</sup> MMA Junkie Staff, "Strikeforce 135-pound tourney official; Marloes Coenen named No. 1 contender," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, July 22, 2010. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2010/07/strikeforce-135-pound-tourney-official-marloes-coenen-named-as-no-1-contender>.



did so in detail. *MMA Rising's* **FCF** coverage only featured small paragraphs on each fighter.<sup>295</sup> In *Sherdog's* **Strikeforce** tournament preview, written by Joe Myers, each woman was interviewed, providing a more human side to the four combatants.<sup>296</sup> This helped to demonstrate that WMMA was only necessary to the most viewed MMA news sites if it was staged at the top promotional levels, **Strikeforce** or the **UFC**.

However, the overall MMA fanbase found WMMA polarizing even in those two promotions. Thirteen out of thirty-four comments attached to the article announcing the tournament participants on *MMA Mania* focused primarily on an individual's appearance.<sup>297</sup> Most either called Carina Damm physically attractive<sup>298</sup> or said she looked like she was on steroids due to her musculature and prior history of steroid abuse.<sup>299</sup> Despite not even being in the tournament, COSA7189 mocked Cris Cyborg, stating **Strikeforce** should book a fight featuring: "Cyborg vs.... all of them (the four tournament competitors) at once."<sup>300</sup> DAKATAK responded: "With one testicle behind her back."<sup>301</sup> The latter featured Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 4. MANALITO hijacked the thread to discuss a possible Tito Ortiz vs. Matt Hammil bout, treating WMMA like it did not deserve coverage.<sup>302</sup> STAK injected stereotypical notions about

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<sup>295</sup> Rob Sargent "FCF Women's Bantamweight Grand Prix Preview," MMArising.com, January 26, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/01/26/fcf-womens-bantamweight-grand-prix-preview/>.

<sup>296</sup> Joe Myers, "STRIKEFORCE TOURNEY WOMEN BREAK DOWN THE FIELD," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, August 12, 2010. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Strikeforce-Tourney-Women-Break-Down-the-Field-26240>.

<sup>297</sup> Jesse Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix," Mmamania.com, Vox Media, July 22, 2010. <https://www.mmamania.com/2010/7/22/1582504/strikeforce-confirms-four-woman>.

<sup>298</sup> Jeremyjackson, July 22, 2010 (4:09pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix."

<sup>299</sup> THORAZINE, July 22, 2010 (2:22pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix."

<sup>300</sup> Cosa7189, July 22, 2010 (2:35pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix." Parentheses mine.

<sup>301</sup> Dakatak, July 22, 2010 (2:48pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix."

<sup>302</sup> Manalito, July 22, 2010 (3:18pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix."



women as an excuse to embrace his male gaze, stating: “Since it’s a womens tournament I’m going to pick a winner like most women that watch mma.... Meisha Tate since she’s the hottest.”<sup>303</sup> This statement slightly contained VMA Trait 4 but was far from toxic. In fairness, in a *Bloody Elbow* interview with the tournament winner, Miesha Tate, fans directly called out writer Jonathan Snowden (co-writer of *The MMA Encyclopedia*) regarding his misogynistic double standard regarding WMMA. Snowden complemented Tate as “savvy”<sup>304</sup> while criticizing then-champion Sarah Kaufman as “a diva”<sup>305</sup> for both, essentially stating that they belonged on the major Showtime broadcasts.<sup>306</sup> This was considered a double standard because he called Kaufman an “ugly broad with cornrows” during her title fight against Roxanne Modafferi.<sup>307</sup> Snowden was guilty of Toxic Trait 1 and possibly an inverse of VMA Trait 2, where he criticizes Kaufman for not being physically attractive to him. However, despite the fans calling out Snowden’s behavior, many of the forty-eight comments also praised Miesha Tate’s physical appearance.<sup>308</sup> These readers were not the same WMMA fans who read *MMA Rising*. *MMA Rising* was the only media outlet still paying attention to Shayna Baszler.

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<sup>303</sup> Stak, July 22, 2010 (3:43pm) Comment on Holland, “Strikeforce confirms four-woman, single-elimination 135-pound tournament for Aug. 13 in Phoenix.”

<sup>304</sup> Doc ransom, August 19, 2010 (4:35pm) Comment on Snowden, “Ring Psychology Exclusive: Miesha Tate Explains Why She'd Rather Be a Small Fish on a Big Card With Strikeforce.”

<sup>305</sup> Jonathan Snowden, “Sarah Kaufman's Dramatic Knockout Not Enough for Strikeforce Diva,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 24, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/7/24/1585937/sarah-kaufmans-dramatic-knockout#42827324>.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> IHateMMA, July 24, 2010 (8:49pm) Comment on Snowden, “Sarah Kaufman's Dramatic Knockout Not Enough for Strikeforce Diva.”

<sup>308</sup> Jonathan Snowden, “Ring Psychology Exclusive: Miesha Tate Explains Why She'd Rather Be a Small Fish on a Big Card With Strikeforce,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, August 19, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/8/19/1630890/ring-psychology-exclusive-miesha>.

## Section 5: Baszler's Contemplated Retirement and Ronda Rousey's Rise

### November 2010- March 2012

The only coverage of Shayna Baszler's twentieth pro MMA fight, which took place on November 19 for **The Cage Inc.**, against Elaina Maxwell in North Dakota, was found in an *MMA Rising* article posted two days after the Battle at the Border 7 event.<sup>309</sup> Sargent wrote: "Baszler (14-6-0) and Maxwell (4-4-0) engaged in a striking battle early. . . The South Dakota native tried to take Maxwell down and eventually got the fight to the mat . . . and rolled into a kneebar. Maxwell held on, but Baszler pulled back on the leg and applied added pressure . . . which forced Maxwell to submit."<sup>310</sup> Once again, Sargent was detailed and complimentary in his commentary.<sup>311</sup> However, despite racking up a four-fight win streak in 2010, the general sphere of MMA beyond *MMA Rising* ignored the regional exploits of the non-emphasized feminine Shayna Baszler.

2011 was an inactive yet interesting year in the career of Shayna Baszler. As mentioned earlier, despite having won the **FCF Women's** tournament to earn a contract with **Strikeforce**, she was never resigned by them. Interestingly, **Strikeforce** signed multiple WMMA fighters to their roster in 2011, including women Baszler had defeated, such as Julie Kedzie<sup>312</sup> and Alexis Davis.<sup>313</sup> The Alexis Davis signing was incredibly frustrating, as Baszler was set to rematch the Canadian in July. With Davis signing to **Strikeforce**, that rematch failed to materialize.<sup>314</sup> All

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<sup>309</sup> Rob Sargent, "Weekend Recap: Baszler, Pene Win At The Cage Inc.," MMArising.com, November 22, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/11/22/weekend-recap-baszler-pene-win-at-the-cage-inc/>.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Robert Sargent, "Julie Kedzie vs Amanda Nunes Set For June 18 Strikeforce," MMArising.com, May 20, 2011. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2011/05/20/julie-kedzie-vs-amanda-nunes-set-for-june-18-strikeforce/>.

<sup>313</sup> Robert Sargent, "Strikeforce Adds Two More Women's Bouts To July 30 Card," MMArising.com, July 1, 2011. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2011/07/01/strikeforce-adds-two-more-womens-bouts-to-july-30-card/>.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

attempts at fighting elsewhere during the remaining half of 2011 failed.<sup>315</sup> This continued into 2012 when a proposed regional rematch with Kelly Kobold set for April fell apart.<sup>316</sup> While desperately trying to find fights, Baszler was also busy getting her EMT certification, planning to become a firefighter in Sioux Falls eventually.<sup>317</sup> She admitted in interviews during her eventual UFC run that she was no longer convinced she could make MMA her primary career. During 2011, outside of MMA Rising articles, Baszler received no media coverage.<sup>318</sup> However, unlike Baszler, the rest of WMMA continued fighting in 2011.

Baszler's 2011 tale of inactivity, told in its exclusivity, would be an inaccurate portrayal of the women's fight scene. In 2011, sixteen Strikeforce events were held, with twelve female bouts spread across them. On average, that is less than one WMMA fight per card (only two events featured more than one female bout).<sup>319</sup> On the one hand, this seems to parallel what Shayna Baszler experienced with pre-**EliteXC**- only one to two female fights per card if that.<sup>320</sup> However, the Queen of Spades began her career in front of a couple of hundred fans at most and

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<sup>315</sup> "Twitter Search: (@QoSBaszler) until:2011-12-31 since:2011-01-01," accessed May 22 2021. [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(from%3Aqosbaszler\)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3Aqosbaszler)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed_query).

<sup>316</sup> Robert Sargent, "CFX: "Spring Brawl" Cancelled, Baszler-Kobold Rematch Off," MMArising.com, March 1, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2012/03/16/cfx-spring-brawl-cancelled-baszler-kobold-rematch-off/>.

<sup>317</sup> "Twitter Search: (@QoSBaszler) until:2011-12-31 since:2011-01-01," accessed May 22 2021. [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(from%3Aqosbaszler\)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3Aqosbaszler)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed_query).

<sup>318</sup> "Twitter Search: (@QoSBaszler) until:2011-12-31 since:2011-01-01," accessed May 22 2021. [https://twitter.com/search?q=\(from%3Aqosbaszler\)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=(from%3Aqosbaszler)%20until%3A2011-12-31%20since%3A2011-01-01&src=typed_query).

<sup>319</sup> "Strikeforce," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/organizations/Strikeforce-716>.

<sup>320</sup> "MFC- USA VS. RUSSIA 3," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/MFC-USA-vs-Russia-3-3839>.

had never been covered in the mainstream MMA media to any serious degree,<sup>321</sup> except for her Cyborg<sup>322</sup> and Kaufman fights.

On the other hand, those twelve **Strikeforce** WMMA bouts occurred on national television, with the lowest in-person attendance being 1,876<sup>323</sup> (Baszler competed in front of 2,000 plus for her Kaufman fight<sup>324</sup> and 6,000 plus for the Cyborg bout).<sup>325</sup> In addition, Zuffa Inc., **UFC**'s parent company, purchased the Strikeforce brand in early March.<sup>326</sup> Finally, WMMA in **Strikeforce** received a decent amount of coverage across the major online MMA news outlets,<sup>327</sup> more so than in 2010.<sup>328</sup> However, despite the work of WMMA pioneers and workhorses who plied their trade in **Strikeforce**, much of the increased coverage centered around a single newcomer who reaped most of the rewards, at least from a public acceptance perspective. Articles about this rookie began appearing on *Bloody Elbow* as early as 2008, well before she started MMA.<sup>329</sup> By late 2011, she was one of the most commonly addressed topics for combat sports journalists. However, unless the story revolved around her in some form or

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<sup>321</sup> Steven Curtis, "MFC: HOMETOWN BOY DOESN'T DISAPPOINT." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 4, 2006. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/MFC-Hometown-Boy-Doesn't-Disappoint-4631>.

<sup>322</sup> James Iannotti, "Shayna Baszler vs Cristiane Cyborg Elite XC fight booked for July 26," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/07/08/shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-cybor-elite-xc-fight-booked-for-july-26>.

<sup>323</sup> "Strikeforce Challengers 17: Bowling vs. Voelker 3," Tapology.com, Accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/events/strikeforce-challengers-17>. Six out of sixteen total events do not have attendance figures listed.

<sup>324</sup> "Strikeforce Challengers 2: Villasenor vs. Cyborg," Tapology.com, Accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/events/strikeforce-challengers-2-villasenor-vs-cyborg>.

<sup>325</sup> "EliteXC: Unfinished Business," Tapology.com, Accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/events/elitexc-unfinished-business>.

<sup>326</sup> Josh Gross, "UFC Buys Rival Strikeforce," ESPN, ESPN Enterprise Inc., Mar 12, 2011. <https://www.espn.com/extra/mma/news/story?id=6209923>.

<sup>327</sup> "Search results for Rousey," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

<sup>328</sup> Search results for WMMA," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=16&q=wmma>.

<sup>329</sup> Nate Wilcox, "Olympic Sports Through the Prism of MMA," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, June 12, 2008. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2008/6/12/550597/olympic-sports-through-the>.

fashion, the media treated WMMA the same as before: with basic acknowledgment and general apathy. That rookie phenom was Ronda Rousey.<sup>330</sup>

Enough has been noted in this study, specifically in the literature review section, about Rousey, her impact on WMMA, and her role in combating and perpetuating emphasized feminine stereotypes. I do not want to tread on worn ground, and Rousey's UFC career, particularly, has been examined with a fine-tooth comb.<sup>331</sup> As such, rather than give a detailed fight-by-fight diagnosis and in-depth article analysis of Rousey, I will instead offer a summary of her first full year as a pro fighter, from March 2011 to March 2012, along with some statistical notes on the amount of coverage Rousey received and a handful of quoted representative media/fan reactions.

Rousey's first two pro bouts received little coverage as they happened within regional promotions. Her first pro fight was against Ediane Gomes for the Californian promotion **King of the Cage**. She submitted Gomes via an armbar just seconds into the contest.<sup>332</sup> Her second fight occurred two months later against Charmaine Tweet for the Calgary-based **Hard Knocks Fighting Championships** organization. Rousey submitted Tweet in just under a minute.<sup>333</sup> Her third fight in the women's featherweight division occurred at **Strikeforce's** Challengers 18 in August. Her opponent was Sarah D'Alelio. Rousey won again by first-round armbar.<sup>334</sup> Surrounding the time frame of her first "major league" pro fight, *MMA Fighting* published eight

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<sup>330</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 144-149.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> "Ronda Rousey." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Tim Burke, "Ronda Rousey's Controversial Strikeforce Win Was Hardly Surprising," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 13, 2011. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2011/8/13/2361372/ronda-rouseys-controversial-strikeforce-win-was-hardly-surprising>.

articles in which she featured, three of which were solely about her.<sup>335</sup> *MMA Mania* featured seven articles about that particular fight card, one of which was entirely about her.<sup>336</sup> *Bloody Elbow* featured five pieces, two of which were entirely about Rousey.<sup>337</sup> *Sherdog* presented the same stats as *Bloody Elbow*, except only one article was about Rousey.<sup>338</sup> In comparison, between 2003 and 2011, only six articles across the major MMA media outlets were solely about Shayna Baszler, and that was in the leadups to her bouts with Cyborg and Kaufman.<sup>339</sup>

Rousey's fourth professional MMA bout came against Julia Budd on November 18 at **Strikeforce** Challengers 20, the former Olympian submitting Budd in just 39 seconds.<sup>340</sup> None of the articles on *Bloody Elbow* were solely about Rousey.<sup>341</sup> On *MMA Mania* in November, four pieces were primarily about Rousey, two specifically about a pre-fight boast that she would issue a challenge to bantamweight champion Miesha Tate and "smack" the title out of her hand.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> "Search results for Rousey," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=374&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=365&q=rousey>.

<sup>336</sup> "Search results for Rousey," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

<sup>337</sup> "Search results for Rousey," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=414&q=rousey> through <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=407&q=rousey>.

<sup>338</sup> Yael Grauer, "OLYMPIAN NO STRANGER TO CENTER STAGE," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, August 11, 2011. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/1/Olympian-No-Stranger-to-Center-Stage-34674>.

<sup>339</sup> 2 on MMA Fighting, 2 on *Sherdog*, 2 on *Bloody Elbow*, and 2 on *MMA Junkie*.

<sup>340</sup> "Ronda Rousey." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>341</sup> "Search results for Rousey," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=414&q=rousey> through <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=407&q=rousey>.

<sup>342</sup> "Search results for Rousey," *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

*MMA Fighting* had eight articles with Rousey as the primary focus, three regarding her budding feud with Tate.<sup>343</sup> *Sherdog* had only one Rousey-dedicated piece.<sup>344</sup>

The next period, November 2011 to March 2012, covered in the academic literature via the work of L.A. Jennings, was when Rousey started campaigning for a title fight against Tate in a weight class in which she had never competed. Why? Because she felt she was more physically attractive and therefore more marketable than number 1 contender Sarah Kaufman.<sup>345</sup> The literature lacks how invested the MMA media was about this potential title match and the bad blood between the two women. Published to *MMA Fighting* between November 2011 and March 2012, 25 articles were about Rousey or Tate in some form or fashion.<sup>346</sup> *Bloody Elbow* had over 20.<sup>347</sup> *MMA Mania* had 34.<sup>348</sup> What is interesting to note is that the last such article on *MMA Mania*, the night of the title fight, was entitled: “Miesha Tate vs Ronda Rousey ... who wins the Strikeforce sexiness battle?” Geno Mrosko argued: “Let’s be real here, Maniacs. Strikeforce has sold us on . . . 135-pound champion Miesha Tate against rising star Ronda Rousey based on sex. Or rather, how sexy they are in addition to how very lethal these lovely ladies can be as highly-trained mixed martial arts (MMA) fighters. So why not take it the full nine yards? That’s right,

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<sup>343</sup> “Search results for Rousey,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=374&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=365&q=rousey>

<sup>344</sup> Yael Grauer, “QUEEN OF THE CAGE,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, December 15, 2011. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Queen-of-the-Cage-38179>.

<sup>345</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 144-149.

<sup>346</sup> “Search results for Rousey,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=374&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=365&q=rousey>

<sup>347</sup> “Search results for Rousey,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=414&q=rousey> through <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=407&q=rousey>.

<sup>348</sup> “Search results for Rousey,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

we . . . present you the very first (and likely only) sexiness battle.”<sup>349</sup> The entire concept of this article, let alone the words printed in it, greatly indulged in Toxic Trait 1 while engaging in all four VMA Traits, primarily 1 and 2. In the first year of Rousey being the “sole face of WMMA,” *MMA Mania*’s final article focused solely on her (and her opponent’s) physical appearance.

A critical distinction between Chapters 3 and 4 of this study is that the former’s timeframe (2007-2008) primarily featured toxic/hegemonic masculinity in the form of online fans clamoring for titillation. However, the latter timeframe (2009-2011) mainly saw the readerships focus more on technical competence and female fragility to voice approval of emphasized feminine norms. By no means is the male gaze absent from 2009 through 2011; it is one of the rare occasions it takes a back seat to one of the other two tenets of emphasized femininity. This is likely due to the fixation both the MMA media and their online readerships had towards WMMA, increasing three minute-rounds to five. It consumed a large part of the narrative surrounding Baszler’s fight with Kaufman, along with that of Cyborg vs. Carano, so it is understandable that the online media and fans heavily discussed female fragility and technical competence. However, compared to the start of WMMA’s Emergence, the Baszler-Cyborg aftermath somewhat lacked toxic masculine and VMA traits expressed online towards the women’s game. During 2007 and 2008, Toxic Traits 1 and 2 were the primary usages of toxic masculinity, while only Trait 1 featured somewhat prominently from 2009 to 2011. This statistic synchronizes with the shift from a male gaze-centered audience to one more focused on the presence of (or lack thereof) technical competency in WMMA. Likewise, since the entire concept of VMAs revolves around sexualizing women, this also saw a slight decline between

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<sup>349</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Miesha Tate vs Ronda Rousey ... who wins the Strikeforce sexiness battle?,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 3, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/3/2840585/miesha-tate-vs-ronda-rousey-who-wins-the-sexiness-battle>.



timeframes. However, it is not just because of the media's focus on the change to five-minute rounds. I think the absence of a male gaze atmosphere, along with toxic masculine and VMA instances, has more to do with what articles and comments I chose, or rather which ones I decided not to examine.

As stated earlier, even in articles whose primary focus was Shayna Baszler, the Cyborg-Carano rivalry somehow managed to find its way into the media's framing and the comment sections available to online fans. In both examined periods, fans expressed their enthusiasm for this WMMA contest because Carano was a "hot girl,"<sup>350</sup> and Cyborg was an "in-human monster."<sup>351</sup> Although most of the articles featuring them focused on hypothesized endurance levels of WMMA competitors, the male gaze seemed to be an unspoken narrative. However, since the Cyborg-Carano fight was the primary focus in a stark minority of articles examined, this caused the data to reflect an absence of toxic masculinity and VMAs rather than a proliferation of those traits. Because of the stark contrast, I hypothesize that if I had examined all the relevant articles about Cyborg and Carano during this timeframe, the male gaze would likely have featured prominently, if not more so, in the second dataset than in the first. Similarly, if I had analyzed a fraction of media articles and fan comments surrounding Ronda Rousey's rise, mainly covering the lead-up to her title fight against Miesha Tate, toxic masculine and VMA examples would likely have been numerous. This begs the question: why did I only partly examine the Carano-Cyborg online discourse and barely glance at the coverage given to Rousey?

The answer is simple, told in three components. First, when I began researching and writing this dissertation in 2019, Shayna Baszler was the lone topic of conversation analyzed. As

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<sup>350</sup> Rainmaker6, April 14, 2009 (10:36 pm) Comment on Rome, "There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos."

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

a result, I initially did not examine any articles or comments unrelated to Baszler. Once I began investigating the first few **Invicta** fight cards, it became apparent that exploring more than Baszler in specific time frames would benefit the study. Hence, Rousey and Invicta for 2012-2013 were examined more deeply. However, she remained largely absent from reviewed 2010-2012 material as this was still primarily Baszler's narrative and because the sheer number of articles on Rousey to analyze would have dominated the study. Second, the Carano-Cyborg rivalry only slightly tied into Baszler's story, so it only was focused on peripherally. I only added a handful of articles to explain how hegemonic masculinity/emphasized femininity impacted WMMA overall and media/fan reactions to it in 2009. Finally, and most importantly, toxic masculinity and VMAs were eleventh-hour additions to the study. For most of the study's construction, its theoretical basis solely consisted of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Focusing primarily on Baszler's career gave me enough examples of both. However, in late 2022, we decided to include toxic masculinity as a central focus. The Vox Media sites erased their entire archive of fan comments a year prior. This meant the data required to determine if Carano-Cyborg-focused articles and those centered on Rousey's 2011 rise saw a noticeable uptick in increased fan examples of toxic masculinity, and VMAs were no longer available. I cannot examine data that no longer exists, ergo turning this into a moot point.

However, despite the limited number of VMA and toxic masculinity examples from 2009 through 2011, that number was still high enough to be noticeable. It was by no means absent from this timeframe. Notably, these two gender theorems were a significant part of the media/fan discourse around some events of lesser focus, such as in between **EliteXC**'s closure and their WMMA division migrating to **Strikeforce**, along with the 2010 **Strikeforce** Bantamweight Number 1 Contender's tournament. Most important, regardless of how absent toxic masculinity

and VMAs arguably were between 2009-2011, hegemonic masculine promotion of emphasized feminine norms and adherence remained high.

In the subsequent chapter, along with Baszler fighting for the new all-WMMA promotion **Invicta Fighting Championships**,<sup>352</sup> I give brief glimpses into Rousey's 2012 activities (her March title fight with Miesha Tate<sup>353</sup> and Dana White's public endorsement following Rousey's August title defense against Sarah Kaufman.)<sup>354</sup> Unlike Carano-Cyborg in Chapter 4, discussions surrounding **Invicta FC** and Rousey, not just Baszler, saw MMA media and online fans participating in numerous examples of toxic masculine behaviors and engaging in VMA tactics. However, there was also a sizeable amount of people, both amongst the media and MMA fans, defending the technical competence on display in **Invicta** and decrying those who insisted on pushing their male gaze to the forefront of WMMA conversations. The media and fans discussed Shayna Baszler and **Invicta FC** differently than how both analyzed Ronda Rousey.

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<sup>352</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>353</sup> Ariel Helwani, "Miesha Tate Didn't Break Arm in Ronda Rousey Fight," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmfighting.com/strikeforce/2012/3/4/2845370/miesha-tate-didnt-break-arm-in-ronda-rousey-fight>.

<sup>354</sup> Jesse Holland, "Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3259943/strikeforce-ratings-showtime-dana-white-warming-up-womens-mma>.

## Chapter 5

### “The Birth of the Phoenix”: March-August 2012

#### Invicta FC, Baszler’s Mainstream Return, and MMA’s Rousey Addiction

“If every male MMA thread you went to was populated by 99% women prefacing everything they said about the fighters with “I’d hit that until my cervix exploded” you’d probably find it really grating after a while.”- *Bloody Elbow* fan commenter MOLLCUTPURSE<sup>1</sup>

#### Section 1: Rousey Vs. Tate Aftermath

##### March 2012

In 2011 and early 2012, as established in the previous chapter, the WMMA media cycle barely touched upon Shayna Baszler’s year-plus layoff from the sport. Primarily, the sport’s overarching narrative was Ronda Rousey’s meteoric rise in becoming the face of WMMA despite having only four professional fights. This startling rise culminated in her challenging **Strikeforce** Women’s Bantamweight Champion Miesha Tate on March 3, 2012.<sup>2</sup> The promotional leadup to this fight, shown in the literature review, has been covered in academic works, most extensively in *She’s a Knockout* by L.A. Jennings. Jennings’ showed that the physical attractiveness aspect of emphasized femininity was part of the media’s draw to the bout.<sup>3</sup> However, she did not examine fan and media reactions to the Rousey-Tate bout.<sup>4</sup> I am including the coverage of the fight proper and some of the aftermath to show the stark contrast between what MMA media wrote about Ronda Rousey and **Invicta FC** in 2012. This is

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<sup>1</sup> Mollcutpurse, April 29, 2012 (2:33pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>2</sup> “Strikeforce: Tate vs. Rousey,” Tapology.com, Accessed July 7, 2021. <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/events/11828-strikeforce>.

<sup>3</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout!*, 145-149.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

especially true in promoting emphasized feminine adherence in WMMA and even more so in the output of toxic masculinity and Virtual Manhood Acts.

Geno Mrosko wrote the Rousey-Tate recap article for *MMA Mania*, recounting: “After a trip from Rousey, they battled back to their feet again and Tate started letting her hands go a bit. Of course, Rousey went back to the bread and butter and hit a judo trip. She transitioned quick to mount and worked hard punches. It wasn't long again before she grabbed a hold of Tate's arm and did just like she said she would and BROKE IT OFF. Ronda Rousey is the new Strikeforce Women's bantamweight champion. Get some.”<sup>5</sup> For clarification, this was the final moment of the fight:

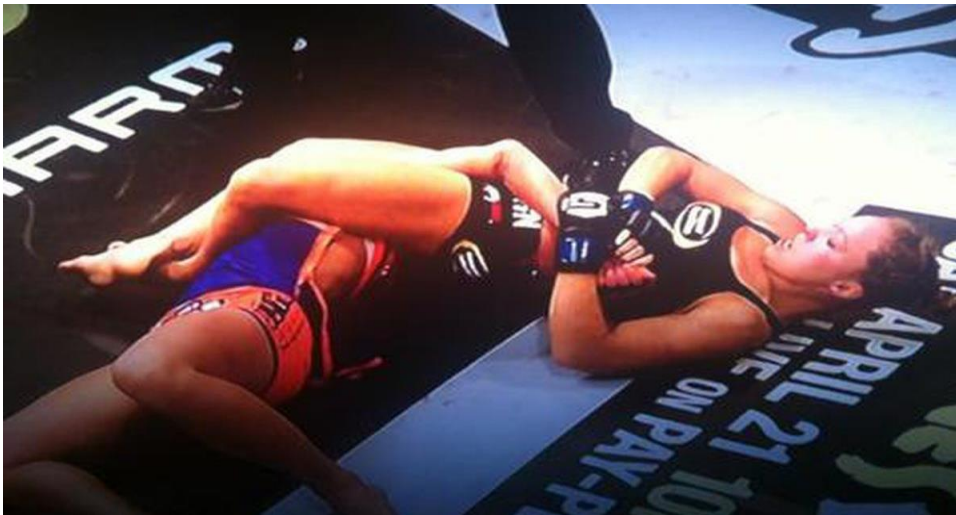


Figure 12 Ronda Rousey hyperextends Miesha Tate's arm to win the Strikeforce Women's Bantamweight Championship, March 3, 2012.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843435/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-breaks-miesha-tates-arm-to-win>.

<sup>6</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Pic: Miesha Tate's broken arm after submission loss to Ronda Rousey at Strikeforce in Ohio,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843487/pic-miesha-tates-broken-arm-after-submission-loss-to-ronda-rousey-at>. Picture taken by Dave Ferra.

For an *MMA Mania* article, especially one written by the same author of the **Strikeforce** Sexiness Battle about the same two women,<sup>7</sup> this was a recap solely focused on the fighters' technical prowess. There was little in the way of emphasized feminine promotion by the writer. However, the majority of the 279 comments written under the article featured men's titillation desires in spades.<sup>8</sup> ~PERENGRINE espoused: "There was some awesome skill in that round wish the break wasn't so bad... hard to fap."<sup>9</sup> ~PERENGRINE was concerned more about his ability to masturbate during the fight than the fighting prowess on display. This shows ~PERENGRINE's complicity in engaging with Toxic Trait 1 by placing their physical attractiveness above fighting skill, also participating in VMA Traits 2 through 4. SHEEPLEBUSTER also focused on the male gaze aspect, opining: "Ronda is more of a man than 95% of men out there. I am talking about in terms of manliness."<sup>10</sup> GSP'SNUTTS wrote: "That fight was sick. I want to kiss Ronda in her no no place even more now."<sup>11</sup> While avoiding toxic masculinity, he fully engages in VMA Traits 2, 3, and 4. To this, BANAGO replied: "Why would you want to kiss a dude in his no no parts? what the fuck is wrong with you. this isn't a pride march."<sup>12</sup> The issue here is twofold.

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<sup>7</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Miesha Tate vs Ronda Rousey ... who wins the Strikeforce sexiness battle?," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 3, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/3/2840585/miesha-tate-vs-ronda-rousey-who-wins-the-sexiness-battle>.

<sup>8</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843435/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-breaks-miesha-tates-arm-to-win>.

<sup>9</sup> ~Peregrine, March 4, 2012 (12:18am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>10</sup> SheepleBuster, March 4, 2012 (12:25am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>11</sup> Gsp'sNutts, March 4, 2012 (12:22am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>12</sup> Banago, March 4, 2012 (12:24am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

First, BANAGO criticizes Rousey's male gaze appeal by referring to her as a man. Second, he expressed that any man who wanted to kiss Rousey was gay, implying that male homosexuality should be chastised. For these reasons, BANAGO fully engaged in Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 4. RYAN KINSLEY expressed a need for female fragility, saying: "Definitely not a fan of 2 hot chicks breaking bones and punching each other... not the way I ever pictured our women being treated no matter what the format may be."<sup>13</sup> SPACEBEN gave a brief reprieve from the male gaze, stating: "Wow.....miesha tate is one tough broad. barely showed any pain at the end there. ronda is straight up evil."<sup>14</sup> But his viewpoint was in a distinct minority.

THORAZINE focused on the supposed lack of women's biology and dedication as proof that WMMA is lesser than the male version, explaining: "It's about 20yrs behind mens mma. I've coached girls wrestling... they are just not the same dedication n skill wise... they can be tough... but it's not near the same refined caliber... no comparison."<sup>15</sup> SUPERFKNMARIO\_ commented: "To be honest, this only proves that women's MMA is severely lacking talent. When a one-trick-pony with only 4 fights under her belt can come in and become champ in the deepest division, that's not a good sign moving forward."<sup>16</sup> Both espoused a narrative that because a woman with only four fights in her professional career beat Tate, who by comparison had ten more fights on her record, meant that any WMMA fighter could be champ because of the overall alleged lack of skill. OJR stated: "Most people would agree that . . . WMMA has no real depth in comparison to Men's MMA . . . if you think differently the burden of proof is definitely

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<sup>13</sup> Ryan Kinsley, March 4, 2012 (12:42am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>14</sup> Spaceben, March 4, 2012 (12:20am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>15</sup> THORAZINE, March 4, 2012 (12:32am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>16</sup> Superfknmario\_, March 4, 2012 (12:58am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

on you.”<sup>17</sup> Essentially, OJR said the burden of proof was on WMMA fans to provide the names of talented female fighters. GRETZKYOVERYOURJETSKI retorted: “I don't see how this fight proves that . . . because wmma doesn't get enough media attention doesn't mean that there is not depth out there. There are other orgs out there aside from Strikeforce for women.”<sup>18</sup> This perfectly described what posters such as OJR were doing, watching the limited **Strikeforce** fights and judging WMMA without watching the entire women's division.

Michael David Smith wrote the counterpart article for *MMA Fighting*. He opined: “In a tremendous main event to Saturday night's Strikeforce card, a new women's champion has been crowned: Ronda Rousey has submitted Miesha Tate with a first-round arm bar. . . It was a great fight.”<sup>19</sup> Ninety-five comments were posted on the article, primarily consisting of back-and-forth dialogue between WMMA fans and its detractors. BIGS- exclaimed: “Ronda Rousey bringing relevance to women's MMA again,”<sup>20</sup> to which SHNAK replied: “Again? for the first time, you mean.”<sup>21</sup> SHNAK completely dismissed the history of WMMA up to 2012, questioning female fighters' technical competence. ROTTEN APPLE expressed: “Holyshit! that arm... that arm looked really hurt! This is what Olympic level athletes bring to the table,” praising Rousey's fighting abilities.<sup>22</sup> AIRESKJJ acknowledged and diminished these abilities, arguing: “The ladies have to be at least 7 or 8 years behind but can likely catch up faster as MMA has gained

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<sup>17</sup> OJR, March 4, 2012 (1:43am) Comment on Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title.”

<sup>18</sup> Gretzkyoveryourjetski, March 4, 2012 (1:18am) Comment on Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title.”

<sup>19</sup> Michael David Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media. March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/3/4/2843419/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-submits-miesha-tate>.

<sup>20</sup> Bigs-, March 4, 2012 (12:18am) Comment on Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate.”

<sup>21</sup> Shnak, March 4, 2012 (12:26am) Comment on Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate.”

<sup>22</sup> Rotten Apple, March 4, 2012 (12:21am) Comment on Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate.”



legitimacy and has evolved training now.”<sup>23</sup> In response to MASTER KILLER stating he thought Rousey looked “delicious,”<sup>24</sup> BLUEJAY\_ countered: “Ronda Rousey looks like a flippin tranny. Did you see her in her pre-fight interview? That’s what you consider an attractive woman? Just gross.”<sup>25</sup> MASTER KILLER perpetrates VMA Trait 2, while BLUEJAY\_ utilizes Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 4. Not only did the latter feel the need to complain that he found Rousey unattractive, but he openly questioned the masculinity of those her physical appearance did arouse.

Matthew Roth wrote the live reaction recap for *Bloody Elbow*: “Rousey passed to mount and Tate gave up her back. Rousey with punches and then an armbar. OH GROSS THAT IS BROKEN. Tate tapped but the damage was already done. Her arm is JACKED! Ronda Rousey is the new Strikeforce bantamweight champion . . . Amazing grappling displayed by both women.”<sup>26</sup> Roth applauded the fighter’s technical abilities and, most importantly, did not question their lack of female fragility despite Tate’s broken arm.

Fans wrote over 200 comments, most of which were positive towards the fight and its two combatants, but overall lacking in emphasized feminine expression.<sup>27</sup> SHNAK slightly contradicted himself from his *MMA Fighting* comment when he wrote: “For once, a technical women fight. I can honestly say that this was the first women fight I have thoroughly enjoyed. As far as I’m concerned, Rousey has earned the right to say whatever she wants against GSP

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<sup>23</sup> AiresKJJ, March 4, 2012 (12:59am) Comment on Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate.”

<sup>24</sup> Master Killer, March 4, 2012 (6:20am) Comment on Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate.”

<sup>25</sup> BlueJay-, March 4, 2012 (9:53am) Comment on Smith, “Strikeforce Results: Ronda Rousey Submits Miesha Tate.”

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Roth, “Strikeforce Tate Vs. Rousey Results: Ronda Rousey By Armbar,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/3/4/2843450/strikeforce-tate-vs-rousey-results-ronda-rousey-by-armbar>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

with this performance. WOW!”<sup>28</sup> To this, DAVEYBOY replied: “AND WHAT A BODY...ooops...didn’t realize my ‘other’ brain could type.”<sup>29</sup> He fully engages with VMA Traits 2, 3, and 4. Even *Bloody Elbow* featured posts solely occupied with pleasing their respective male desires. G87 presented an interesting emphasized feminine dichotomy when arguing: “Ronda is a BEAST but in my opinion a an arrogant B seriously classless words after wrecking her arm.”

On the one hand, he was complimenting Rousey’s toughness. On the other, he chastised her for not apologizing for breaking Tate’s arm. He applied a double standard to Rousey, expecting her to have some semblance of female sociability and decorum in the middle of the fight itself, despite, as shown in Hirose and Pih’s work, that when a fighter gets caught in a submission, it is either “tap or snap.”<sup>30</sup> However, such comments were a minority of those attached to this news article.

## **Section 2: Invicta FC 1**

### **February 2012- April 2012**

**Invicta Fighting Championships 1** was first announced on February 20, 2012, to take place on April 28 of the same year. In the *Sherdog* article with this pronouncement, the unnamed author wrote: “The upcoming bout between Ronda Rousey and Miesha Tate has drawn plenty of attention toward women’s mixed martial arts. On April 28, the Invicta Fighting Championships

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<sup>28</sup> Shnak, March 4, 2012 (12:22am) Comment on Roth, “Strikeforce Tate Vs. Rousey Results: Ronda Rousey By Armbar.” Georges St-Pierre was a Canadian UFC fighter who had been the promotion’s welterweight champion since 2008. He had said women did not belong in the UFC once Rousey’s signing had been finalized. Both Rousey and Tate criticized his comments.

<sup>29</sup> Daveyboy, March 4, 2012 (12:25am) Comment on Roth, “Strikeforce Tate Vs. Rousey Results: Ronda Rousey By Armbar.”

<sup>30</sup> Hirose and Pih, 199-200.

will attempt to take things a step further with the launch of its all-female fight series.”<sup>31</sup> The author also quoted Shannon Knapp, the president of **Invicta**, as stating: ““The time has come for a platform dedicated exclusively to building the growing women’s division in our great sport . . . Invicta is committed to increasing the depth of the women’s field and building female superstars by providing women athletes with the opportunity to compete and hone their skills on a consistent basis throughout the year.”<sup>32</sup> The article also listed all eleven matchups which would be taking place.<sup>33</sup> The literature review briefly covered this first show, solely featured in L.A. Jennings *She’s a Knockout*.<sup>34</sup> Despite Baszler not fighting for the promotion until **Invicta FC 2**, an academic analysis of the media coverage and fan reaction surrounding **Invicta FC 1** needs implementation.<sup>35</sup> This puts her three Invicta fights in their proper context and perspective and does the same for the then-current state of WMMA. Due to Baszler not fighting on this first show, **Invicta FC 1** will not be analyzed in the same depth as their following three cards, primarily focusing on two of the three VOX media sites (*MMA Mania* and *Bloody Elbow*) along with *Sherdog* to provide the media/fan reaction data.

On March 28, 2012, Tristan Critchfield announced on *Sherdog* that the all-female fight card would be streamed for free online by **Invicta**. Critchfield also discussed the main event featuring Marloes Coenen vs. Romy Russen and the co-main of Jessica Penne vs. Lisa Ellis.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sherdog.com Staff, “MARLOES COENEN, ROMY RUYSSSEN HEADLINE INVICTA FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIPS’ ALL-FEMALE CARD,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, February 20, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Marloes-Coenen-Romy-Ruyssen-Headline-Invicta-Fighting-Championships-AllFemale-Card-40461>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Jennings, *She’s a Knockout*, 142-143.

<sup>35</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>36</sup> Tristen Critchfield, “INVICTA FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIPS TO STREAM ALL-FEMALE FIGHT CARD ON APRIL 28,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, March 28, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Invicta-Fighting-Championships-to-Stream-AllFemale-Fight-Card-on-April-28-41427>.

Mike Whitman wrote a weigh-in result article containing zero promotion of emphasized feminine adherence. Instead, it focused on the recent fight records of Coenen and Russen. No derogatory comments were made toward the four fighters missing weight; Whitman listed how much they missed by.<sup>37</sup> Most importantly to this study, Tristan Critchfield did a one-on-one interview with Shayna Baszler, tentatively written due to her being ready to step in on a moment's notice if one of **Invicta FC 1**'s bantamweights had to pull out of the card.<sup>38</sup> In the interview, Baszler expressed her thoughts on not having fought in almost two years, along with a view concerning the new sole face of WMMA, Ronda Rousey. About the former, Baszler stated: "I think the hardest part about something like that is to keep training on the off chance you might have a fight . . . that's the most frustrating part- - training hard and busting your tail, and going to the gym when you just don't feel like it during down time. It's hard to convince yourself that you might have a fight and you have to get in there."<sup>39</sup> Baszler's words and Critchfield's framing showed no emphasized feminine promotion. However, regarding Rousey, Baszler opined:

Even though her fight with Miesha was a really great fight, I still think we haven't seen what she's like in a fight yet . . . When she's tired and it's round three, what does she fight like when the pace has slowed down? . . . As far as Ronda Rousey the character, I love all the hubbub. There's a lot of people that hate that stuff about MMA, but I'm of the opinion that fighting is an entertainment sport, and people are far more concerned with the story of a fight than the actual fight . . . Did she say things that pissed me off? Yes. Do I think she's cocky and needs to be smacked around? Yeah, but I love that stuff . . . I love that she's a heel. I love that whole part of fighting . . . It brings a lot of attention. It's only good for me, whether people hate her or love her.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mike Whitman, "MARLOES COENEN CLEARED, ROMY RUYSSSEN HEAVY FOR INVICTA FC 1 HEADLINER," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, April 27, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Marloes-Coenen-Cleared-Romy-Ruyssen-Heavy-for-Invicta-FC-1-Headliner-42235>.

<sup>38</sup> Tristen Critchfield, "MOONLIGHTING AS A ROLLER DERBY COACH, SHAYNA BASZLER LOOKS FORWARD TO MMA RETURN," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, April 16, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Moonlighting-as-a-Roller-Derby-Coach-Shayna-Baszler-Looks-Forward-to-MMA-Return-41877>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Here, Baszler argued why a bit of cockiness and showmanship, even in the women's division, is built into the fabric of the sport of MMA. A woman showboating or talking trash is no different than a man doing so. This is clarified further because Baszler did not mention gender once in the quote. At the beginning of the paragraph, she touched on wanting to see more of Ronda's fighting abilities past the first round, discussing her technical competence. By the end, Baszler applauds Rousey's ability to get under the fan's skin, the opposite of feminine sociability. Critchfield offers no praise or condemnation of her assessment.<sup>41</sup>

Jordan Breen wrote the fight recap article for **Invicta FC 1**, largely avoiding hegemonic masculine or emphasized feminine narratives. He gave the WMMA competitors credit for their technical competence, did not discuss their physical appearance in any way, and generally treated **Invicta**'s first-ever fight card like any other. Not once in the entire article did Breen mention this was an all-women's show.<sup>42</sup> One specific fight of note, however, prompted interesting language by Breen. The writer described the co-main event featuring Jessica Penne vs. Lisa Ellis: "Penne quickly seized the moment, landing two sharp knees from the clinch that crunched Ellis' nose, turning on the bloody faucet. Ellis powered her way to a desperation takedown, but Penne quickly swept her bloody foe, set up on top, and began to seal the deal. Ellis turned sideways while Penne continued to pound away, smearing blood with her gloves until referee Chuck Wolfe intervened."<sup>43</sup> This fight is particularly notable as the first WMMA bout examined in the study, where the author focused on the presence of blood. The image of a woman bloodied and battered is something WMMA detractors often use in dismissing women in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Jordan Breen, "COENEN TOPS RUYSSSEN AGAIN, OLYMPIC MEDALIST MILLER WINS DEBUT AT INVICTA FC 1," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, April 28, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Coenen-Tops-Ruyssen-Again-Olympic-Medalist-Miller-Wins-Debut-at-Invicta-FC-1-42259>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

combat sports, playing on the emphasized feminine ideal of the fragile female. However, Breen treated female blood as just blood, not exaggerating its appearance as an unnatural or taboo phenomenon in MMA. In layman's terms, the author heavily defied emphasized feminine norms by treating the final round of Penne-Ellis as nothing out of the ordinary.

The three Vox Media sites, *Bloody Elbow*, *MMA Mania*, and *MMA Fighting*, presented a different story from both Sherdog and one another. What becomes apparent throughout this chapter and the next is that despite being owned by the same media conglomerate, the three Vox hubs for MMA fans presented utterly different attitudes in what comments moderators would allow to remain under articles, giving us a pronounced sociological tint through how these comment sections got preserved. In many cases, the overall tone in a site's comment sections stood in stark contrast to how the website's staff writers covered the inaugural **Invicta** event and the ones that followed. For starters, *MMA Fighting* provided virtually no coverage of **Invicta FC 1**.<sup>44</sup>

*MMA Mania*, from the reporting perspective, thoroughly covered the event. They were the first of the Vox sites to announce the event was taking place (via a press release).<sup>45</sup> Staff writer Brian Hemminger interviewed fighters Marloes Coenen,<sup>46</sup> Liz Carmouche<sup>47</sup>, and Ashley

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<sup>44</sup> "Search results for Invicta," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, accessed July 22, 2021. <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=205&q=invicta>.

<sup>45</sup> Press Release, "Invicta Fighting Championships announces female featherweight tournament, Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen to headline," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, February 21, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/2/21/2813862/invicta-fighting-championships-marloes-coenen-mma>.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Golden girl: Invicta headliner Marloes Coenen interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 23, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/23/2969924/golden-girl-invicta-headliner-marloes-coenen-interview-exclusive-with>.

<sup>47</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Hurricane Awesome: Invicta fighter Liz Carmouche interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 26, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/26/2974826/hurricane-awesome-invicta-fighter-liz-carmouche-interview-exclusive>.

Cummins<sup>48</sup> and wrote a preview and predictions article.<sup>49</sup> Hemminger<sup>50</sup> and Geno Mrosko wrote separate weigh-in articles;<sup>51</sup> the former provided live coverage of the fights via a live stream thread.<sup>52</sup> The press release, which came from **Invicta** directly, unsurprisingly strayed from emphasized feminine narratives outside the opening line: “The term “girl power” is about to take on a whole new meaning.”<sup>53</sup> Hemminger’s interview with Carmouche contained no mention of her homosexuality.<sup>54</sup> Cummins promoted female fragility, stating: “There’s a couple smaller guys that fight at 125 and 135 at my gym so I usually pair up with them. I’ve been doing that for five years so I don’t mind it. I look at it like, I spar with guys every day so when I get in the cage with a female, I’m like, “This is it?” because I’m used to go up against someone that’s quicker, stronger, faster because naturally, that’s just what guys are.”<sup>55</sup> However, she also countered that thought when discussing who her idol was in MMA: “My favorite female fighter is Shayna Baszler. I think she’s just amazing. Her jiu-jitsu and wrestling is just out of this world. I think she

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Excessive use of force: Invicta fighter Ashley Cummins interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 24, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC preview and predictions for ‘Coenen vs Ruysen’ on April 28 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 26, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/26/2977980/invicta-fc-preview-and-predictions-for-coenen-vs-ruysen-on-april-28>.

<sup>50</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for ‘Coenen vs Ruysen 2’,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 27, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/27/2981984/invicta-fc-1-weigh-in-results-live-from-missouri-for-coenen-vs>.

<sup>51</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/28/2982931/marloes-coenen-vs-romy-ruysen-staredown-pic-photo-gallery-Invicta-FC-1-weigh-ins>.

<sup>52</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for ‘Coenen vs Ruysen 2’ TONIGHT (April 28),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/28/2983228/invicta-fc-1-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-coenen-vs-ruysen-2>.

<sup>53</sup> Press Release, “Invicta Fighting Championships announces female featherweight tournament, Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen to headline,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, February 21, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/2/21/2813862/invicta-fighting-championships-marloes-coenen-mma>.

<sup>54</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Hurricane Awesome: Invicta fighter Liz Carmouche interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 26, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/26/2974826/hurricane-awesome-invicta-fighter-liz-carmouche-interview-exclusive>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

can beat up all the guys.”<sup>56</sup> Hemminger mentions Invicta’s policy regarding fighters who miss weight in his weigh-in article: “Invicta has a unique weigh-in format. The four fighters who missed weight the first time around are automatically penalized 10 percent of their fight purse. If they fail to make weight the second time, they are fined a total of 25 percent of the purse.”<sup>57</sup> He highlighted the weight-cut criticism that female fighters often receive, showing how Invicta was taking steps to stabilize weight classes, thereby reducing the amount of skepticism. Finally, his predictions article was utterly void of emphasized feminine promotion, focusing instead on each fighter’s technical abilities. However, this differs from how the fans responded in comment sections.<sup>58</sup>

Much of the *MMA Mania* fan discourse surrounding **Invicta FC 1** was heavily steeped in hegemonic masculine and emphasized feminine roles. In the article which covered the event’s announcement, two out of the four comments argued that female fighting never draws.<sup>59</sup> LESNAR’S STRIKING COACH proclaimed: “Hook n Shoot died, this will too! Look there are about 10 female mma fighters who can produce good fights time and time again. Toughill, Kenzie, Carano, Rousey, Tate, Kaufmann, Cyborg, Fujimi and Coenen are the only women i’ve enjoyed watching. I have seen these ‘trend’ shows fall upon their face.”<sup>60</sup> Of thirty-eight comments posted to Coenen’s interview, nineteen focused on praising or condemning the Dutch

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for 'Coenen vs Ruyssen 2’,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 27, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/27/2981984/invicta-fc-1-weigh-in-results-live-from-missouri-for-coenen-vs>.

<sup>58</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC preview and predictions for 'Coenen vs Ruyssen' on April 28 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 26, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/26/2977980/invicta-fc-preview-and-predictions-for-coenen-vs-ruyssen-on-april-28>.

<sup>59</sup> Press Release, “Invicta Fighting Championships announces female featherweight tournament, Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruyssen to headline,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, February 21, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/2/21/2813862/invicta-fighting-championships-marloes-coenen-mma>.

<sup>60</sup> Lesnar’s striking coach, February 21, 2012 (9:28am) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta Fighting Championships announces female featherweight tournament, Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruyssen to headline.” He misspelled Julie Kedzie as Kenzie and Megumi Fujii as Fujimi.



fighter's physical appearance.<sup>61</sup> Most notable was THEPEOPLE'SCHAMP, writing: "She is so skilled and so beautiful. She needs to . . . come live with me, bear at least 2 of my children, allow me to manage her."<sup>62</sup> He barely avoids participating in toxic masculinity but does reflect VMA Traits 2, 3, and 4. The same interview featured nine comments about a UFC fight instead of the article.<sup>63</sup> Readers left twenty-four comments on Hemminger's weigh-in article.<sup>64</sup> STARR788 opined: "I don't care what her ears look like...I'd hotdog Coenen for sure,"<sup>65</sup> employing Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 3. FAT DADDY DOOBS argued, "I think in female mma, for the most part, attractiveness is inversely proportionate to credibility. The more gruesome a chick looks, the more I respect her skills."<sup>66</sup> The rest of the comments focused on who was hotter, Coenen or Ruysen, thereby participating in, at minimum, VMA Trait 2.<sup>67</sup>

On Mrosko's weigh-in article, fans wrote forty-four comments, the majority of which featured calls for emphasized feminine adherence and engaged in toxic masculine behavior.<sup>68</sup> Expressing Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 2, THE CHUBBSTER opined: "The lady in the middle

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<sup>61</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Golden girl: Invicta headliner Marloes Coenen interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 23, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/23/2969924/golden-girl-invicta-headliner-marloes-coenen-interview-exclusive-with>.

<sup>62</sup> ThePeople'sChamp, April 23, 2012, (8:18am) Comment on Hemminger, "Golden girl: Invicta headliner Marloes Coenen interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>63</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Golden girl: Invicta headliner Marloes Coenen interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 23, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/23/2969924/golden-girl-invicta-headliner-marloes-coenen-interview-exclusive-with>.

<sup>64</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2'," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 27, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/27/2981984/invicta-fc-1-weigh-in-results-live-from-missouri-for-coenen-vs>.

<sup>65</sup> Starr778, April 27, 2012 (8:45pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2'."

<sup>66</sup> Fat Daddy Doobs, April 27, 2012 (10:15pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2'."

<sup>67</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2'," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 27, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/27/2981984/invicta-fc-1-weigh-in-results-live-from-missouri-for-coenen-vs>.

<sup>68</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/28/2982931/marloes-coenen-vs-romy-ruysen-staredown-pic-photo-gallery-Invicta-FC-1-weigh-ins>.

(Shannon Knapp) looks better than all these ugly bitches.”<sup>69</sup> DANIEL WORBY, on purpose, mistook Liz Carmouche for male fighter Urijah Faber<sup>70</sup> and mocked Sarah D’Alelio’s homosexuality, immersed in Toxic Traits 1 and 2 in tandem with VMA Trait 4.<sup>71</sup> When a reader mentioned Carmouche’s homosexuality, FAT DADDY DOOBS responded: “That only adds to the challenge/sexiness. If I can’t talk her into letting me join, I’m always ready to hold a camera, or pass whatever apparatus they might need. I’m helpful like that.”<sup>72</sup> He outright stated it as a challenge, caring only about his male gaze and not the fighter’s sexual orientation, let alone their consent. FAT DADDY DOOBS was dedicated to the toxic masculine ideal, promoting Toxic Traits 1 and 2 along with VMA Traits 2 through 4.

Hemminger’s blow-by-blow coverage of each **Invicta FC** 1 bout strictly discussed the fighters’ technical competence, not once focusing on a combatant’s physical attractiveness. This contrasts with most of the 725 readership comments, primarily consisting of titillation ratings.<sup>73</sup> XQUISITEWRETCH complained: “Is this the itty bitty titty try outs? talk about some flat chested broads,”<sup>74</sup> to which AJTHROWINJABS responded: “I haven’t seen too many female fighters with huge knockers yet...maybe im not looking at the right places?”<sup>75</sup> The former engaged with Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 4, while the latter reflected VMA Trait 2.

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<sup>69</sup> The chubbster, April 28, 2012 (1:47am) Comment on Mrosko, “Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel worby, April 28, 2012 (2:07am) Comment on Mrosko, “Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins.”

<sup>71</sup> Daniel worby, April 28, 2012 (2:19am) Comment on Mrosko, “Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins.”

<sup>72</sup> Fat Daddy Doobs, April 28, 2012 (11:04am) Comment on Mrosko, “Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins.”

<sup>73</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/28/2983228/invicta-fc-1-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-coenen-vs-ruysen-2>.

<sup>74</sup> Xquisitewretch, April 28, 2012 (3:58pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>75</sup> AJthrowinjabs, April 28, 2012 (4:00pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

Even Hemminger got in the act, admitting he found Sofia Bagherdai “pretty fine” appearance-wise.<sup>76</sup> SHEEPLEBUSTER complained there was not enough pushback on fighters not meeting his male gaze, asserting, “I swear I have never seen a girl get called ugly in these forums no matter how ugly she is . . . people are shitless scared of saying someone is not cute.”<sup>77</sup> This revealed his participation in Toxic Trait 1 as well as VMA Traits 1 and 2. He also encouraged more heterosexist and homosocial discourse in the *MMA Mania* community. JEBSBEARD replied he found Carmouche: “pretty goddamn ugly.”<sup>78</sup> HEXBREAKER added: “None of the fighters so far are cute . . . but id dick em down given the chance.”<sup>79</sup> His comment contained Toxic Trait 1 along with VMA Traits 2 and 3.

When JEBSBEARD remarked it was funny the promotion used ring girls instead of ring guys,<sup>80</sup> GRETZKYOVERYOURJETSKI stated: “Lezbe honest maybe some of the female fighters don’t mind,” implying some fighters are lesbian,<sup>81</sup> a comment which featured VMA Trait 4. When Sarah D’Alelio made her entrance to fight Vanessa Mariscal, THEPEOPLE’SCHAMP claimed the former: “was a fukin dude,” expressing Toxic Trait 2.<sup>82</sup> There were moments where readers acknowledged WMMA's technical competence, most prominent during the Leslie Smith-Kaitlin Young bout. HONKHONKHONK noted: “these girls

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<sup>76</sup> Brian Hemminger, April 28, 2012 (8:26pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).” He includes a photo of her in a dress and high heels.

<sup>77</sup> SheepleBuster, April 28, 2012 (8:38pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>78</sup> Jebsbeard, April 28, 2012 (8:39pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>79</sup> Hexbreaker, April 28, 2012 (8:42pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>80</sup> Jebsbeard, April 28, 2012 (9:44pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>81</sup> Gretzkyoveryourjetski, April 28, 2012 (9:49pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>82</sup> ThePeople’sChamp, April 28, 2012 (10:08pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

throwing leather here,”<sup>83</sup> and THEPEOPLE’SCHAMP opined: “This fight is fucking awesome.”<sup>84</sup> But the fans soon reverted to contributing to the male gaze. Before the Penne-Ellis fight, SCARNON asked: “Im going for Ellis because id do her is that wrong,” participating in Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 3.<sup>85</sup> During the main event, 10THDEGREEWHITEBELT wrote “fap” repeatedly.<sup>86</sup> Using one word, internet slang for male masturbation, he perpetrated Toxic Traits 1 along with the latter three VMA Traits.

Similarly, HITOKIRIX remarked: “Would much rather watch these two scissor it out.”<sup>87</sup> He participated in Toxic Traits 1 and 2 and VMA Trait 2, focusing more on sexual fantasies of faux lesbianism than anything to do with WMMA. While after the show, there were several positive comments about Smith-Young and Penne-Ellis, many heavily criticized the event.<sup>88</sup> HEXBREAKER opined: “That wasn’t very fun. Lets never watch an all women card again.”<sup>89</sup> SHEEPLEBUSTER remarked outside of the last three fights; he was unimpressed.<sup>90</sup> Readers overtly sexualizing fighters continued in Hemminger’s recap article the following day.<sup>91</sup> With nine comments, it echoed many sentiments expressed in the live stream, as BJPENNFAN

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<sup>83</sup> HonkHonkHonk, April 28, 2012 (10:31pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>84</sup> ThePeople’sChamp, April 28, 2012 (10:34pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>85</sup> Scarnon, April 28, 2012 (11:27pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>86</sup> 10thDegreeWhiteBelt, April 29, 2012 (12:08am) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>87</sup> HitokiriX, April 29, 2012 (12:18am) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>88</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/28/2983228/invicta-fc-1-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-coenen-vs-ruysen-2>.

<sup>89</sup> Hexbreaker, April 29, 2012 (12:22am) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>90</sup> SheepleBuster, April 29, 2012 (12:23am) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>91</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results recap from last night for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' in Kansas City, Kansas,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/29/2986042/invicta-fc-1-results-recap-from-last-night-for-coenen-vs-ruysen-2-in>.

requested: “Make it so all the chick fighters have to be hot,”<sup>92</sup> featuring Toxic Trait 1 in tandem with VMA Traits 1 and 2. Another four posts demanded WMMA adhere to what they found physically attractive, while the remaining four praised the card.<sup>93</sup> The most common narrative thread found within *MMA Mania Invicta FC 1* articles saw their readership consistently announce toxic masculine appreciation or disdain towards certain fighters’ physical appearances.

*Bloody Elbow*, covering much less of the build-up to **Invicta FC 1** than their counterparts at *MMA Mania*, did two exclusive interviews with Shannon Knapp, one written by guest writer Stephanie Haynes.<sup>94</sup> They wrote weigh-in<sup>95</sup> and recap articles<sup>96</sup> while only producing a solitary fighter interview- a segment on *Bloody Elbow Radio* with Marloes Coenen.<sup>97</sup> Brent Brookhouse wrote two pieces, one regarding the announcement of the live stream thread<sup>98</sup> and the other focused on the weigh-ins.<sup>99</sup> With both *Bloody Elbow Radio* interviews unavailable in the present due to technical difficulties, the only fighter news in the lead-up to the event was Coenen

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<sup>92</sup> BJPennfan, April 29, 2012, (9:18am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results recap from last night for 'Coenen vs Ruyssen 2' in Kansas City, Kansas,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012.”

<sup>93</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results recap from last night for 'Coenen vs Ruyssen 2' in Kansas City, Kansas,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/4/29/2986042/invicta-fc-1-results-recap-from-last-night-for-coenen-vs-ruyssen-2-in>.

<sup>94</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Shannon Knapp Talks Invicta FC, Plans To Stream First Show Live And Free In HD,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, March 16, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/3/16/2878061/shannon-knapp-invicta-fc-womens-mma-wmma>. The article addresses the author as Stephanie Daniels, however every other article she writes has the Stephanie Haynes byline, suggesting whenever she got her name changed, it retroactively changed the bylines on her previous articles.

<sup>95</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983384/invicta-fc-four-of-twenty-two-fighters-miss-weight-for-womens-mma>.

<sup>96</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/29/2985800/invicta-fc-1-results-recap-coenen-randi-miller-womens-mma>.

<sup>97</sup> Matt Bishop, “Bad Boy Presents Bloody Elbow Radio - Episode 156: Marloes Coenen, UFC 145 Preview, Bellator 66 Preview,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 19, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/19/2960105/bad-boy-presents-bloody-elbow-radio-episode-156-ufc-145-preview>.

<sup>98</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Start Time, Preview And Live Stream Details,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983419/invicta-fc-start-time-preview-live-stream-details>.

<sup>99</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983384/invicta-fc-four-of-twenty-two-fighters-miss-weight-for-womens-mma>.

criticizing former Golden Glory gym teammate **UFC** fighter Alister Overeem.<sup>100</sup> Hayne's interview with Knapp before the event lacked emphasized feminine promotion, although she only asked the promoter four questions. Here, Knapp rebutted Dana White's assessment of WMMA, stating: "When Dana (White) said that there was a lack of depth with the women, he was absolutely correct, but the rebuttal to that is that he's only seeing four or five girls active. How do you gauge the depth when they're so spread out? . . . us coming in and building a solid foundation to bring all these girls together, we can solidify these weight classes."<sup>101</sup> Haynes herself commented: "Having over a decade of experience in the MMA industry . . . Shannon Knapp may not only be breathing financial life into the careers of some hungry female fighters, she might just be providing them with a home for the future."<sup>102</sup>

In contrast to Haynes' positivity were the writings of Brent Brookhouse, whose weigh-in article lambasted **Invicta** for four fighters missing weight. While Hemminger praised them for their revolutionary incentives to convince fighters to make weight, Brookhouse focused solely on the negative results. He opined: "The real issue here is the extent to which weight was missed. Four fighters missing weight by more than four pounds is a real issue and something that needs to be fixed."<sup>103</sup> He then quoted Knapp stating that they were going to solidify the weight classes before countering: "Solidifying weight classes isn't going to work if the fighters aren't able to make the weight."<sup>104</sup> Making that particular critique is not on its' own a hegemonic masculine

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<sup>100</sup> Tim Burke, "Invicta FC's Marloes Coenen Disses Alistair Overeem, Defends Golden Glory," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 26, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/26/2976100/ufc-marloes-coenen-disses-alistair-overeem-defends-golden-glory-invicta-mma-news>.

<sup>101</sup> Stephie Haynes, "Shannon Knapp Talks Invicta FC, Plans To Stream First Show Live And Free In HD," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, March 16, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/3/16/2878061/shannon-knapp-invicta-fc-womens-mma-wmma>.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983384/invicta-fc-four-of-twenty-two-fighters-miss-weight-for-womens-mma>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

viewpoint; however, Brookhouse seemed to assume this was the norm for WMMA, that they could not consistently make weight like their male colleagues. His preview article primarily drew quotes from Hayne's interview with Knapp, as if he did not care enough about WMMA to write his own piece on the subject.<sup>105</sup>

The comments under the articles were much more articulate than their *MMA Mania* counterparts, and even when they touched upon the structures mentioned in Connell's theorems, they did so more restrained and respectfully. In Hayne's interview with Knapp, who outlined her plans for **Invicta**, most of the thirty-eight comments praised the promotion and left gender all but removed from their respective insights.<sup>106</sup> SLEEPYGUY remarked: "Sounds like a good event, and it will give everyone a better idea of the overall quality of women's mma than just a few fights."<sup>107</sup> BIGNAT wrote: "I hope the event does very well then wmma can get a bigger fanbase. that way we can get some higher weight classes for the ladies. then the bigger women don't have to kill themselves trying to get down to 145."<sup>108</sup> Five comments did focus on Coenen's physical attractiveness,<sup>109</sup> but they were much more restrained than *MMA Mania* regulars such as THEPEOPLE'SCHAMP.<sup>110</sup> On the weigh-in article, forty-three comments were posted, most arguing that if they want to be treated as legitimate MMA fighters, women would

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<sup>105</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Invicta FC: Start Time, Preview And Live Stream Details," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983419/invicta-fc-start-time-preview-live-stream-details>.

<sup>106</sup> Stephanie Haynes, "Shannon Knapp Talks Invicta FC, Plans To Stream First Show Live And Free In HD," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, March 16, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/3/16/2878061/shannon-knapp-invicta-fc-womens-mma-wmma>.

<sup>107</sup> Sleepyguy, March 16, 2012 (11:27pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp Talks Invicta FC, Plans To Stream First Show Live And Free In HD."

<sup>108</sup> BIGNAT, March 16, 2012 (10:01pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp Talks Invicta FC, Plans To Stream First Show Live And Free In HD."

<sup>109</sup> Stephanie Haynes, "Shannon Knapp Talks Invicta FC, Plans To Stream First Show Live And Free In HD," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, March 16, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/3/16/2878061/shannon-knapp-invicta-fc-womens-mma-wmma>.

<sup>110</sup> ThePeople'sChamp, April 23, 2012, (8:18am) Comment on Hemminger, "Golden girl: Invicta headliner Marloes Coenen interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."



have to make weight consistently.<sup>111</sup> However, they were much more articulate than Brookhouse. PUDD333 offered: “Part of being seen as a professional is making weight. I think if women’s MMA is meant to be taken seriously, having one’s period can’t be seen as an excuse.”<sup>112</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG added: “It is a pretty weak excuse. They signed to fight at a certain weight, and I feel do have a professional obligation to make that contracted weight.”<sup>113</sup> MOLLCUTPURSE provided a female reader’s perspective, arguing: “I’m not excusing these women, because missing weight is totally unprofessional, but I really sympathize. I can easily gain 10lbs of water weight during PMS and it won’t fucking move until it is ready.”<sup>114</sup>

Ben Thapa did live play-by-play coverage of all eleven fights during the live stream of the **Invicta FC 1** card. He wrote about the fighters’ varying levels of technical competence, seemingly not interested in discussing his approval of their physical appearance. For example, in his overall assessment of the Kaitlyn Young- Leslie Smith bout: “Wow, a very close, absolutely brawlerific 9-28 decision for Kaitlin Young as Bloody Elbow scores it . . . This is going to be very, very tough to beat as the Fight of the Night.”<sup>115</sup>

The **Invicta FC 1** livestream thread generated 1,949 comments. Most focused on the fights rather than a combatant’s physical attractiveness, avoiding both Toxic and VMA traits.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983384/invicta-fc-four-of-twenty-two-fighters-miss-weight-for-womens-mma>

<sup>112</sup> Pudd333, April 28, 2012 (11:44am) Comment on Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event.”

<sup>113</sup> Christopher Muldong, April 28, 2012 (1:04pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event.”

<sup>114</sup> Mollcutpurse, April 28, 2012 (4:40pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event.”

<sup>115</sup> Ben Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2985038/invicta-coenen-vs-ruysen-live-stream-tblog-and-play-by-play>. The official judge’s decision for Young Vs. Smith was a draw.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.



OUR BOVINE PUBLIC asked: “How big/important would you guys say this is for womens MMA?”<sup>117</sup> GETTING SOME BAS replied: “It’s not a game changer just yet, but neither was the WEC (World Extreme Cagefighting) back in the day and we saw what that did for 135/145.”<sup>118</sup> Ben Thapa added: “I think if Invicta can stay above the water and consistently employ these women, this is the breakthrough women MMA fighters have been waiting for. The promoter is smart, the organizers are great, the fighters getting more and more skilled (although being professional about weight was apparently hard for some).”<sup>119</sup> DETROITDREW1980 commented: “My lady says she prefers UFC, but is excited for an all female card. If they can pull in the female audience they could be around a while. I’m looking forward to the main event. Could be a good night.”<sup>120</sup>

Compared to the *MMA Mania* readership, the *Bloody Elbow* fans generally concentrated on the intricacies of WMMA rather than promoting emphasized feminine norms. ELITEX10X inquired as to what weight classes **Invicta** featured.<sup>121</sup> Three separate commenters complimented Ashley Cummins on being well-rounded,<sup>122</sup> having patience and composure,<sup>123</sup> and having an extensive amateur background.<sup>124</sup> There were hegemonic masculine outliers, such as PDL. He joked: “If regional MMA isn't lol-worthy enough, put the words ‘women’s’ or ‘heavyweight’ in

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<sup>117</sup> Our Bovine Public, April 28, 2012 (7:32pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>118</sup> Getting some Bas, April 28, 2012 (7:35pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>119</sup> Ben Thapa, April 28, 2012 (7:36pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>120</sup> DetroitDrew1980, April 28, 2012 (7:38pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>121</sup> Elitex10x, April 28, 2012 (7:50pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.” Invicta features atomweight, strawweight, flyweight, bantamweight, and featherweight bouts.

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Muldong, April 28, 2012 (8:30pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>123</sup> IRodC April 28, 2012 (8:32pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>124</sup> Patrick Wyman, April 28, 2012 (8:31pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

front of it.”<sup>125</sup> This showcased VMA Trait 4. However, these comments were a rarity on the live stream thread. It also featured more posts from female fans, for example, MOLLCUTPURSE and ME(LISSA).<sup>126</sup> There was a debate midway through the chat about whether the audience for **Invicta** would draw more women or men to the promotion as fans. ZACHARY KATER espoused: “It might be an ignorant opinion, but I wouldn’t think women fighting instead of men would bring that much more of a female audience. I mean, there’s only so many women who are bloodthirsty fools like us.”<sup>127</sup> HORSELOVER FAT retorted: “Really? I definitely think if they market it right and get the word out a bit, some girls who maybe aren’t even MMA fans would be going just for the novelty of all female fights for once. And like I said, listen to the audience noise.”<sup>128</sup>

There was discussion about the male gaze, with some participating in the activity while others questioned the emphasized feminine appearance status quo. During the opening main card fight between Sarah Schneider and Sally Krumdiak, ALEJANDRO CASTELLANOS-JARAMILLO commented: “Krumdiak looks like a teenaged boy.”<sup>129</sup> MILLONDOLLARDREAMS called Curry-Carmouche: “Booker T(male pro wrestler) vs Urijah Faber.”<sup>130</sup> While the former commenter failed to signal any toxic characteristics outside of Trait 2, the latter somewhat engaged with Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 4. Conversely, the fight

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<sup>125</sup> PDL, April 28, 2012 (8:46pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>126</sup> Ben Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2985038/invicta-coenen-vs-ruysen-live-stream-tblog-and-play-by-play>.

<sup>127</sup> Zachary Kater, April 28, 2012 (9:09pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>128</sup> Horselover Fat, April 28, 2012 (9:11pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>129</sup> Alejandro Castellanos-Jaramillo, April 28, 2012 (9:54pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>130</sup> Milliondollardreams, April 28, 2012 (10:59pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.” Parentheses mine.

between Sarah D'Alelio and Vanessa Mariscal prompted VICTOR RODRIGUEZ to state: "I like the D'Alelio look. fuck the status quo."<sup>131</sup> He later elaborated: "I like all kinds of women . . . i like the look for her as a fighter, not as a matter of attraction. i'm not really seeing them like that when they fight. I just think she looks cool."<sup>132</sup> During the Young-Smith bout, the comment section praised their fighting skills. MRAMAZING said: "I think this could be the start of big things for WMMA. If somehow we could have all the top female talent in one organization things could get really fun. Def the right direction having an all female org."<sup>133</sup> ALEJANDRO CASTELLANOS-JARAMILLO argued: "These two chicks are legit."<sup>134</sup> MMARTSY agreed: "This fight was definitely awesome."<sup>135</sup> The fans gave similar praise to both Liz Carmouche<sup>136</sup> and the Penne-Ellis fight.<sup>137</sup> When the broadcast team announced Baszler-McMann as the main event for **Invicta FC 2**, Patrick Wyman declared: "So much awesome."<sup>138</sup>

After the main event, HEAD-SPLITTER asked female fans: "You mean to say that when you watch two handsome, physically fit fighters sweat and grind against each other as they grapple, you at no point fantasize, 'Oh my god, I want them to sandwich me'"?<sup>139</sup> Here, HEAD-SPLITTER is arguing for his right to objectify female fighters, his comment featuring Toxic

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<sup>131</sup> Victor Rodriguez, April 28, 2012 (10:09pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>132</sup> Victor Rodriguez, April 28, 2012 (10:12pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>133</sup> MrAmazing, April 28, 2012 (10:32pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>134</sup> Alejandro Castellanos-Jaramillo, April 28, 2012 (10:34pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>135</sup> Mmaartsy, April 28, 2012 (10:49pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>136</sup> James Kimbell, April 28, 2012 (11:03pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>137</sup> Our Bovine Public, April 28, 2012 (11:35pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>138</sup> Patrick Wyman, April 28, 2012 (11:49pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>139</sup> Head-splitter, April 29, 2012 (5:30am) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

Trait 1 along with VMA Traits 2 and 3. MARTA\_GALLO answered: “Even if do find a fighter attractive I would never fantasize anything like you just said, and I certainly wouldn’t post ‘durp durp look at his nice package in those vale tudos’ It’s incredibly difficult for me to try to get into WMMA when a decent chunk of the comments are ‘she’s purty’ ‘she has the butt advantage.’”<sup>140</sup> HEAD-SPLITTER again argued: “I have a hard time completely getting women’s frustrations about objectification. I know it would be incredibly offensive if the fans did nothing but objectify . . . but the fans here are more like, ‘Wow, she’s really talented. Also helps that she’s cute,’”<sup>141</sup> to which MOLLCUTPURSE replied:

It isn’t about us being offended by heterosexual males heterosexual malin’. nobody is saying you shouldn’t find the opposite sex attractive. but you have to consider the sheer volume of the comments. if every male MMA thread you went to was populated by 99% women prefacing everything they said about the fighters with “I’d hit that until my cervix exploded” you’d probably find it really grating after a while, if not immediately. and I’m going to assume that would be true even if they said something more benign like “god, he’s so hot.” there’s a lot more to it, but that is at least one part of why it’s annoying and feels like walking into a locker room. (and part of the reason I am really happy when marta and Kat are around.) I don’t want to criticize the BE community too much here — almost everyone posting last night were good peeps with a sincere interest in WMMA, and the mods do a good job of preventing things from getting out of hand. but if you asked me the most immediate way to improve the situation, simply reducing the amount of times (general) you tell everyone your penis’s rating of a fighter would help a lot. I don’t think encouraging us to say vulgar things about male fighters is the way forward.<sup>142</sup>

The **Invicta FC 1** recap article by T.P. Grant largely leaned away from emphasized feminine narratives. Grant summed up the entire event: “All in all it was a widely entertaining night of fights that highlighted both the good and bad of the current state of WMMA. It is clear that there is talent in this side of the sport, but there is still a ways to go before it is caught up

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<sup>140</sup> Marta\_gallo, April 29, 2012 (9:38am) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>141</sup> Head-splitter, April 29, 2012 (1:56pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

<sup>142</sup> Mollcutpurse, April 29, 2012 (2:33pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play.”

with the men's divisions in terms of depth. The match making was fantastic and resulted in interesting style clashes and good fights . . . all female fight leagues are not new to MMA but this one might have some staying power.”<sup>143</sup> Grant acknowledged the quality discrepancy between MMA and WMMA but also pointed out nothing was stopping the women from eventually matching their male counterparts in terms of talent.<sup>144</sup> There were 36 comments attached to this article, most of which were positive about the show, hesitant but hopeful for the promotion’s future. In many ways, it mirrored what fans posted in the live stream thread. Many posters, like PUNISHER BASS, echoed Grant’s sentiments, reflecting: “The talent pool is very shallow and there’s just a handful of top tier fighters, but sweeping WMMA under the carpet because it’s not ready for prime time would be such a mistake. With luck, promotions like Invicta, Strikeforce, and Bellator will be able to cultivate WMMA so . . . there will crops of true ‘next generation’ fighters.”<sup>145</sup> Then, there were the rare but vocal detractors, like PDL, who argued: “Invicta (or any promotion featuring several women’s fights all in a row) is the worst thing that can happen to women’s MMA,”<sup>146</sup> further elaborating, “It was a painful illustration of how weak the talent pool is.”<sup>147</sup> But then, the likes of CHRISTOPHER MULDONG pointed out: “The cream will rise to the top, and the journeywomen and lower-tier fighters will show themselves as well . . . I see nothing but positives for Womens MMA by having InvictaFC.”<sup>148</sup> The comment section

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<sup>143</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/29/2985800/invicta-fc-1-results-recap-coenen-randi-miller-womens-mma>.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Punisher Bass, April 29, 2012 (11:30am) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

<sup>146</sup> Pdl, April 29, 2012 (1:09pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

<sup>147</sup> Pdl, April 29, 2012 (1:49pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

<sup>148</sup> Christopher Muldong, April 29, 2012 (7:40pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

concluded with female readers ME(LISSA)<sup>149</sup> and MOLLCUTPURSE pontificating on how important the event was to them, the latter admitting: “There's no way for me to be objective here because the emotional experience I have watching other women fight is intensely personal and I find it extraordinary and inspiring.”<sup>150</sup>

Two significant points need to be discussed regarding Stephe Haynes's post-show interview with Shannon Knapp. The first revolved around weight cutting, with Knapp proclaiming:

At the end of the day, if they all want the same equality, to be respected, appreciated, and acknowledged, like the men are, then they have to adhere to the same guidelines. It just has to be that way. Yes, the female anatomy is different, and metabolism and things like that, but as professional athletes, we have to learn to know about our bodies, and understand and identify where we need to be, and what's realistic for us. I think that putting the fines in place, and kind of helping them to be accountable, is also holding them to a higher level of professionalism.<sup>151</sup>

Knapp's discourse defied emphasized feminine norms because she held her fighters to a higher quality standard than expected from the hegemonic masculine fanbase, who expected to hear the “women's problems” excuse. The other was despite the card being a free show and **Invicta** still in its early stages, they managed to hand out five monetary bonuses: two Fights of the Night and submission of the night. Also dispersed were two marketing bonuses, totaling \$6,000 in extra revenue for the fighters, besides the contracted purses and respective win bonuses.<sup>152</sup> This showed that if the **UFC** was unwilling to treat WMMA like the big leagues, Knapp would. 127 comments were attached to the article. Six of them centered around Knapp holding women to the same weight-cutting standard as male fighters, most of which praised the

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<sup>149</sup> Me(lissa), April 29, 2012 (11:30am) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

<sup>150</sup> Mollcutpurse, April 29, 2012 (2:53pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 1 Results Recap: Coenen Dominates, Penne Impresses and Classic Scrap Ends in Draw.”

<sup>151</sup> Stephe Haynes, “Invicta's Shannon Knapp Says UFC Very Supportive,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, May 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/5/1/2990735/invicta-interview-ufc-shannon-knapp-dana-white>.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

move. Twenty-one comments questioned Knapp on **Invicta**'s failure to have found a more qualified opponent for Liz Carmouche than Ashleigh Curry. Sixteen comments discussed the event itself, most of which complimented Knapp on running a quality show.<sup>153</sup> However, the comment thread got side-tracked by twenty-eight posts debating if testing firefighters solely on physical prowess was sexism, a conversation that heavily utilized Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 1. One problematic element, however, came in the form of *Bloody Elbow* staff writer Mookie Alexander. He started the firefighter conversation and complained that women cry "sexism" too often,<sup>154</sup> along with other hegemonic masculine statements.<sup>155</sup> A particular heinous example was his citing former Florida middle school teacher Debra LaFave, a sex offender who avoided jail time for being "too beautiful for prison," as proof that women experienced far less sexism than they claim.<sup>156</sup> The staff writer participated heavily in Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 1. In a less toxic statement, Alexander opined: "I really am not a women's MMA fan and wouldn't want it in the UFC, But I'm all for having an org just for them. It's nice and hopefully it grows into something."<sup>157</sup> From that statement alone, it cannot be inferred that he does not enjoy seeing women fight because of social norms or feels women cannot be talented. Either way, Mookie Alexander still promoted emphasized feminine adherence and toxic masculinity.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Mookie Alexander, May 1, 2012, (1:25pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta's Shannon Knapp Says UFC Very Supportive."

<sup>155</sup> Mookie Alexander, May 1, 2012, (12:49pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta's Shannon Knapp Says UFC Very Supportive."

<sup>156</sup> Stephanie Haynes, "Invicta's Shannon Knapp Says UFC Very Supportive," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, May 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/5/1/2990735/invicta-interview-ufc-shannon-knapp-dana-white>. Debra LaFave was convicted of lewd or lascivious battery against a teenager in 2005, but served her sentence under house arrest instead of prison after her attorney argued "To place Debbie into a Florida state women's penitentiary, to place an attractive young woman in that kind of hellhole, is like putting a piece of raw meat in with the lions."

<sup>157</sup> Mookie Alexander, May 1, 2012, (1:26pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta's Shannon Knapp Says UFC Very Supportive."

### Section 3: Invicta FC 2

#### May 2012- July 2012

As soon as Knapp officially booked the Baszler-McMann main event for Invicta FC 2 in late May, media articles, interviews/podcasts, and fan posts/opinions began circulating around the usual MMA media websites. *Sherdog*'s announcement was lacking in promoting either masculine or feminine norm adherence; it simply listed the fighter's record and notable victories.<sup>158</sup> For the "Queen of Spades," Mike Whitman espoused: "Baszler holds four times McMann's professional experience and rides a four-fighting winning streak into her inaugural Invicta FC appearance . . . but has not seen action since submitting Elaina Maxwell with a kneebar in November 2010."<sup>159</sup> Tristan Critchfield's article quoted Shannon Knapp about **Invicta** live streaming the show: "We are excited about delivering a stacked women's fight card to a global audience for the second time in a three-month span . . . The live stream is an excellent way of supporting Invicta FC's mission of providing women mixed martial artists with a major platform to showcase their skills on and to support the growth of women's MMA." This article featured no emphasized feminine adherence.<sup>160</sup> The same applied to the piece written on the weigh-in results, simply listing the weight of the respective fighters.<sup>161</sup> There were also two

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<sup>158</sup> Mike Whitman, "SHAYNA BASZLER-SARA MCMANN, ALEXIS DAVIS-HITOMI AKANO TOP ALL-FEMALE INVICTA FC 2 BILL," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, May 29, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Shayna-BaszlerSara-McMann-Alexis-DavisHitomi-Akano-Top-AllFemale-Invicta-FC-2-Bill-43109>.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Tristan Critchfield, "INVICTA FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIPS' SOPHOMORE EFFORT TO STREAM ON PROMOTION'S WEBSITE," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, July 23, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Invicta-Fighting-Championships-Sophomore-Effort-to-Stream-on-Promotions-Website-44395>.

<sup>161</sup> Mike Whitman "INVICTA FC 2 WEIGH-IN RESULTS: SHAYNA BASZLER, SARA MCMANN HIT MARKS FOR 135-POUND MAIN EVENT," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, Jul 27, 2018.



articles about fighter replacements.<sup>162</sup> Essentially, *Sherdog* was treating it as any other mainstream MMA card.

By contrast, the three Vox Media sites increased their coverage of **Invicta** from the promotion's debut show and focused more on individual fights, particularly Baszler and McMann. As was the case at **Invicta FC 1**, the similarities and differences between *MMA Mania*, *Bloody Elbow*, and *MMA Fighting* in their discussion of gender revealed different priorities for their respective writing staffs and their readerships.

*MMA Mania* went out of its way to portray **Invicta** as elite level competition for MMA, not simply for the women's game, with their press release covering eight of the thirteen fights in detail.<sup>163</sup> Each update received a respective article as the card changed with fighter replacements.<sup>164</sup> The website also did various interviews for **Invicta FC 2**, just as they did for the promotion's inaugural event. Their writing staff interviewed not just the main eventers in McMann<sup>165</sup> and Baszler<sup>166</sup> but also Kaitlin Young<sup>167</sup> and prelim wrestling standout Carla

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<sup>162</sup> "More On Invicta FC 2- Baszler Vs. McMann," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, Accessed July 24, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/news/Invicta-FC-2-Baszler-vs-McMann-22035>.

<sup>163</sup> Press Release, "Invicta Fighting Championships 2 announced for Memorial Hall on July 28 in Kansas City," *MMAMania.com*, Vox Media, May 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/5/29/3050538/invicta-fighting-championships-2-july-28-kansas-city>.

<sup>164</sup> "Search results for Invicta," *MMAMania.com*, Vox Media, accessed July 24, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=128&q=Invicta> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=127&q=Invicta>.

<sup>165</sup> Brian Hemminger, "No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with *MMAMania.com*," *MMAMania.com*, Vox Media, July 25, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/25/3186794/no-backing-out-now-invicta-fc-2-headliner-sara-mcmann-interview>.

<sup>166</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with *MMAMania.com*," *MMAMania.com*, Vox Media, July 26, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/26/3189153/shayna-baszler-interview-invicta-sara-mcmann>.

<sup>167</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Fired up: Invicta FC 2's Kaitlin Young interview exclusive with *MMAMania.com*," *MMAMania.com*, Vox Media, July 24, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/24/3184474/fired-up-invicta-fc-2s-kaitlin-young-interview-exclusive>.

Esparza.<sup>168</sup> In addition, the website featured combatants Kaitlin Young<sup>169</sup> and Liz Carmouche doing parallel video blog series leading up to their fight.<sup>170</sup> However, the primary focus and draw of its coverage featured in Brian Hemminger's fight week interviews with McMann<sup>171</sup> and Baszler focused on the fighters' respective perspectives on their upcoming bout, **Invicta** and WMMA.<sup>172</sup>

Regarding McMann, Hemminger elaborates on her combat sports pedigree as an Olympic silver medalist, a pronounced recognition of her technical competence and prowess. He also stated she was a fighter whom opponents were wary of facing. At times, scheduled opponents would back out from facing her at the last moment. In response to Hemminger asking about her last canceled bout, McMann replied: "If you don't want to fight me, don't accept the fight in the first place. Coming from the wrestling world where people crave the challenge and want to face the best people, having people back out is a complete mystery to me. Why be a fighter if you are scared of losing? . . . I know it sounds ruthless but you're taking away from the people who actually want to do this."<sup>173</sup> McMann shows how seriously she took the sport and was not in it to

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<sup>168</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Neutralizer: Invicta FC 2 strawweight Carla Esparza interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012.

<sup>169</sup> Jesse Holland, "Kaitlin Young video blog for Liz Carmouche fight at Invicta FC 2 (Episode 1)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 15, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/15/3161429/kaitlin-young-video-blog-liz-carmouche-invicta-fc-2>.

<sup>170</sup> Jesse Holland, "Liz Carmouche video blog for Kaitlin Young fight at Invicta FC 2 (Episode 1)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 12, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/12/3155292/liz-carmouche-video-blog-kaitlin-young-fight-invicta-fc-2>.

<sup>171</sup> Brian Hemminger, "No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/25/3186794/no-backing-out-now-invicta-fc-2-headliner-sara-mcmann-interview>.

<sup>172</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/26/3189153/shayna-baszler-interview-invicta-sara-mcmann>.

<sup>173</sup> Brian Hemminger, "No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/25/3186794/no-backing-out-now-invicta-fc-2-headliner-sara-mcmann-interview>.

socialize but to compete. Instead of utilizing emphasized feminine narratives, most of Hemminger's questions centered around McMann's transition from the Olympics and amateur wrestling to BJJ and MMA and how she matched up with Baszler stylistically.<sup>174</sup>

Hemminger described Baszler as: "one of the most lethal and diverse submission experts in all of mixed martial arts," along with stating her pro record and that, similar to McMann, opponents often did not want to face her.<sup>175</sup> The critical thing to note here is that Hemminger wrote "all of mixed martial arts," not simply the women's division or WMMA. Hemminger asked Baszler about her camp, her opinion on the advancement of McMann's ground game, and about being on the sidelines for over a year and a half. None of them advance or defy hegemonic masculine/emphasized feminine narratives. However, Hemminger did touch upon emphasized femininity briefly when he asked: "You're main eventing this show. Do you see yourself as a role model for some of the ladies that are getting in this sport?"<sup>176</sup> She responded: "It wasn't until really the last Invicta show when I had girls come up to me and saying, 'I used to watch you fight!' and I'm like, 'Holy smokes, I'm one of the old vets now. . . We're the last of the old guard and it's kind of weird to think about that there are gonna be girls fighting on the prelims of the show that have nostalgia with my fights.'"<sup>177</sup> The emphasized femininity comes from the fact that to many MMA fans, the women's division suddenly appeared overnight, many unaware that those such as Baszler had been competing in the sport for nearly a decade. It even caught Baszler off guard to think of herself as a vet. However, this emphasized femininity was countered when Hemminger's final question asked what Baszler's game plan for McMann was. Baszler

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2012.  
<https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/26/3189153/shayna-baszler-interview-invicta-sara-mcmann>.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

answered: “It’s not like I’m setting up an armbar and the only way I can win is by armbar. Not to bag on Ronda Rousey, but that’s not my game. My game is, all of a sudden you’re tapping and you don’t even know why.”<sup>178</sup> Baszler’s “showwomanship” did not fade away during the fight promotion. Overall, Hemminger’s interviews lacked a call for emphasized feminine adherence for WMMA fighters. However, the MMA Mania readership firmly expressed the hegemonic masculine viewpoint.

Under the press release regarding **Invicta FC 2**, there were nine comments.<sup>179</sup>

HEXBREAKER stated: “I watched the whole first event...not really into this one or any more WMMA.”<sup>180</sup> Another three remarks focused on how the readers wanted sex with the ring girl in the accompanying photo and another four on how they looked forward to the event.<sup>181</sup> Those first three posts heavily engaged in Toxic Traits 1, along with VMA Traits 2 and 3. Fifteen posts were attached to an article announcing the live stream details.<sup>182</sup> Eight comments did not discuss WMMA; they instead specifically mentioned **Invicta** commentator and **Bellator** fighter “King Mo” Lawal’s beef with **UFC** fighter Quinton “Rampage” Jackson. The comment section also featured a joke tangent of four posts discussing a 265-pound heavyweight women’s division,<sup>183</sup> to which NINJA OREO posted a gif of someone vomiting at the prospect.<sup>184</sup> This conversation

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Press Release, “Invicta Fighting Championships 2 announced for Memorial Hall on July 28 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, May 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/5/29/3050538/invicta-fighting-championships-2-july-28-kansas-city>.

<sup>180</sup> Hexbreaker, May 29, 2012, (2:21pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta Fighting Championships 2 announced for Memorial Hall on July 28 in Kansas City.”

<sup>181</sup> Press Release, “Invicta Fighting Championships 2 announced for Memorial Hall on July 28 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, May 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/5/29/3050538/invicta-fighting-championships-2-july-28-kansas-city>.

<sup>182</sup> Jesse Holland, “Invicta FC 2 streams live and free online at InvictaFC.com on July 28 from Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 23, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/23/3178152/invicta-live-stream-online-july-28-kansas-city-mma>.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ninja OreO, July 23, 2012, (3:38pm) Comment on Holland, “Invicta FC 2 streams live and free online at InvictaFC.com on July 28 from Kansas City.”

uses Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 1 and 4. Focusing solely on the ability to appeal to the male gaze, WISETOAD added: “I may be going out on a limb here but I think naked WMMA would sell,”<sup>185</sup> engaging in Toxic Trait 1 as well as VMA Traits 2 and 4. Even bringing up the topic in jest still damaged a female fighter’s legitimacy, accenting more on how the women physically look than their fighting prowess. GRETZKYOVERYOURJETSKI dissented from the rest of the comments, offering: “I really want to see Young (Kaitlin Young). I hope she’s back to her old knocking people out self, cause her kicks were brutal. Shayna is also a good fighter.”<sup>186</sup>

Under the Carla Esparza interview, there were two comments, one from GOLDMOUTH which read: “I am part of the problem with womens mma Because when i saw the pic, 1st thing in my mind was, ‘yeah,i’d beat that shit up.’ Did not even think about her fighting career.”<sup>187</sup> GOLDMOUTH openly admitted that fans like him are a “problem” because they see WMMA competitors as possible outlets for their male gaze first, professional athletes second. He stated that this took away from a female fighter’s legitimacy. While he contributes to promoting emphasized feminine norms, his acknowledgment of this participation while citing it as problematic can be seen as a disapproval of these norms. Nevertheless, GOLDMOUTH slightly engaged in Toxic Trait 1 and embraced VMA Traits 2 and 3.

Attached to the McMann interview thirteen comments focused on the fight, or at least her career.<sup>188</sup> However, most of these posts flowed through the emphasized feminine lens. One of the

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<sup>185</sup> Wisetoad, July 23, 2012 (4:43pm) Comment on Holland, “Invicta FC 2 streams live and free online at InvictaFC.com on July 28 from Kansas City.”

<sup>186</sup> Gretzkyoveryourjetski, July 23, 2012 (3:19pm) Comment on Holland, “Invicta FC 2 streams live and free online at InvictaFC.com on July 28 from Kansas City.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>187</sup> Goldmouth, July 28, 2012 (7:14PM) Comment on Hemminger, “Neutralizer: Invicta FC 2 strawweight Carla Esparza interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>188</sup> Brian Hemminger, “No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/25/3186794/no-backing-out-now-invicta-fc-2-headliner-sara-mcmann-interview>.

more notable dialogues came from JADRIG, who claimed to have been beaten by her in a high school club amateur wrestling contest. Despite his loss, JADRIG felt inclined to point out: “She still had a very feminine physique,”<sup>189</sup> demoting her back to an appeaser of the male gaze. In addition, JADRIG stated that he was so embarrassed losing to a girl that he did not wrestle freestyle again. His recount of the alleged match itself imposed caveat after caveat on McMann’s win: “She was bigger/older than me . . . a lot stronger than me . . . (I) hadn’t cut weight . . . I took her down at will but was only getting 1 point . . . I was impatient and tryna score in a wreckless way. I was winded the end . . . and she got me in a leg lace and rolled me like 3 times and pulled ahead at the last second.”<sup>190</sup> JADRIG’s excuses attempted to delegitimize McMann’s success, even while admitting he was no paragon of hegemonic masculinity in high school. TKOTOM commented: “Is it just me or does she have that hot nerd thing going on. Slap a G (string thong) and some glasses on her.”<sup>191</sup> He fully participates in VMA Trait 2. Hemminger responded: “In the full interview, she mentioned she wouldn’t be opposed to posing for ESPN The Body issue in the future.”<sup>192</sup> Even the author, who largely kept sex appeal out of his interview with an Olympic athlete, complimented someone solely focusing on how attractive McMann was, not her skills as a fighter.

Only five comments were underneath Baszler’s interview, two of which complimented Baszler and the event.<sup>193</sup> The other three consisted of an exchange between ADAM G and

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<sup>189</sup> Jadrig, July 25, 2012 (11:47pm) Comment on Hemminger, “No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>190</sup> Jadrig, July 26, 2012 (3:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, “No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>191</sup> Tkotom, July 26, 2012 (6:29am) Comment on Hemminger, “No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>192</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 26, 2012, (8:36am) Comment on Hemminger, “No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>193</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2012.

<https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/26/3189153/shayna-baszler-interview-invicta-sara-mcmann>.

Hemminger, where the former stated: “NOW ON TO SOME NEWS THAT MATTERS,” proceeding to discuss how UFC fighter BJ Penn had just entered the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association’s testing pool.<sup>194</sup> He deliberately published his comments under a WMMA article, with his header implying that women in the sport are not newsworthy. And when Hemminger “called him out,” saying: “Thanks for changing the subject for no reason douche,”<sup>195</sup> ADAM G seemed to wear the insult with pride, opining: “I have a great reason, im a douche, douche.”<sup>196</sup>

Conversely, the seven comments under the **Invicta FC 2** fight week preview article praised and looked forward to the WMMA event. SWEDISH CHEF SMERDY HERDY VERDY figured McMann was likely talented enough to beat then-**Bellator** Welterweight Champion Ben Askren.<sup>197</sup> JAYWOLF1 commented: “InvictaFC needs to start holding Tournaments. Maybe do a yearly Grand Prix like PRIDE FC.”<sup>198</sup> REX\_KWON\_DO asserted: “Womes MMA=Awesome.Keep the sport growing.”<sup>199</sup>

However, on the two weigh-in articles, *MMA Mania* fans returned to form with message upon message decrying how WMMA was not abiding by emphasized femininity, specifically male gaze appeal. On the live weigh-in stream, there were thirty-two comments.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>194</sup> ( Adam G ), July 26, 2012, (10:26pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>195</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 26, 2012, (10:39pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>196</sup> ( Adam G ), July 26, 2012, (10:46pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Seen it all: Invicta FC 2 headliner Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>197</sup> Swedish Chef smerdy herdy verdy, July 26, 2012, (9:38pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 preview and predictions for 'Baszler vs McMann' on July 28 in Kansas City.”

<sup>198</sup> Jaywolf1, July 27, 2012, (4:53pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 preview and predictions for 'Baszler vs McMann' on July 28 in Kansas City.”

<sup>199</sup> Rex\_Kwon\_Do, July 26, 2012, (10:17pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 preview and predictions for 'Baszler vs McMann' on July 28 in Kansas City.” He corrected his spelling error in a follow up post.

<sup>200</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann',” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/27/3193059/invicta-fc-2-weigh-in-results-live-from-kansas-city-for-baszler-vs->



VICDUNDEE posted: “I think all weigh ins involving women should be done in the nude,”<sup>201</sup> utilizing Toxic Trait 1 with VMA Traits 2 and 4. Poking fun at the Brazilian’s non-feminine appearance, O DAMN HE GOT CAUGHT countered: “I bet you can't wait until Cyborg headlines one of those cards then,” clearly indicative of VMA Trait 4.<sup>202</sup> NOTORIOUS G.I.B. went a step further, declaring: “Invicta is female only fighting homie,” implying that Cyborg was too masculine even to be considered a biological woman, an excellent example of Toxic Trait 2 as well as VMA Trait 4.<sup>203</sup> ARIESKJJ stated he would rather watch the weigh-ins than the fights, participating in VMA Trait 2.<sup>204</sup> The comment section also featured an unrelated tangent of ten posts about UFC fighters Nick Diaz and Anderson Silva, delegitimizing WMMA by refusing to discuss it in an article dedicated to a WMMA promotion.<sup>205</sup> There were a few comments which praised **Invicta**, such as ALBINO GARCIA exclaiming: “The first Invicta was pret0ty damn good, this should be equally as good as the first. Plus the past two UFC cards have been pretty bad (except the prelims). Another reason to give these ladies a chance.”<sup>206</sup>

FRAGGLESHATEKOS echoed: “It looks like they are starting it off right . . . They are running the organization with minimal staffing and overhead. They aren’t scheduling too many events . .

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<sup>201</sup> VicDundee, July 27, 2012 (11:17am) Comment on Hemminger, Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>202</sup> O damn he got caught, July 27, 2012 (11:43am) Comment on Hemminger, Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>203</sup> Notorious G.I.B., July 27, 2012 (12:12pm) Comment on Hemminger, Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>204</sup> AriesKJJ, July 27, 2012 (3:37pm) Comment on Hemminger, Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>205</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann',” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/27/3193059/invicta-fc-2-weigh-in-results-live-from-kansas-city-for-baszler-vs->

<sup>206</sup> Albino Garcia, July 27, 2012 (3:25pm) Comment on Hemminger, Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”



. They need to get a lot of these woman good fights and exposure, so they can deepen the divisions.”<sup>207</sup>



Figure 13 Ring girls posing during Invicta FC 2 weigh-ins, July 27, 2012.<sup>208</sup>

The weigh-in photo gallery’s comment thread featured thirty-two posts, most focusing on one of three things: which fighters and ring girls the fans wanted to sleep with, how ugly most of the combatants were in their opinion, and that these women were either lesbian, male, or transgender.<sup>209</sup> The above picture of bikini-clad ring girls was the main reason NINJA OREO clicked on the article, opining: “Those sweater puppies look real,” engaging in VMA Trait 2.<sup>210</sup> FREEFOCUS decided to announce one particular ring girl gave him an erection<sup>211</sup> while clarifying that main eventer Sara McMann failed to produce the same result.<sup>212</sup> DANIEL WORBY listed four fighters he wanted to sleep with while admitting to being too lazy to

<sup>207</sup> FragglesHateKos, July 27, 2012 (2:08pm) Comment on Hemminger, Invicta FC 2 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>208</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann',” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198443/invicta-fc-2-weigh-in-photos-gallery-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>. Photo by Tracy Lee.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ninja Oreo, July 28, 2012, (2:25pm) Comment on Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>211</sup> FreeFocus, July 28, 2012, (2:36pm) Comment on Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>212</sup> FreeFocus, July 28, 2012, (6:43pm) Comment on Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

remember the last woman's name, despite the article naming her. These two commenters utilized Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 3. SCOTT1 complained about his erection going away from looking at the pictures, simultaneously engaging in Toxic Trait 1 as well as VMA Traits 2 through 4. Similarly, the photo below of Sarah D'Alelio and Vanessa Porto received toxic masculine ire.



*Figure 14 Sarah D'Alelio and Vanessa Porto at Invicta FC 2 weigh-ins, July 27, 2012<sup>213</sup>*

WISETOAD joked that D'Alelio and Porto were competing for the “Lesbian Masculine Championship”<sup>214</sup> while also insinuating the fighters were not “real women” but transgender, declaring: “Guaranteed theres a scar where a penis used to be.”<sup>215</sup> With these two statements, WISETOAD was complicit in Toxic Trait 2, VMA Trait 4, and an inverse of VMA Trait 2. DANIEL WORBY elaborated: “What’s this ‘Bob and Steve’ stuff? I thought this was an all

<sup>213</sup>Geno Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann',” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198443/invicta-fc-2-weigh-in-photos-gallery-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>. Photo by Tracy Lee.

<sup>214</sup> Wisetoad, July 28, 2012, (1:09pm) Comment on Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

<sup>215</sup> Wisetoad, July 28, 2012, (2:13pm) Comment on Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

women's League," associating his words with the same three toxic/VMA traits.<sup>216</sup> Both commenters emphasized that masculine and/or lesbian women must be ostracized from online MMA communities. They equated D'Alelio and Porto, fighters who failed to appease WISETOAD and DANIEL WORBY's respective male desires. None of the additional comments focused on the **Invicta** card.<sup>217</sup> Overall, the fan discourse highlighted the *MMA Mania* readership's focus: To sexualize female participants they found physically attractive while mocking those they deemed otherwise.

*Bloody Elbow* conducted a somewhat different approach to *MMA Mania* in covering the leadup to **Invicta FC 2**, with only eight articles leading up to fight night. The website's primary focus featured the main event matchup, particularly Shayna Baszler.<sup>218</sup> The Queen of Spades was interviewed twice by *Bloody Elbow*.<sup>219</sup>

On July 1, Stephe Haynes posted a transcript of a radio interview she and her co-host Evan Shoman conducted with Baszler. Most of the questions were in-depth and detailed regarding the **Invicta** matchup, as were the Queen of Spades' answers.<sup>220</sup> They dealt with how well Baszler's training camp was going, discussing how her MMA experience would fare versus McMann's wrestling pedigree and how, after the Kaufman fight, Baszler completely changed her

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<sup>216</sup> Daniel worby, July 28, 2012, (2:07pm) Comment on Mrosko, "Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'."

<sup>217</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198443/invicta-fc-2-weigh-in-photos-gallery-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

<sup>218</sup> Stephe Haynes, "Shayna Baszler: It's Going To Be On My Shoulders To Make This Fight Interesting," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/1/3125291/shayna-baszler-talks-love-hate-relationship-with-ronda-rousey>.

<sup>219</sup> Stephe Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3196978/invicta-fc-shayna-baszler-says-mcmann-will-make-arena-fall-asleep>.

<sup>220</sup> Stephe Haynes, "Shayna Baszler: It's Going To Be On My Shoulders To Make This Fight Interesting," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/1/3125291/shayna-baszler-talks-love-hate-relationship-with-ronda-rousey>.

mindset in how she approached fights. To that particular question, she stated: “I just have to be myself and beat people up.”<sup>221</sup> Of particular note were two questions asked near the end of the interview; one revealed how Baszler had not lost her showmanship, i.e., lack of sociability. The other question asked how she truly saw the then-current state of WMMA. At the tail end of the experience vs. pedigree discussion, Baszler remarked: “I should be getting paid twice as much as . . . (McMann) because it's going to be on my shoulders to make this fight interesting for fans. She's not going to submit me. She ain't knocking anybody out.”<sup>222</sup> This is defiance in the face of hegemonic masculinity as she was still expressing her bombastic side, outright stating it was up to her to keep fans entertained. Then Haynes asked for Baszler’s opinion regarding Rousey’s impact on WMMA. The Queen of Spades responded: “It's frustrating that she is one of the people that I have had to watch get opportunities that I feel that I have worked harder for and paid dues for. Ronda Rousey . . . talks a lot of sh\*t and she says . . . things that make me want to smack her if I ever see her, but I love it. I love the heel role.”<sup>223</sup> She elaborated further, saying that while she felt her dues warrant her getting opportunities ahead of Rousey, people like the **Strikeforce** champion are essential for the survival of WMMA. Baszler noted: “The showmanship and the character is very important to a sport like this, and she does it so well. . . People are talking about women's MMA now, so as a fan, I love what she's doing. I love that I hate her.”<sup>224</sup> Baszler decried the sole face of WMMA's emphasized feminine mentality but argued that Rousey’s non-emphasized feminine heel character somewhat counteracted those effects.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

In an article by ShinSplits covering both the main and co-main events, the author stated: “With over four times McMann's experience in professional fights, Baszler will be looking to upset the former Olympian with her own submission game . . . She's also no stranger to being the underdog having been in the cage against some of the biggest names in Women's MMA.”<sup>225</sup> Outside of the WMMA qualifier, there are no hegemonic/emphasized gender narratives promoted. The weigh-in article noted that only two fighters missed weight, and one gained weight on the second attempt. Unlike Brent Brookhouse before **Invicta FC 1**, there were no remarks made by the staff writers about the alleged inability of women fighters to make weight. The article only listed the fighters' respective weights. This showed potential acceptance towards females and trust in the fighters' ability and dedication to make the agreed-upon weight.<sup>226</sup>

Haynes and Shoman conducted another interview with Baszler on the afternoon of **Invicta FC 2**. Reiterating many similar points as before, they asked Baszler five questions. When asked if she felt pressure to put on a better main event than Coenen-Ruyssen, Baszler responded: “All I need is one of my things to work one time. The only way I don't have a chance is if I stop shooting. I'm going to be doing everything I can to finish that fight . . . There's not anyone in the fight world that would say I don't do fun and exciting stuff. I know my bag of tools is awesome, so as long as I play game, the world shall be entertained, never fear.”<sup>227</sup> At the end of another question, she added to her Queen of Spades persona: “There's two ways this is going

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<sup>225</sup> ShinSplits, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/25/3184636/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-free-live-stream-mma-news>. ShinSplits was a fan not employed by *Bloody Elbow*.

<sup>226</sup> ShinSplits, “UPDATED: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Weigh In Results,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/27/3193490/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-weigh-in-results>.

<sup>227</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3196978/invicta-fc-shayna-baszler-says-mcmann-will-make-arena-fall-asleep>.

to end. I'm going to finish her, or she's going to fall asleep on top of me, and make everyone else in the arena fall asleep."<sup>228</sup> Praising McMann, Baszler espoused: "She's a very experienced combat athlete. I have a high amount of respect for her, and I think she's going to have a very successful career in MMA."<sup>229</sup> However, overall, the showwoman persona was the image of Shayna Baszler, who finished the interview, opining: "Every scenario puts me at an advantage. There's nowhere that I don't have an advantage. On top, on bottom, standing, it's all me. This is my fight. I don't care what her gameplan is . . . because I have all the answers."<sup>230</sup> Her level of confidence and how she expressed it went against feminine sociability.

Ten comments were posted under the July 1st interview, each praising Baszler, **Invicta**, or WMMA.<sup>231</sup> DEVYN RODRIGUEZ touted: "We have the old guard of WMMA, a skilled fighter in Baszler who has always been better than average competition vs. a high level athlete relatively new in the sport."<sup>232</sup> CHROMIUM elaborated: "Shayna Baszler has been hella overlooked at W135. She's an extremely solid (and marketable) fighter . . . and should be a very tough test for Sarah McMann."<sup>233</sup> VICTOR RODRIGUEZ opined: "More Invicta is always a good thing."<sup>234</sup> Comments such as these three defied hegemonic masculine norms. There was no readership discussion of emphasized femininity adherence, but rather a focus on the individual competitors' technical competence as fighters.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Stephie Haynes, "Shayna Baszler: It's Going To Be On My Shoulders To Make This Fight Interesting," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/1/3125291/shayna-baszler-talks-love-hate-relationship-with-ronda-rousey>.

<sup>232</sup> Devyn Rodriguez, July 1, 2012 (4:08pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shayna Baszler: It's Going To Be On My Shoulders To Make This Fight Interesting."

<sup>233</sup> Chromium, July 1, 2012 (6:52pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shayna Baszler: It's Going To Be On My Shoulders To Make This Fight Interesting."

<sup>234</sup> Victor Rodriguez, July 1, 2012 (10:25pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shayna Baszler: It's Going To Be On My Shoulders To Make This Fight Interesting."



This echoed underneath an article that promoted **Invicta FC 2** streaming live online. Thirty-one comments were written, most similar to those in the prior piece.<sup>235</sup> BIGNAT noted: “All new comers on the prelims all the fights look pretty good on the main card. like someone took time to make sure they won’t be to over or under matched.”<sup>236</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG stated: “This card should be great. It’s on a night with no UFC or Strikeforce . . . It also doesn’t hurt that some of these female fighters like Angelica Chavez are attractive. InvictaFC has a large pool of female fighters to choose from as well, so they can get some of the top female fighters and prospects that are out there.”<sup>237</sup> The remark about Angelica Chavez pressured **Invicta** to reserve some of their fights based on emphasized feminine features instead of fighting credentials. However, the comment largely avoided promoting male gaze adherence. WONDERFULSPAM opined: “Should be a great card. Kudos to Knapp & co. for doing another free stream.”<sup>238</sup> There were even some good-natured asides at male MMA. SENSEI SCOTT, regarding Hitomi Akano’s nickname of Girlfight Monster, said: “When will women's MMA learn? Everyone is either ‘the assassin’ or ‘the hit(wo)man.’”<sup>239</sup> MOLLCUTPURSE replied: “Why can’t they be creative like the guys and go for creative names like ‘Pitbull.’”<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 25, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/25/3184636/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-free-live-stream-mma-news>.

<sup>236</sup> BIGNAT, July 25, 2012 (9:03pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free.”

<sup>237</sup> Christopher Muldong, July 25, 2012 (12:04pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free.”

<sup>238</sup> Wonderfulspam, July 25, 2012 (11:09am) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free.”

<sup>239</sup> Sensei Scott, July 25, 2012 (8:00pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free.”

<sup>240</sup> Mollcutpurse, July 25, 2012 (8:22pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Will Be Streamed Live And Free.”

On the *Bloody Elbow* weigh-in article, twenty comments were posted.<sup>241</sup> A few readers joked at women's presumed inability to make weight, with CORY BRAITERMAN "guessing" the over/under on how many would miss.<sup>242</sup> HEAD-SPLITTER sarcastically stated that he did not know women could make weight.<sup>243</sup> Even WMMA defenders like DEVYN RODRIGUEZ commented: "After half the card missed weight the first time, one or two is a massive improvement."<sup>244</sup> This statement was false as four out of twenty-two fighters missed weight for **Invicta's** first card, just over eighteen percent. Inflating and exaggerating women's inability to cut weight delegitimized their status as combat athletes and promoted female fragility.<sup>245</sup> All three commenters utilized VMA Trait 4, although DEVYN RODRIGUEZ might argue he was not joking, just misinformed. Despite these jokes, many other comments focused on specific fights they wanted to see in future **Invicta** events, with LAUGHINGBONFIRE asking: "Michelle Waterson vs Jessica Penne for the Atomweight title please!"<sup>246</sup>

Under the second Baszler interview, thirty-five comments were written. Approximately half of the comments featured a debate between the interviewer Stephanie Haynes and HEAD-SPLITTER about the talent the latter alleged Zuffa was lending to **Invicta** to help their sophomore broadcast (Zuffa loaned no contracted employees for the show). This argument

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<sup>241</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATED: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Weigh In Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/27/3193490/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-weigh-in-results>.

<sup>242</sup> Cory Braiterman, July 27, 2012 (6:47pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Weigh In Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012."

<sup>243</sup> Head-splitter, July 27, 2012 (6:50pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Weigh In Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012."

<sup>244</sup> Deyvn Rodriguez, July 27, 2012 (6:51pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Weigh In Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012."

<sup>245</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Invicta FC: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's MMA Event," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983384/invicta-fc-four-of-twenty-two-fighters-miss-weight-for-womens-mma>."

<sup>246</sup> Laughingbonfire, July 27, 2012 (6:49pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Weigh In Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 27, 2012."



showed HEAD-SPLITTER's insistence on giving the UFC credit for a female promotion's success, although the premier MMA organization contributed nothing, which was a failed attempt to take away credit from WMMA.<sup>247</sup> Many praised the event, WMMA or Baszler specifically. DANKNABBOT stated: "I am really loving WMMA and the way it challenges me to rethink gender."<sup>248</sup> This post made MOLLCUTPURSE, as a female fan, quite happy: "I would love to hear more about this sometime."<sup>249</sup> She also commented on the interview, espousing: "Love this interview, shes got some serious spunk. Werq it, Shayna."<sup>250</sup> ROBERT COWAN echoed: "Can't wait for this. Invicta is really getting me into WMMA."<sup>251</sup> DANGALVAN added: "Really looking forward to this fight, Even if she gets put on her back, she'll still make the fight intriguing."<sup>252</sup> There were three hegemonic masculine posts. The first was KING'S\_GAMBIT, inquiring: "Am I the only one who finds McMann kinda hot?"<sup>253</sup> This, of course, placed his "penis's rating" ahead of respecting her ability as a fighter. SEXYTIME compared the toy lightsaber Baszler brandished at the weigh-in to a dildo.<sup>254</sup> DRFERNADO quipped: "I finish, and then fall asleep on top of you' That's what he said."<sup>255</sup> Both of the latter

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<sup>247</sup> Stephe Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3196978/invicta-fc-shayna-baszler-says-mcmann-will-make-arena-fall-asleep>.

<sup>248</sup> DankNabbot, July 28, 2012. (1:45pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>249</sup> Mollcutpurse, July 28, 2012. (2:01pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>250</sup> Mollcutpurse, July 28, 2012. (2:00pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>251</sup> Robert Cowan, July 28, 2012. (3:09pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>252</sup> Dangelvan, July 28, 2012. (2:15pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>253</sup> King's\_Gambit, July 28, 2012. (2:59pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>254</sup> Sexytime, July 28, 2012. (3:44pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

<sup>255</sup> DrFernando, July 28, 2012. (5:52pm) Comment on Haynes, "Invicta FC: Shayna Baszler: I'm Going To Finish Her, Or She's Going To Fall Asleep On Top Of Me."

comments featured VMA Traits 2 and 4. However, such statements were in the minority for this article.

*MMA Fighting* did the bare minimum in promoting and covering the lead-up to **Invicta FC 2**. No article touted the main event, and the website featured no fighter interviews. They had no articles regarding the weigh-ins and, like *Bloody Elbow*, lacked an announcement of the event itself. *MMA Fighting* featured seven articles about **Invicta FC 2**, only two submitted before fight night.<sup>256</sup> The first article was a Luke Thomas non-interview with Shannon Knapp. By “non-interview,” I mean that Thomas chose quotes from a podcast interview with Knapp, adding his take on them. Thomas wrote:

When the aim of the organization (Invicta) isn't merely to showcase top female talent as viable sports programming, but to fix everything that's wrong with that side of the sport, it's going to take a lot more than a handful of fun, moderately successful events to reach the promised land . . . This is a sport where the majority of the consumers are heterosexual men. Knapp knows her product isn't necessarily content associated with pleasing that demo unless the participants have a measure of sex appeal. She acknowledges it's nothing to be ignored, but it's also not a stumbling block to people who promote MMA correctly.<sup>257</sup>

Here, Knapp is seemingly acknowledging that some portion of emphasized femininity, particularly complying with male requests for arousal, must be present for **Invicta** to be accepted by the sport's fanbase. However, she also feels that while the attractive women will get that audience through the door, the quality of the fights will get them to stay. For truly emphasized feminine defiance, men's desires should not be deliberately catered to, so it seems even Knapp herself is somewhat guilty of promoting that narrative.<sup>258</sup> However, Knapp also opined: “If

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<sup>256</sup> “Search results for Invicta,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, accessed July 24, 2021 through <https://www.mmafighting.com/search?order=date&page=201&q=invicta&type=Article>.

<sup>257</sup> Luke Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/7/24/3181457/invicta-fc-second-show-shannon-knapp-women-mixed-martial-arts-mma-news>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

you're a true fan of this sport - and I mean that literally - if you really enjoy this sport . . . you cannot be gender biased when it comes to talented athletes.”<sup>259</sup> Knapp stated that one could not call themselves an MMA fan if they dismissed the WMMA portion of the sport. *MMA Fighting* also did a piece on the Genesis promotional video, a behind-the-scenes look at **Invicta FC 1**. However, it was simply a link to YouTube by the article’s writer, Ariel Helwani, with no opinion or context added by him.<sup>260</sup>

Readers wrote seventeen comments under the Knapp/Thomas interview recap, about a third of which featured hegemonic masculine statements about how women cannot be as athletically talented as men and, as such, they should not be considered less of MMA fans because they refuse to watch WMMA.<sup>261</sup> SHORT\_BUS opined: “Enough with the women's MMA already I have zero interest in watching 2 chicks fight unless there’s a kiddie pool full of mud, jello or baby oil involved. Wish the MMA ‘media’ would give it a rest.”<sup>262</sup> This commenter engaged in Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4. Like many other posters, he focused solely on the male gaze atmosphere and accused the media of being politically correct and promoting non-feminine norms. TBEAST wrote: “Beh I could take it or leave it, but not because I’m a sexist. It’s because theres like 3 girls in the world with well rounded legit skill sets. For the most part the fights are totally sloppy and untechnical no matter how you’d like to spin it. It’s just not the same.”<sup>263</sup> Even though he dismissed an entire gender’s MMA technical

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Genesis of Invicta FC,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2012.

<https://www.mmafighting.com/news/2012/7/26/3186500/genesis-of-invicta-fc>.

<sup>261</sup> Luke Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2012.

<https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/7/24/3181457/invicta-fc-second-show-shannon-knapp-women-mixed-martial-arts-mma-news>.

<sup>262</sup> SHORT\_BUS, July 24, 2012 (5:01pm) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.”

<sup>263</sup> Tbeast, July 24, 2012 (5:26pm) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.”

competence, TBEAST tried to claim he was not sexist. JESUSJR gave a bit more nuanced yet similar view, stating: “My personal stance like majority female sports entertainment level is not up to par with mens. I am not against women’s mma, in fact I hope they do find success because no reason they shouldn’t be allowed to enjoy this sport like every other sport out there.”<sup>264</sup>

J SINISTER countered this narrative that women’s sports are not as entertaining as their male counterparts, espousing: “These ladies were better than, dare I say, 70 percent of the UFC guys lately. Not one fight was dull or stalled out, lots of technique, and true competition. I guess some guys just can’t watch a girl fight that would beat their ass. I have yet to honestly see a boring womens MMA match since the sport took off . . . Oh and Shannon the sex appeal is good but don’t be shy to let a few trucker ladies . . . in the cage once in a while.”<sup>265</sup> LORDMEPH echoed: “Agree 100%, I love the enthusiasm that the girls have for their fights and their promotion. It’s something nice to see, and they certainly do bring it.”<sup>266</sup> MEMITIM pointed out flaws in comparing WMMA to WNBA, explaining: “You can’t compare it (to) basketball or golf because those are sports that have been played professionally for decades upon decades. MMA in general is a baby comparatively, WMMA is in its earliest of stages and you still have some big stars representing the sport and some amazing fights.”<sup>267</sup> CHROMIUM challenged SHORT\_BUS’s post: “And yet you had enough interest to comment. If you want to jerk off to porn there’s plenty of it on the internet. That has nothing to do with WMMA.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> jesusr, July 24, 2012 (7:09pm) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.”

<sup>265</sup> J Sinister, July 25, 2012 (4:20am) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.”

<sup>266</sup> LordMeph, July 25, 2012 (4:34pm) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.”

<sup>267</sup> Memitim, July 24, 2012 (5:47pm) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>268</sup> Chromium, July 24, 2012 (5:26pm) Comment on Thomas, “On Eve of Invicta FC's Second Show, Shannon Knapp Continuing to 'Fight the Fight' for Women's MMA.”

On the Genesis video, fifteen comments were posted; eight contained no emphasized femininity promotion. However, some exceptions made it clear part of the site's readership did not enjoy WMMA, mainly for hegemonic masculine reasons.<sup>269</sup> SUPERFKNMARIO\_ specified: "I don't mind watching a women's grappling match, but I don't like watching them punch each other in the face," implying that he abides by the emphasized feminine tenant of female fragility.<sup>270</sup> WTFU espoused: "To be honest...They all looked like they had been just released from prison,"<sup>271</sup> which features an inverse of VMA Trait 2 and VMA Trait 4. This harkened back to Michael Narine's dissertation in dismissing female fighters for daring not to titillate the male audience purposefully.<sup>272</sup> JUTSENBERG stated: "Nicely shot vid, and props and respect to the female mma fighters. I agree though, just dont like watching women hit each other. Dont think it's wrong or any less than mens mma, just doesnt sit right with me."<sup>273</sup> He is not questioning a women's right to compete in fighting, nor doubting their technical abilities. But he firmly believed in the myth of female fragility or perhaps also that of the male protector role. TWILIGHTS posted: "Not my cup of tea I too just get a little wierded out seeing females beat the crap out of eachother. Not to be a hater I just hope womans mma never makes it to the ufc and I think Dana feels the same. I respect their athletic abibilities just kinda a freak show imo."<sup>274</sup> Once again, he subconsciously cites female fragility, as he is not only "weierded out" by two women fighting but also considers WMMA in and of itself a "freak show." Women being professional fighters seemed somehow unnatural and strange to him.

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<sup>269</sup> Ariel Helwani, "Genesis of Invicta FC," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 26, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/news/2012/7/26/3186500/genesis-of-invicta-fc>.

<sup>270</sup> Superfkmario\_, July 26, 2012 (9:52pm) Comment on Helwani, "Genesis of Invicta FC."

<sup>271</sup> WTFU, July 26, 2012 (6:23pm) Comment on Helwani, "Genesis of Invicta FC."

<sup>272</sup> Narine, "Developing an understanding," 97.

<sup>273</sup> Jutsenberg, July 27, 2012 (9:07am) Comment on Helwani, "Genesis of Invicta FC."

<sup>274</sup> Twilights, July 28, 2012 (8:18pm) Comment on Helwani, "Genesis of Invicta FC."

*MMA Rising* covered multiple aspects of **Invicta FC 2**. Sargent wrote individual articles on each fight on the card as they became announced<sup>275</sup> while also posting updates regarding fighters who had to drop out of the card and who their replacements were.<sup>276</sup> Two days before the event, Sargeant posted two articles, one covering the seven prelim bouts and the other focusing on the eight main card fights. In both pieces, Sargeant dedicated a detailed paragraph for each fighter, featuring their records, accomplishments, primary martial arts specialties, and what game plan he suggested they implement.<sup>277</sup> For the Queen of Spades, he summarized: “Baszler is a seasoned veteran who has battled most of the top female fighters at 135 . . . and is renowned for her crafty submission game. All but one of her victories have come by tapout . . . While McMann will hold a decided edge in the wrestling department, one mistake on the ground could be all that Baszler needs in order to submit the Olympian.”<sup>278</sup> Sargent promoted no emphasized feminine adherence as he treated WMMA fighters as who they are: MMA fighters, nothing more, nothing less. Compared to its counterparts on the Vox Media websites, the weigh-in article featured no pictures, thus no addition to the male gaze atmosphere. Sargent listed each fighter’s weight and any resulting fines from **Invicta**.<sup>279</sup>

Baszler’s twenty-first pro MMA contest came on July 28, 2012, against the 6-0 newcomer Sara McMann in the main event of **Invicta FC 2**, staged in Kansas City, Kansas, at the historic Memorial Hall.<sup>280</sup> Mauro Ranallo, Julie Kedzie, and “King Mo” Muhammed Lawal

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<sup>275</sup> “Search results for Invicta,” MMArising.com, accessed July 24, 2021.

<https://www.mmarising.com/page/38/?s=invicta> through <https://www.mmarising.com/page/40/?s=invicta>.

<sup>276</sup> Rob Sargent, “Kobold Injured, D’Alelio Set To Face Porto At Invicta FC 2,” MMArising.com, June 25, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2012/06/25/kobold-injured-dalelio-set-to-face-porto-at-invicta-fc-2/>.

<sup>277</sup> Rob Sargent, “Invicta Fighting Championships 2 Main Card Preview,” MMArising.com, July 26, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/07/26/invicta-fighting-championships-2-main-card-preview/>.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Rob Sargent, “Invicta Fighting Championships 2 Live Weigh-In Results,” MMArising.com, July 27, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/07/27/invicta-fighting-championships-2-live-weigh-in-results/>.

<sup>280</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

were in the broadcast booth. About midway through the card, **Invicta FC** aired promotional videos for the two main event competitors. Baszler's video showed her playing cello and guitar, training and teaching at Next Edge Academy, and playing with her dog. In addition, the vignette showed Baszler leading a roller derby practice for the Sioux Falls Roller Dollz and her working out at the gym covered in sweat. Arguably, the most intriguing part of the package featured Baszler wrestling against members of the Augustana College Vikings wrestling team. Vikings assistant coach Tom Meester offered an opinion: "She's darn good at wrestling, you know . . . She would have a bright future if she chose to wrestle."<sup>281</sup> Right before the main event, another vignette featuring the fighters discussing the bout aired. Baszler exuded her usual "showwomanship," declaring: "I'm going to do something so awesome that everybody's jaw will hit the floor, and shake the foundation of Memorial Hall, and the whole place will collapse, and the last thing will be the streamed internet audience writing blogs about whatever awesome thing I did to end the world."<sup>282</sup>

During Baszler's entrance to the cage, Ranallo stated: "The Queen of Spades, some may call her. I prefer to call her the submission magician. Thirteen of her fourteen wins have come by submission." Baszler carried her usual guitar to the cage as "Killing in the Name Of" by rap metal band Rage Against the Machine played over the arena's sound system. Notably, she received a roar of applause from the audience as soon as she exited backstage, primarily from women. Kedzie thanked Knapp and match-maker Dana Martin for: "getting this woman back in the cage. So many of her fights have fallen through the last couple of years. It's so nice to see her back in there against really high-level competition. Shayna Baszler is one of the most exciting

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<sup>281</sup> "Invicta FC 2: Baszler vs McMann,," July 28, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:58:57, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34063>.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

figures . . . in all of MMA.”<sup>283</sup> Just before entering the cage, Josh Barnett attempted to psych Baszler up by giving her a hard slap to both cheeks. The “Queen of Spades” looked unphased.<sup>284</sup>

The fight went the fifteen-minute distance, only the third of Baszler’s professional bouts to reach the final bell.<sup>285</sup> The only accurate way to summarize this bantamweight title contender bout was that it was a back-and-forth contest, full of grappling and fisticuffs, that either competitor could have won.

The first round consisted of a punching and kicking exchange, with both competitors landing hard strikes throughout, but McMann arguably won the frame because she landed more of her blows. The second round saw neither fighter gain a noticeable advantage, more of a grappling focus on the ground, with Baszler locking on or just missing locking on several different submissions. Most of the MMA media analysts gave it to Baszler because even though McMann never remained in her submission attempts for very long, the former was repeatedly going after her, receiving minor damage, and dictated the pace of the round.<sup>286</sup> The third frame saw more striking exchanges. McMann, managing to secure a couple of takedowns, seemed to get the better of the stand-up affair, although Baszler did manage to land a few counters. Just before the final bell, however, Baszler caught McMann with a stiff left to the head, landing punch after punch to the side of the Olympian’s head, the crowd loudly cheering as the former desperately tried to finish the fight. Following McMann down to the canvas, Baszler clinched, preparing to fire off more blows with her legs. However, the clock ran out, ending the fight.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> “Shayna Baszler.” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019.  
<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.



The two immediately embraced, the combatants receiving a standing ovation. While the judges tallied their scorecards, McMann asked her opponent: “Fight of the night?”<sup>288</sup> to which Baszler replied: “Fuck yeah, we're getting a bonus.”<sup>289</sup> In the end, the judges gave McMann the unanimous decision win. Interviewed by Julie Kedzie after the fight, McMann exclaimed that Baszler: “By far that is the toughest and most skilled fighter I've ever fought . . . She brought all of her game, all of her experience. She's tough, slick . . . she's unbelievable.”<sup>290</sup> Baszler told Kedzie: “Honestly, this is the best I've ever felt. I said it in all my interviews; this is the best training camp I've ever had . . . I felt like I did enough to win, but I'm not sour and definitely not taking anything away from Sara McMann. If I'm gonna go to war with someone in a title contention match, Sara McMann is the exact type of athlete I'd want to go against. I want to go to war more for you guys.”<sup>291</sup> The crowd, commentators, and Invicta FC considered it the best main event they could have gotten.

The pre-fight vignette of Baszler's Sioux Fall training was unlike any other vignette examined in this study, specifically in its commentary on different aspects of her life. Moments more in line with feminine norms showed her playing the cello and playing with her dog; however, the number of non-adherence video clips outweighed them. These included showing her training at her MMA gym, lifting weights while visibly dripping with sweat, and seeing images of her practicing roller derby. All of these moments are generally associated with masculinity as opposed to femininity, except roller derby.<sup>292</sup> The most visible example of Baszler's masculine expression featured in the vignette was the wrestling portion of her training

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

camp. Baszler wrestled male opponents from a school that often finished highly in the NCAA Division II rankings. In addition, their assistant coach stated that Baszler could have competed on the varsity team in terms of her skill level. Showing a woman competing against the men, elite men, in a combat sport is quite a defiant statement to emphasized femininity's sociability and fragility social contracts.<sup>293</sup>

In the video aired before the main event, most of Baszler's statements described her game plan for the fight and why she respected Sara McMann, both as an opponent and a person. None of that qualifies as gendered narratives. One of two examples of non-adherence to Connell's theorem was that both fighters' lacked makeup during their interview segments. The second example was when Baszler turned to her "showwomanship," declaring she would: "Shake the foundation of Memorial Hall, and the whole place will collapse" from a self-described "wave of awesomeness."<sup>294</sup> This was a tongue-in-cheek statement, with Baszler showing herself far from demure and reserved. Her pre-fight walk to the cage mainly consisted of the same non-emphasized feminine elements present in most of her prior-analyzed "walkouts": Baszler's hair in corn rows, wearing a baseball cap, while carrying her electric guitar high above her head as heavy metal music played. One new element featured was her head coach's slaps before entering the cage. Though these were not full-force slaps, this was still an image of former **UFC** heavyweight champion Josh Barnett, one of the epitomes of hegemonic masculinity in the sport, slapping a female student. A male colleague was striking Baszler, and instead of showing "feminine fragility," her face remained stoic and defiant. What helped the defiance translate to the viewer was that the announcers did not mention it, making it seem normal for WMMA

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<sup>293</sup> "Invicta FC 2: Baszler vs McMann,," July 28, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:58:57, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34063>.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

fighters. Since this was many viewers' first or second viewing of an all-WMMA card, making that striking action seem normal is bound to strike both audiences, the one in attendance and the one watching online, as not conforming to emphasized femininity.<sup>295</sup>

As for the fight, the announcers kept their dialogue mostly technical, with admittedly some hyperbole from the enthusiastic Mauro Ranallo. Although Ranallo spent much of the contest emphasizing both combatants' submission acumen, the bout that played out before the audience was a very "masculine" fight regarding physicality. Despite Baszler and McMann being grapplers, most of the first and third rounds were spent on the feet, throwing strikes. The second round was more of a grappling affair. While not deliberate non-adherence, because they were firmly avoiding "feminine" submissions for two-thirds of the contest, especially with Baszler seeking the knockout at the end, showed that women could "fight like men."<sup>296</sup> And it was in moments such as that final flurry of punches by Baszler at the bell that the crowd cheered lustily.<sup>297</sup>

Baszler and McMann's actions post-fight mixed sociable sportsmanship and defying emphasized feminine norms. They hugged after the final bell, a kind of sportsmanship extended further in complimenting each other during their respective post-fight interviews. However, yelling cries of victory into the crowd with their fists held high is not timid. Neither was Baszler stating: "Fuck yeah, we're getting a bonus!"<sup>298</sup> Her swearing and confidence level in their respective technical skills expressed in that statement went against emphasized feminine notions of sociability. While both of their post-fight interviews strayed into sociable sportsmanship, the

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Hirose, "Men who Strike and Men who Submit," 190-209.

<sup>297</sup> "Invicta FC 2: Baszler vs McMann,," July 28, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:58:57, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34063>.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

overall presentation of Baszler-McMann defies emphasized femininity.<sup>299</sup> In this regard, the MMA news media's reception of this fight and the **Invicta FC 2** card was a mixture of praising and decrying the lack of emphasized feminine attributes.

*MMA Mania*'s live play-by-play of the fight, written by Brian Hemminger, was largely absent of hegemonic masculine and emphasized feminine narratives. It simply narrated the action, leaving little room for sociological commentary. The closest Hemminger came to sociological analysis was when he referred to Baszler and McMann as ladies on three occasions.<sup>300</sup> He never referred to them as women or girls, simply ladies. Though it does exude an air of female sociability, Hemminger's statement was thoroughly negated by praising their technical competence.<sup>301</sup> There was no play-by-play commentary on *Bloody Elbow*, simply the live web stream link listing the main card fights, followed by the final results.<sup>302</sup> This is not surprising, considering ShinSplints, the non-staff writer moderating the stream just over a month before, exclaimed: "I just can't get into WMMA."<sup>303</sup> *MMA Rising*, by contrast, gave live play-by-play analysis for each of the fourteen fights, six on the prelims and eight on the main card. Sargent's writing was the most technical of all media reactions in explaining what moves Baszler and McMann utilized. Here was his assessment of the fight's second round: "McMann flurried with punches in round two, but Baszler backed her up with left and right hook counters. McMann took Baszler down, but Baszler reversed and spun into a kneebar attempt. McMann

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198093/invicta-fc-2-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>303</sup> ShinSplints, June 22, 2012 (12:26pm) Comment on ink.yo, "1 unpopular opinion about MMA you hold." [https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/6/21/3108998/1-unpopular-opinion-about-mma-you-hold?&\\_ga=2.31367743.1466088797.1626821479-572006477.1617748640#106080897](https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/6/21/3108998/1-unpopular-opinion-about-mma-you-hold?&_ga=2.31367743.1466088797.1626821479-572006477.1617748640#106080897).

triangled her legs to defend and punched the sides of Baszler's face. Baszler transitioned from a kneebar to a heel hook and then took over top position. She tried to spin into an armbar, but McMann escaped and the fighters stood. McMann pressed forward with punches, but Baszler's counters landed consistently. McMann took Baszler's back at the bell."<sup>304</sup> While the event's media coverage largely avoided promoting toxic masculinity and emphasized feminine norms, many online fans contributed to making a "homosocial, heterosexist space."

*MMA Mania*'s livestream thread saw 548 comments posted. Most of these heavily promoted hegemonic masculinity and complained about the lack of fighters adhering to emphasized femininity. The image thumbnail used above the article was from the prior day's weigh-ins, where Baszler held a toy lightsaber in her hand.<sup>305</sup>

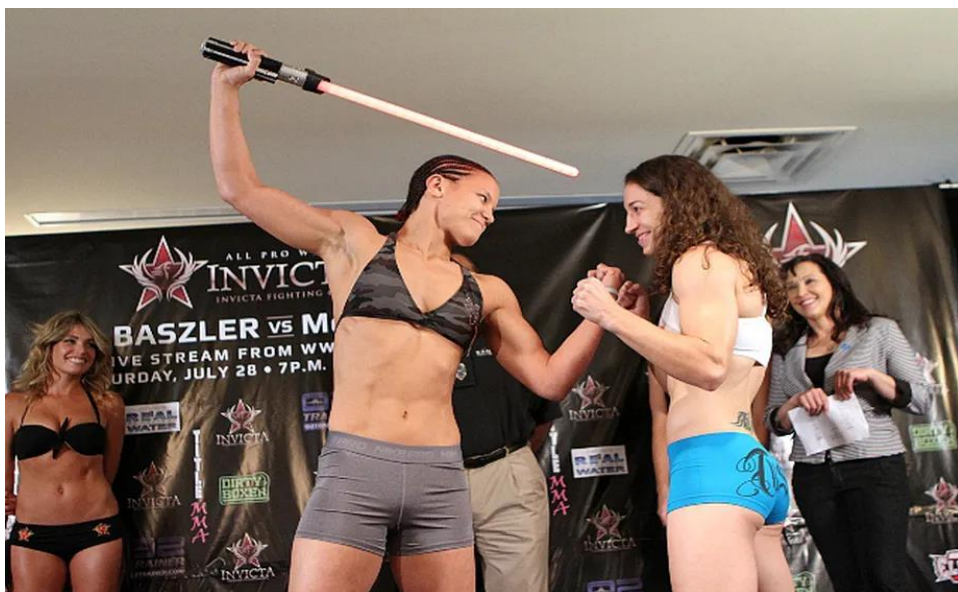


Figure 15 Shayna Baszler and Sara McMann face off at Invicta FC 2 weigh-ins, July 27, 2012.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>304</sup> Rob Sargent, "Invicta Fighting Championships 2 Live Play-By-Play & Results," MMArising.com, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/07/28/invicta-fighting-championships-2-live-play-by-play-results/>.

<sup>305</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198093/invicta-fc-2-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. Photo by Tracy Lee.

HITOKIRIX, one of the prime WMMA detractors in the thread, said: “She uses that to cut multiple sandwiches for me at once. Saves her time,” implying her role as a woman is in the kitchen, i.e., female domesticity.<sup>307</sup> His words contained Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 1 and 4. SARAH- reacted: “She brought her double ended (dildo) to the weigh ins? who gets the thick side? fight ends in a scissor sandwich with that in between . . . i am a sexist pig..carry on.”<sup>308</sup> They engaged in Toxic Traits 1 and 2 in tandem with VMA Traits 2 and 4. Likely, a man utilizing a female username or a complicit feminine presence posted this statement. Either way, the comment prioritized the male gaze while also mocking lesbians. Hemminger stated that he hoped his daughter would pursue combat sports,<sup>309</sup> to which P-DUBL replied: “What about when I start posting on the interweb about she isn't really all that hot but I would do her if I was promised a sandwich afterward?”<sup>310</sup> He utilized Toxic Trait 1 in unison with VMA Traits 2 through 4. ROOSEVELTDUNN<sup>311</sup> and WISETOAD said that at least their daughter fighting would be better than her stripping or “hooking.”<sup>312</sup> However, HEXBREAKER suggested: “Less money...equally beat up,” insinuating that a WMMA fighter makes less money than a prostitute while remaining subject to the same amount of violence the latter faces, promoting Toxic Trait 1 in addition to VMA Traits 1 and 4.<sup>313</sup> His comment declared women cannot make income from

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<sup>307</sup> HitokiriX, July 28, 2012 (11:55am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>308</sup> Sarah-, July 28, 2012 (10:43am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).” Parentheses mine.

<sup>309</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 28, 2012 (1:15pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>310</sup> P-Dub, July 28, 2012 (9:35pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>311</sup> Rooseveltdunn, July 28, 2012 (2:12pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>312</sup> Wisetoad, July 28, 2012 (2:29pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>313</sup> Hexbreaker, July 28, 2012 (4:38pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

the “technical” world of MMA, with prostitution being a more “sociable” and, therefore, more reasonable profession for females to pursue.

Before the Nicdali Rivera-Calanoc/Angelica Chavez fight, Hemminger clarified that both combatants were: “really really good looking. I almost don’t want to see them beat the shit out of each other....almost.”<sup>314</sup> He surprisingly participated in VMA Trait 4. This suggests the sportswriter does not want his “penis’s rating” of either fighter to decrease by seeing them battered and bruised. However, as in earlier articles, he exuded respect for their technical competence and, on other occasions, admitted to enjoying WMMA. Hemminger does not mind sexualizing WMMA athletes, but he knows it should not be his first priority. Recognizing their fighting prowess comes first. MAUIWAVES was so convinced that WMMA fighters do not adhere to emphasized femininity that Rivera-Calanoc/Chavez caused him to exclaim: “So weird how hot some WMMA fighters are. Very grateful for this lol,”<sup>315</sup> displaying VMA Trait 2. Later, during Baszler’s video package, he opined that the Queen of Spades: “doesn’t look a little good.”<sup>316</sup> WOLFMAN13 argued: “Okay a chick that can fight and play music is pretty sexy,”<sup>317</sup> and “Shayna is ... meh okish” regarding physical appearance.<sup>318</sup> However, WOLFMAN13 quickly announced that Baszler’s shoulders were too broad. He then changed his mind about finding her attractive,<sup>319</sup> concluding: “After seeing her teeth I really really take it (his

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<sup>314</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 28, 2012 (8:43pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>315</sup> MauiWaves, July 28, 2012 (8:50pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>316</sup> MauiWaves, July 28, 2012 (9:20pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>317</sup> Wolfman13, July 28, 2012 (9:27pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>318</sup> Wolfman13, July 28, 2012 (9:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>319</sup> Wolfman13, July 28, 2012 (9:29pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

compliment) back.”<sup>320</sup> JOBEN twice tried to bring viewers over to the Fuel TV station to watch a replay of UFC.<sup>321</sup> This caused stream moderator Brian Hemminger to chastise JOBEN for attempting to remove viewers from the **Invicta** event.<sup>322</sup>

It is somewhat confusing that some commenters posted statements that directly contradicted their earlier assertions. For example, HITOKIRIX implied that many WMMA fighters, such as openly gay competitor Liz Carmouche during her second-round victory over Kaitlin Young, are lesbian because: “with some of their looks they have no choice.”<sup>323</sup> Here he engaged in Toxic Trait 2 along with an inverse of VMA Trait 2. However, earlier in the card, he praised Amanda Nunes’ (an openly lesbian fighter) technical competence and said he “loves her.”<sup>324</sup> He blatantly stated that lesbians are ugly and do not titillate him, yet he respects at least one such woman’s fighting ability. ARIESKJJ commented: “These chicks are winning me over but I still cringe when they take a big shot,” indicating that he is starting to gain respect for their technical competence but still buys into the notion of female fragility via his “cringing” at them taking a punch.<sup>325</sup>

Interestingly, the main event generated few comments, all praising either Baszler-McMann or the entire card. MAUIWAVES proclaimed: “This is like a title fight.”<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Wolfman13, July 28, 2012 (9:31pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).” Parentheses mine.

<sup>321</sup> Joben, July 28, 2012 (10:04pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>322</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 28, 2012 (10:05pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>323</sup> HitokiriX, July 28, 2012 (10:58pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>324</sup> HitokiriX, July 28, 2012 (10:26pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>325</sup> AriesKJJ, July 28, 2012 (11:07pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>326</sup> MauiWaves, July 28, 2012 (11:49pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”



GRETZKYOVERYOURJETSKI stated: “Very nice end to the fight and she rocked her.”<sup>327</sup> HUCKABUCK878 offered: “You laugh for joy at the exchanges and just the action all around. awesome dude.”<sup>328</sup> Hemminger concluded: “What an awesome night of fights. 8 finishes in a row and then a barnburner in the main event. That was as much fun as I’ve had covering any UFC event in 2012. One of the best cards of the year no joke.”<sup>329</sup> On his posting conduct during the event, ARIESKJJ summarized: “1 sexist joke and not even 1 lesbian joke. I did pretty good ... for me! Good fights, I’m a little more of a WMMA fan than I was this morning.”<sup>330</sup> Despite praising female fighters in an earlier post, he was complicit in the first two toxic masculine traits in addition to VMA Trait 4. While he admits to the fighters’ technical competence, he openly admits that he made a sexist joke along with a homophobic one.

On the *Bloody Elbow* livestream, 2,020 posts were made during the broadcast (although most of the comments focused on streaming issues prevalent throughout the first half of the card, during which many posters could not see the first six fights).<sup>331</sup> DEVYN RODRIGUEZ looked forward to Baszler-McMann, stating: “Main event is all sorts of awesome. Freestyle wrestling vs. catch wrestling. McMann can straight up toss females through the air, but her sub grappling game isn’t fully formed. Baszler can pull off some crazy stuff.”<sup>332</sup> ELITEX10X seemed knowledgeable of WMMA, noticing: “A shitload of fights. But surprisingly I have seen nearly

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<sup>327</sup> Gretzkyoveryourjetski, July 28, 2012 (11:56pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>328</sup> Huckabuck878, July 29, 2012 (12:07am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>329</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 29, 2012 (12:09am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>330</sup> AriesKJJ, July 28, 2012 (11:59pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28).”

<sup>331</sup> ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>332</sup> Devyn Rodriguez, July 28, 2012 (5:37pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

half of the main card fighter's names before."<sup>333</sup> DARTHKITTY echoed: "I thought I used to know a lot about WMMA, and then Invicta started up, and then I was like damn. I don't know half of these women. I guess I was wrong."<sup>334</sup> Comments like these suggest that the *Bloody Elbow* readership generally followed WMMA or were willing to watch it. PDL tried to counter this enthusiasm, arguing: "Just to be fair with expectations from the start. 1. At least more folks made weight this time 2. The first 8 fighters have a combined 4 career wins. 3. The last event sucked."<sup>335</sup> Here, PDL frequently utilized VMA Trait 1. DARTHKITTY, MOLLCUTPURSE, OUR BOVINE PUBLIC, ZOMBIE PROPHET, and DEVYN RODRIGUEZ vehemently disagreed with PDL's assessment.<sup>336</sup> In response, PDL highlighted the role of males needing to legitimize female technical competence, claiming: "I don't excuse boring fights because it was ladies. Bad cards are bad cards, and the last one was bad. Thankfully they have a super low bar set on this one so I be easy to impress."<sup>337</sup> Again, he primarily featured VMA Trait 1.

Most of the talk between the prelim fights focused on various posters' frustrations at being unable to get the online stream to function properly. The rest of the comments centered on the fights, clearly judging the participants' technical merits and "fighting spirit."<sup>338</sup> During the card's fourth fight, MOLLCUTPURSE exclaimed: "What these women lack in technique they

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<sup>333</sup> Elitex10x, July 28, 2012 (6:10pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>334</sup> DarthKitty, July 28, 2012 (6:14pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>335</sup> Pdl, July 28, 2012 (6:46pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>336</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>337</sup> Pdl, July 28, 2012 (7:10pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>338</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

more than make up for in aggression. dear god.”<sup>339</sup> Fans commonly defined the prelim fights as “fun (yet sloppy).”<sup>340</sup> The lone exception to this came during the prelim main event of Carla Esparza-Sarah Schnieder, where OUR BOVINE PUBLIC espoused: “so many fun scrambles in this fight,” praising their technical competence.<sup>341</sup>

And yet, there were still a select few who doubted either the ability of the combatants to fight or the worthiness of **Invicta** to draw a good crowd. During Esparza-Schnieder, HEAD-SPLITTER, regarding women having knockout power in their punches, remarked: “I think it’s an accomplishment for the average adult woman to bicep curl even 10 lbs.”<sup>342</sup> LUCAS BOURDON claimed: “The level of striking in WMMA is horrendous.”<sup>343</sup> HEAD-SPLITTER also commented: “Anyone got numbers on how big the live audience is? Very smart of Invicta to use sex lights to dim everyone else out.”<sup>344</sup> SHINSPLINTS answered: “If you ask Knapp, I’m sure it’s somewhere around 50K.”<sup>345</sup> Since the max capacity of Memorial Hall was 3,500,<sup>346</sup> he was likely claiming Knapp had lied about the viewership numbers for **Invicta FC 1** and would

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<sup>339</sup> Mollcutpurse, July 28, 2012 (8:17pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>340</sup> Christopher Muldong, July 28, 2012 (8:35pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>341</sup> Our Bovine Public, July 28, 2012 (9:19pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>342</sup> Head-splitter, July 28, 2012 (8:49pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>343</sup> Lucas Bourdon, July 28, 2012 (9:25pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>344</sup> Head-splitter, July 28, 2012 (8:41pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>345</sup> ShinSplints, July 28, 2012 (8:44pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

<sup>346</sup> Deyvn Rodriguez, July 28, 2012 (8:43pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread.”

do the same again relative to live attendance figures.<sup>347</sup> Both commenters participated in VMA Trait 4.

During the airing of the mid-show Baszler/McMann vignettes, many posters praised Baszler's cello playing, except PDL. He stated that the Queen of Spades: "Gave up a music career for a fighting career. What's the next stop on the "youthful dreams going nowhere" train?"<sup>348</sup> DANKNABBOT cracked a joke about Baszler modeling because she is not physically attractive to him.<sup>349</sup> There were at least ten comments on McMann's musculature, none of which accused her of being on steroids, being a man, or even being unattractive.<sup>350</sup> They were used as a statement of fact, such as ELITEX10X noting: "McMann is jacked."<sup>351</sup> In this same vein, many comments during the main card praised WMMA to varying extents. HYPNOTIC opined: "It's funny, I remember . . . 5 years ago thinking that women's mma would never really interest me . . . I really hope Invicta has a future because they are putting on great fights and doing a great service for women's MMA."<sup>352</sup> During the Young-Carmouche fight, while discussing the latter's homosexuality, there were two key differences between it and *MMA Mania's* live-stream counterpart. First, some forty comments praised the fight on *Bloody Elbow* instead of *Mania's* paltry six.<sup>353</sup> Second, *Mania* featured sixteen posts debating whether or not the feminine gay

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<sup>347</sup> ShinSplints, July 28, 2012 (8:44pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>348</sup> Pdl, July 28, 2012 (9:26pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>349</sup> DankNabbot, July 28, 2012 (9:28pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>350</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>351</sup> Elitex10x, July 28, 2012 (9:27pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>352</sup> Hypnotic, July 28, 2012 (10:17pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>353</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198093/invicta-fc-2-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

male stereotype is accurate for most of the gay population.<sup>354</sup> *Bloody Elbow* discussed if there were any other openly gay/lesbian MMA fighters and even praised Carmouche for being out of the closet. There were no negative stereotypes associated with homosexuality.<sup>355</sup>

During Baszler's entrance, VIOLENT NEWT wrote: "shit, baszler is going to end the world."<sup>356</sup> GEORGE MICHAEL, NORIFUMI YAKOLEV, and FIZBAN all appreciated Baszler's walkout song choice, not considering it abnormal for a woman to be a fan of such a masculine genre of music.<sup>357</sup> MERCUTIOSHOGUNRUIN, complaining that the main eventers were not adhering to female fragility, exclaimed: "These girls might have more muscle than me and that enrages me, like really enrages me."<sup>358</sup> This comment contained Toxic Trait 3 and VMA Trait 1. GZL5000 responded: "Being weaker than a woman is no shame in my opinion though. Hardest I've ever been hit was by a female amateur boxer 40 pounds lighter than me."<sup>359</sup> SKLART, discussing his MMA gym experiences, echoed: "I get beat up by girls all the time."<sup>360</sup> However, when GZL5000 asked who he should root for,<sup>361</sup> MERCUTIOSHOGUNRUIN replied: "The better looking one."<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>356</sup> Violent Newt, July 28, 2012 (11:32pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>357</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>358</sup> MercutioShotgunRuin, July 28, 2012 (11:36pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>359</sup> Gzl5000, July 28, 2012 (11:44pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>360</sup> Sklart, July 28, 2012 (11:51pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>361</sup> Gzl5000, July 28, 2012 (11:44pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>362</sup> MercutioShotgunRuin, July 28, 2012 (11:37pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

During the fight, the comments primarily expressed amazement at the technical fighting prowess on display. ELITEX10X called Baszler's grappling "legit,"<sup>363</sup> and SKLART mentioned an "awesome scramble sequence."<sup>364</sup> After the final bell rang, almost all posts were positive regarding the main event. WHORES\_BANE stated: "that was a WARR!"<sup>365</sup> LEMONSQUEEZE opined: "Shayna was clearly the superior fighter when it came to technique, but McMann is crazy athletic."<sup>366</sup> VICTOR RODRIGUEZ commented on the post-fight talk between Baszler and McMann, writing: "Camaraderie and athleticism. love that shit. I wish this was on tv."<sup>367</sup> Most of the remaining comments focused on incredulity that one judge scored all three rounds for McMann and speculated on her chances in a fight against Rousey.<sup>368</sup> But for an overall opinion on the entire card, KEFKA simply remarked: "Great show."<sup>369</sup> Compared to *MMA Mania*, comments focused less on physical appearance and emphasized feminine gender roles and more on technical competence as well as the legitimacy of WMMA. Most of the posters either seemed well-versed in WMMA of the day or were eager to learn.<sup>370</sup>

Despite not featuring a live stream thread, *MMA Fighting* managed thirty-four comments posted on their **Invicta 2** results article, most written just before or after the show. The comments

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<sup>363</sup> Elitex10x, July 28, 2012 (11:49pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>364</sup> Sklart, July 28, 2012 (11:48pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>365</sup> Whores\_bane, July 28, 2012 (11:57pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>366</sup> LemonSqueeze, July 29, 2012 (12:04am) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>367</sup> Victor Rodriguez, July 28, 2012 (11:58pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>368</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

<sup>369</sup> Kefka, July 29, 2012 (12:01am) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread."

<sup>370</sup> ShinSplints, "UPDATE: Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Live Thread," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/28/3198481/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-live-thread>.

were a mixture of extremes usually seen from *MMA Mania* and *Bloody Elbow* readers.<sup>371</sup>

91HOTROD opined: “I just can't help but not care.”<sup>372</sup> This view was echoed by STEPHEN.ANTHONY.EST1986, who exclaimed: “I tried. I really did try to watch. The fights have been going on for awhile now and I am no longer entertained. I wish them the best as I do the WNBA, but I do not find either entertaining, which essentially is what all sports are all about. I am very active in the MMA community and love the UFC, but in a real world not dominated by ‘PC,’ this is just not entertaining when you’ve watched the UFC.”<sup>373</sup> Here, he proclaims that women athletes are athletically inferior to men, regardless of the sport. And, since he allegedly only wants to watch the most athletic compete, he does not care for WMMA, going so far as to say if you like WMMA, you are being politically correct instead of honest. His statement primarily centered around VMA Trait 1. Anyone who suggested otherwise spurred STEPHEN.ANTHONY.EST1986 to attack their opinion. When MMAFIGHTER1969 stated: “It’s very cool and full of action. It’s obviously the place to be for Women,”<sup>374</sup> the former interjected, arguing: “In the past three fights, which woman didn’t just “give up”?”<sup>375</sup> BIGS-joked: “I’d much rather watch Carano weigh in a million times in a row to be honest,” featuring VMA Traits 2 and 4,<sup>376</sup> later claiming he was both a Kaufman and Rousey fan.<sup>377</sup>

TWILIGHTS expressed a common sentiment about WMMA being unnatural, solely to promote female fragility through a question: “I have to wonder...What guy would want to see a

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<sup>371</sup> Ben Fowlkes, “Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/results/2012/7/28/3192571/invicta-fc-2-results-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

<sup>372</sup> 91hotrod, July 28, 2012, (7:55pm) Comment on Fowlkes, “Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>373</sup> Stephen.anthony.est1986, July 28, 2012, (10:07pm) Comment on Fowlkes, “Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>374</sup> Mmafighter1969, July 28, 2012, (10:32pm) Comment on Fowlkes, “Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>375</sup> Stephen.anthony.est1986, July 28, 2012, (10:50pm) Comment on Fowlkes, “Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>376</sup> Bigs-, July 29, 2012 (1:48am) Comment on Fowlkes, ““Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>377</sup> Bigs-, July 29, 2012 (2:15am) Comment on Fowlkes, ““Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”



female hurt. Done by a female or not it's just disturbing.”<sup>378</sup> TWILIGHTS essentially equated those who watch WMMA to domestic abusers. HUCKABUCK878 countered: “Whether it is a guy or woman, these people fight injuries in the cage might happen, like ronda breaking arms and any other fighter out there going to war.”<sup>379</sup> RYANG- espoused: “Say what you want about their skills, but the women BRING IT!”<sup>380</sup> MATAME\_SIN\_DOLOR concurred, stating: “Now there's no way to compare a mediocre fighter to a girl, no way im using “you fight like a girl” anymore.”<sup>381</sup>

*The Underground* contained 776 posts on a live stream thread of **Invicta FC 2**. Much like *Bloody Elbow*, many comments (at least 300) centered around the event's streaming issues.<sup>382</sup> Outside the technical difficulties narrative, the thread's conversation featured a steady back-and-forth dialogue praising WMMA while arguing for emphasized femininity adherence. BARAOKIK stated: “First event was great, Invicta is world class. Another very solid card again, great matchups.”<sup>383</sup> During the initial streaming error stage, AUTHORITY\_FIGURE opined: “Request: Pls have all the unattractive fighters go on first - even if this means changing the matchup,” implying he wanted the bouts he was unable to watch to feature competitors based on their perceived ugliness rather than any lack of MMA technical competence,<sup>384</sup> thus engaging in Toxic Trait 1 as well as VMA Traits 2 and 4. During the third fight, many applauded Jessamyn Duke's knee strikes.<sup>385</sup> DAMANE08, after the Sarah Moras-Raquel Pennington bout, remarked

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<sup>378</sup> Twilights, July 28, 2012 (10:50pm) Comment on Fowlkes, ““Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>379</sup> Huckabuck878, July 29, 2012 (1:23am) Comment on Fowlkes, ““Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>380</sup> RyanG-, July 28, 2012 (10:48pm) Comment on Fowlkes, ““Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>381</sup> Matame\_sin\_dolor, July 29, 2012 (8:46am) Comment on Fowlkes, ““Invicta FC 2 Results: Baszler vs. McMann.”

<sup>382</sup> Underground\_Feed “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET,” Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, July 2012. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-2-streaming-free-sat-7-pm-et/2034196>.

<sup>383</sup> BaraoKix, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>384</sup> Authority\_Figure, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>385</sup> JitzInMyPants, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”



about the former: “That girl has a lot of ass! There was a LOT of jiggling in that fight,” showing his adherence to VMA Trait 2.<sup>386</sup> At the end of the prelims, 2JUPITERSTOOMANY argued: “Invicta has killed it (minus stream probs) top to bottom so far. Hopefully they survive after they inspire the UFC to jump on the bandwagon.”<sup>387</sup>

Yet, before the first fight of the main card concluded, MR.\_PIBB complained: “Where are the hot chicks? All I see are a bunch of butch lesbos *heads back to ultimate surrender* (a porn site that parodies WMMA).”<sup>388</sup> This post features examples of Toxic Traits 1 and 2, along with VMA Traits 2 through 4. UGCTT\_BLAHBREH similarly complained about the lack of sexualization, insisting that “it should be mandatory that girls cannot where trunks,” expressing Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 4. KOSTELLO felt aroused by the main event, stating: “Cameltoe.... mmmm,” reveling in Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Trait 2.

Conversely, AUTHORITY\_FIGURE argued: “MEN FIGHTERS: You could learn a lot from the women of Invicta. Your ‘technical ability’ has made you ‘technically boring as fuck’ and these women make some of you look ‘technically not worth PPV \$’”<sup>389</sup> SIMONPE inquired: “Has the owner of Invicta FC sold his/her soul to the devil? These fights are fucking amazing!”<sup>390</sup> Intrigued by Baszler and McMann’s slugfest, BENTLEYSUPER8 claimed: “So far this fight is better than the entire main card of the last UFC,”<sup>391</sup> echoed by THIAZI<sup>392</sup> and MCHASE126.<sup>393</sup> While the thread heavily promoted emphasized femininity and toxic

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<sup>386</sup> Damane08, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>387</sup> 2JupitersTooMany, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>388</sup> Mr.\_Pibb, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”  
Parentheses mine.

<sup>389</sup> Authority\_Figure, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>390</sup> Simonpe, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>391</sup> BentleySuper8, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.” The UFC in question was UFC 149 on July 21, 2012, main evented by Urijah Faber vs. Renan Barao.

<sup>392</sup> Thiazi, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>393</sup> Mchase126, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.”

masculinity, posts supporting **Invicta** and their rosters' fighting prowess outnumbered them. A few fans who reveled in "penis ratings" also praised the technical skill displayed, especially by Baszler and McMann.<sup>394</sup> This did not make the presence of hegemonic/toxic masculine pressure towards emphasized feminine adherence any less problematic.

One video of the Baszler-McMann bout was uploaded to YouTube in the days following **Invicta FC 2** by the promotion's official YouTube account, garnering 361 comments.<sup>395</sup> At one point in the comment section, a discussion arose around the question: Do female athletes wear groin protectors like their male counterparts wear jockstraps and cups? The debate reveals the presence of hegemonic masculinity, as it shows that the average commenter fails to know that female external sexual organs are sensitive to injury.<sup>396</sup> However, in a much more toxic fashion, AARONFU2 explained: "Yeah like cyborg. I'm pretty sure she has a penis! .... but yeah they where a Female Groin Guard/Protector," engaging in Toxic Trait 2 along with VMA Trait 4.<sup>397</sup> He was responding to a comment which implied that many WMMA fighters are either men or too masculine and felt obligated to mention Cyborg, despite her not fighting on the card. This starts a trend of online fans mocking fighters' perceived masculinity, referring to them as lesbians or men.

At 13:37 of the video, the referee halted the bout so Baszler could pull up her pants. JAMIE FELIX joked: "Ref was like 'hold up, tuck your dick in,'" implying she was so masculine she must be male.<sup>398</sup> This remark featured Toxic Trait 2 in tandem with VMA Trait 4.

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<sup>394</sup> Underground\_Feed "Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET," Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, July 2012. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-2-streaming-free-sat-7-pm-et/2034196>.

<sup>395</sup> Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Aaronfu2, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>398</sup> Jamie Felix, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

In the post-fight aftermath, DECIMATED550 bemoaned: “damn look at all that post-fight physical contact: holding heads, arms around each other, lots of talking, locking eyes, I wonder if they’re going to elope to the island of Lesbos.”<sup>399</sup> He participated in Toxic Trait 2 while displaying VMA Traits 2 and 4. They heavily insinuated that both McMann and Baszler are lesbians, the described behavior meaning they must be in a physical, romantic relationship. OOHESGOOD pontificated: “Most these females (gays in general) have a birth defect were only part of their body made the transformation to the other gender. It is a fact all babies start off as females. [homosexuality] is not morally wrong just a defect by definition.”<sup>400</sup> This post was steeped in Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 1. Although he stated that being gay is not morally wrong, OOHESGOOD attempted to portray homosexuality as an unnatural mutation. These posts range across the toxic masculine spectrum. Two commenters joked about WMMA fighters “being” men; another mocked said fighters potentially being lesbians, and someone spread conspiracies that homosexuality is scientifically unnatural. This exchange shows that each comment primarily utilized Toxic Trait 2. i.e., homophobia. This commonality suggests that the presence of masculine/lesbian women is considered a threat by some online MMA fans in their efforts to construct their “heterosexist and homosocial” space.

Following a series of posts arguing that Baszler won the fight instead of McMann, DOUG JOHNSON retorted: “It’s a fight., not an ugly contest. Baszler lost.”<sup>401</sup> It was not enough to say, “I felt she lost,” he insisted on attacking Baszler for her physical appearance, which did

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<sup>399</sup> Decimated550, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>400</sup> OOHESGOOD, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>401</sup> Doug Johnson, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

not meet his male desires. When SPLITZ79 said he found Baszler “hot,”<sup>402</sup> CHAKRATESE retorted: “Shutup, Shayna, no you aren’t,” insinuating no heterosexual male would find a masculine woman physically attractive.<sup>403</sup> These conversations featured VMA Trait 4 and inverses of VMA Trait 2. Two posters expressed attraction to McMann, one stating: “McMann got a nice, fat ass,”<sup>404</sup> and the other echoing that same sentiment about the Olympian’s posterior, each utilizing VMA Trait 3.<sup>405</sup> SHAH ALLADIN questioned: “Why can’t women fight with their shirts off? Breasts aren’t sex symbols,”<sup>406</sup> promoting Toxic Trait 1 in addition to VMA Traits 2 and 4.

There were a handful of positive comments. TYRELL TAYLOR posted: “Baszler is just so good with her catch-wrestling. Her comfort level on the ground with the Olympian is ridiculous.”<sup>407</sup> ANTHON KHUU echoed: “Both of these girls are championship material.”<sup>408</sup> MANDIMAL GAMES expressed, “What a fight!! I loved seeing the great sportsmanship between them.”<sup>409</sup> HATCHET D. reiterated: “These women embody what I love about mma.”<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Splitz79, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>403</sup> Chakratese, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>404</sup> Megagolgo13, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>405</sup> Yaha .F, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>406</sup> Shah alladin, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>407</sup> Tyrell Taylor, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>408</sup> Anthon khuu, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>409</sup> Mandimal games, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>410</sup> Hatchet D., Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

However, these comments were outnumbered by those from a largely hegemonic masculine audience watching at home.<sup>411</sup>

Brian Knapp wrote the *Sherdog* recap, briefly analyzing each main card fight. For the main event, he said: “Baszler . . . countered beautifully throughout the 15-minute affair, attacked McMann’s legs with kicks and did a superb job of staying on her feet . . . McMann refused to be denied, however, and delivered takedowns in each of the final two rounds while holding her own in the standup.”<sup>412</sup> Brian Hemminger wrote the Invicta FC 2 recap for MMA Mania, mainly keeping it free of gender narratives. Specifically, regarding Baszler-McMann, he espoused: “McMann was an undefeated Olympic silver medalist wrestler while Baszler entered the bout as the crafty veteran with some of the best submission skills in all of women's MMA.”<sup>413</sup> He then gave a summary of the fight devoid of gender specifiers, praising their footwork, power punches, and how the end of the contest witnessed: “both ladies threw caution to the wind and traded big bombs.”<sup>414</sup> “Ladies” is the only gender differentiation found in the recap, hardly an example of emphasizing the fighters’ respective femininities. This is especially true because Hemminger applauded both combatants’ fighting ability and prowess.<sup>415</sup>

The *Bloody Elbow* counterpart penned by ShinSplints failed to discuss any bout’s details, including the main event. To help readers find out who won, ShinSplints copied and pasted the results directly from **Invicta**’s website. He seemingly put minimal effort into his assignment,

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<sup>411</sup> Shayna Baszler Vs. McMann posted to Invicta FC YouTube Channel, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>412</sup> Brian Knapp, “OLYMPIC SILVER MEDALIST SARA MCMANN DOWNS SHAYNA BASZLER AT INVICTA FC 2,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory July 29, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Olympic-Silver-Medalist-Sara-McMann-Downs-Shayna-Baszler-at-Invicta-FC-2-44507>.

<sup>413</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results recap from last night for ‘McMann vs Baszler’ in Kansas City, Kansas,” *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/29/3199681/Invicta-FC-2-results-recap-sara-mcmann-shayna-baszler>.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*

despite noting: “Throughout the night, Invicta FC delivered action. From corner stops to TKO's to submissions, these ladies delivered in a pure illustration of effective aggression.”<sup>416</sup> His words rang hollow as if WMMA did not warrant an actual proper reporter’s analysis, thereby delegitimizing WMMA athletes’ technical competence as fighters. *Bloody Elbow* put less than a total effort into covering the show’s aftermath, with only a single interview with Shannon Knapp.<sup>417</sup> One op-ed article remained in *Bloody Elbow*’s focus on **Invicta FC 2**.<sup>418</sup> The article by David Castillo praised **Invicta** and Shannon Knapp in particular. However well-intentioned and sincere, his words had definite traces of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Castillo stated: “For many critics of female MMA, the question has always been about the quality of its product. After watching Invicta FC 2, I think it's safe to say there are moments when the sheer spectacle and entertainment of an event becomes the quality, if just for a moment. Can even the harshest critics of female MMA argue they'd rather watch Cheick Kongo vs. Shawn Jordan over Sara McMann vs. Shana Baszler?”<sup>419</sup> The issue evident here is that while Castillo does not argue that McMann-Baszler is quality fighting, he still sees WMMA as a “spectacle” regardless of the technical prowess displayed. His comments subtly echo back to Baszler’s amateur career days when WMMA fights were considered a freak show or “chick fight.”

Castillo continued: “I offer the strawman scenario to follow up with the next point. The counter to that argument is that Kongo and Jordan don't represent the highest levels of male mixed martial arts. McMann, though still very much a prospect in the sport, and to a lesser

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<sup>416</sup> ShinSplits, “Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/29/3199513/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-results>.

<sup>417</sup> Stephie Haynes, “Shannon Knapp Says Invicta's Second Show Numbers Were Better Than First Event,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 30, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/30/3201054/shannon-knapp-says-invicta-second-show-numbers-better-than-first>.

<sup>418</sup> David Castillo, “Why Invicta FC And Female Mixed Martial Arts Will Endure,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 31, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/31/3207259/invicta-fc-female-mixed-martial-arts-endure>.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

extent, Baszler, do represent the higher levels of mixed martial arts in their sport.” Castillo argues that the top level of WMMA was far from the top male MMA counterpart. Castillo quoted Shannon Knapp’s acknowledgment of the talent disparity to further this line of thought: “For us to come in and build a platform, and to educate, and to establish legitimate weight classes...it's a building process. Now are all these weight classes ready to step into the UFC like the men are? No, we're not. But will they be? Absolutely.”<sup>420</sup> Thus, according to Castillo, women will be ready, just not in 2012. While this was an accurate statement, Castillo should have countered with some positive focus on Baszler and McMann’s technical competence, especially within the context of the **Invicta FC 2** main event. Castillo concluded: “While Ronda Rousey has established herself as the main attraction (an increasing amount of which is coming from the type of pugnacious language that reveals insecurity rather than theatrical bravado) she's still no less of a prospect than fighters like McMann, for example . . . Years ago, female MMA couldn't offer a scenario that involved compelling personalities between former Olympians (McMann and Rousey). This isn't just a step in the right direction. It's a quantum leap forward by any standard.”<sup>421</sup> While complimenting Rousey and McMann for being Olympians and agreeing that compelling personalities would help move WMMA towards the UFC, hegemonic masculine pretentiousness remained in Castillo’s words. First, he argued that Rousey’s behavior came not from a Baszler-like sense of theatrics and showmanship but from being insecure or fragile about herself. Even if it is just about one fighter, he labels Rousey with the feminine fragile archetype. Second, he called both Rousey and McMann prospects, implying that neither knew quite what they were doing, questioning their technical competence. He had already established WMMA as “10 years” behind its male counterpart. Restating that point while simultaneously calling

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

Rousey-McMann a “quantum leap forward” for WMMA made his support of the sport seem hollow.<sup>422</sup>

The day after the fights, *MMA Fighting* released an article with a blow-by-blow recap of the Baszler-McMann main event. Nothing hegemonic masculine or emphasized feminine in how they portrayed the fighters. Fowlkes quoted McMann: “‘That was by far the toughest and most skilled fighter I have ever fought’ . . . For anyone who saw Baszler nearly drop her in the waning moments of the bout, it wasn’t hard to believe.”<sup>423</sup> *MMA Rising*’s recap article presented the day after **Invicta FC 2** might have been copied and pasted from Sargent’s play-by-play commentary the night prior.<sup>424</sup>

In Hemminger’s *MMA Mania* recap article, readers wrote four comments. These posts portrayed a split user base, with some having enjoyed the event and others laughing at the concept of WMMA.<sup>425</sup> One was a post by Hemminger containing YouTube links,<sup>426</sup> and another featured praise for Invicta hosting a good show.<sup>427</sup> The third comment saw LORDRELAY post a shot of a woman’s butt in yoga pants, calling it a “FACE holder.”<sup>428</sup> DRAGONASSAULT deduced: “I suppose that since this is an all-female fighter promotion, that the chances of a top getting ripped off during a fight are maximized.” Having their “penis ratings” appeased was the

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ben Fowlkes, “Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/7/29/3199522/invicta-fc-2-results-sara-mcmann-outpoints-shayna-baszler-in-main>.

<sup>424</sup> Robert Sargent, “Invicta FC 2 Results: McMann, Davis & Carmouche Victorious,” MMArising.com, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/07/29/invicta-fc-2-results-mcmann-davis-carmouche-victorious/>.

<sup>425</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results recap from last night for ‘McMann vs Baszler’ in Kansas City, Kansas,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/29/3199681/Invicta-FC-2-results-recap-sara-mcmann-shayna-baszler>.

<sup>426</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 29, 2012 (9:46am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results recap from last night for ‘McMann vs Baszler’ in Kansas City, Kansas.”

<sup>427</sup> Albino Garcia, July 29, 2012 (9:14am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results recap from last night for ‘McMann vs Baszler’ in Kansas City, Kansas.”

<sup>428</sup> Lordrelay, July 29, 2012 (9:06am) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results recap from last night for ‘McMann vs Baszler’ in Kansas City, Kansas.”



prime concern of these two commenters, one caring more about wardrobe malfunctions than technical competence, the other posting a crude picture that had nothing to do with the event other than it featured a woman.<sup>429</sup> Both commenters participated in Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 and 4.

Twenty-two comments were posted on Bloody Elbow's Invicta FC 2 results article, most praising the event.<sup>430</sup> Fan and site moderator D.E.O. summarized the bouts as: "A few mismatches, some sloppy grapple-brawls, and a decent bunch of FUCKYEAMUTHERFUKERS."<sup>431</sup> CORY BRAITERMAN tried to portray five out of eight main card fights as mismatches, more than half the contests.<sup>432</sup> Two posters, CHROMIUM and ROBBYEDROBBY EDWARDS, disputed his claims.<sup>433</sup> KEFKA stated: "Awesome show, great Judo,BJJ and some decent wrestling, terrible striking though."<sup>434</sup> KGW complimented their technical competence: "These women know how to finish fights."<sup>435</sup> None of the postings concerned, let alone applauded, WMMA fighters appealing to the male gaze or maintaining female fragility.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Dragonassault, July 29, 2012 (9:18am) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 2 results recap from last night for 'McMann vs Baszler' in Kansas City, Kansas."

<sup>430</sup> ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/29/3199513/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-results>.

<sup>431</sup> D.E.O., July 29, 2012 (8:09am), Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results."

<sup>432</sup> Cory Braiterman, July 29, 2012 (2:57pm), Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results."

<sup>433</sup> ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/29/3199513/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-results>.

<sup>434</sup> Kefka, July 29, 2012 (9:52am), Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results."

<sup>435</sup> KGW, July 29, 2012 (3:10pm), Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results."

<sup>436</sup> ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 2: Shayna Baszler Vs. Sara McMann Results," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/29/3199513/invicta-fc-2-shayna-baszler-vs-sara-mcmann-results>.

Following David Castillo's praising yet complicit masculine article, fans contributed twenty-one comments. The vast majority praised not only **Invicta** but WMMA itself.<sup>437</sup> JAMES KIMBELL wrote: "If you go back even a few months you'll see "I could never watch women fight" posted all the time. And now it's rare. I don't know if those people are changing their minds or just getting quieter, but it's still a change."<sup>438</sup> ROB\_22 revealed: "I was one of them ill admit it and yes I changed my mind."<sup>439</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG noted: "I still see that (anti-WMMA stances), but mainly on other MMA websites. However, InvictaFC and Rousey have really changed many MMA fans' perceptions of Womens MMA. There are MMA fans that have mentalities such as that they aren't that interested in Womens MMA, but they'll watch Ronda Rousey fight . . . Not everyone will get converted, but I am seeing much more acceptance of Womens MMA now."<sup>440</sup> This lengthy comment accurately summarized the various attitudes that different segments of MMA fandom held towards the presence of women as competitors. He also noted that *Bloody Elbow* readers are generally more accepting than other websites and inadvertently pointed out the difference in accepting **Invicta** vs. accepting women into the **UFC**.

*MMA Fighting's* Baszler-McMann recap article had ten comments attached.<sup>441</sup> Six featured a debate between poster RUGERK91 and others about whether Julia Budd was on steroids, stating: "Sorry that's not natural. I have been around high level woman athletes since

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<sup>437</sup> David Castillo, "Why Invicta FC And Female Mixed Martial Arts Will Endure," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 31, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/31/3207259/invicta-fc-female-mixed-martial-arts-endure>.

<sup>438</sup> James Kimbell, July 31, 2012 (8:13pm) Comment on Castillo, "Why Invicta FC And Female Mixed Martial Arts Will Endure."

<sup>439</sup> Rob\_22, July 31, 2012 (8:30pm) Comment on Castillo, "Why Invicta FC And Female Mixed Martial Arts Will Endure."

<sup>440</sup> Christopher Muldong, July 31, 2012 (9:36pm) Comment on Castillo, "Why Invicta FC And Female Mixed Martial Arts Will Endure." Parentheses mine.

<sup>441</sup> Ben Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event," *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/7/29/3199522/invicta-fc-2-results-sara-mcmann-outpoints-shayna-baszler-in-main>.

1970's and NEVER once saw a woman look like her that wasn't JUICING."<sup>442</sup> This attitude goes back to female fragility, suggesting that there is somehow a specific musculature limit that women as a gender are biologically able to obtain without steroids. He briefly strays into using VMA Trait 1 and Toxic Trait 2. Ironically, he then opined: "Excellent main event where both fighters gave it their all and looked great doing it. They both should be very proud of their skills and showing the world women's MMA belongs with main stream MMA."<sup>443</sup> These conflicting statements suggest that while he supports WMMA competitors having technical competence, they still have to show female fragility regarding their musculature. USED2WRESTLE commented: "I'm a fan of MMA, women's MMA, especially free MMA. I was looking forward to the card but gave up after a few of the fights. Simply put, the matches weren't competitive."<sup>444</sup> He complained that most of the finishes were submissions or decisions instead of knockouts, prompting him to say: "It was pretty sad how these overmatched opponents were giving up their back so easily." He specifically stated they lacked technical competence, despite admitting he only watched three main card fights, barely one-third of the broadcast.<sup>445</sup> GUTZMMA countered: "The main event was also awesome I can't remember the last time the best wrestler in wmma or men's mma spent a full fight striking with a striker. sara has balls."<sup>446</sup> He praised McMann's intestinal fortitude, contrasting the images of feminine sociability and fragility.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Rugerk91, July 29, 2012 (2:18am) Comment on Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event."

<sup>443</sup> Rugerk91, July 29, 2012 (2:13am) Comment on Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event."

<sup>444</sup> Ben Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/7/29/3199522/invicta-fc-2-results-sara-mcmann-outpoints-shayna-baszler-in-main>.

<sup>445</sup> Used2wrestle, July 29, 2012 (11:35am) Comment on Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event."

<sup>446</sup> Gutzmma, July 29, 2012 (3:42pm) Comment on Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event."

<sup>447</sup> Rugerk91, July 29, 2012 (3:42pm) Comment on Fowlkes, "Invicta FC 2 Results: Sara McMann Outpoints Shayna Baszler in Main Event."

*MMA Rising* published excerpts from dual interviews that Rob Sargent conducted with Baszler and McMann. Sargent framed the interviews as discourses with MMA fighters, not specifically female fighters. He quoted Baszler, recounting: “Honestly, this was the best I’ve ever felt . . . and I thought that I won . . . but that’s what happens when you leave it in the hands of the judges . . . The judges were watching from a different perspective than I was . . . but I think this [fight] right here was your title match. So I’m just glad we put on a good fight, and if I’m going to lose, I guess that’s a good fight to lose.”<sup>448</sup>

#### **Section 4: Dana White Impressed by Ronda Rousey**

##### **August 2012- September 2012**

The final period examined in this chapter is the aftermath of Rousey successfully defending her **Strikeforce** Women’s Bantamweight Championship against Sarah Kaufman on August 18, 2012. Rousey-Kaufman drew some 529,000 fans during the broadcast as the main event of that card.<sup>449</sup> This achievement and several other factors Ronda Rousey brought to the table had Dana White state that he was “warming up” to WMMA. *MMA Junkie* directly quoted White as saying: “I don’t think I’ve been too shy about what I think about Ronda Rousey . . . she just looked impressive, and not only did she look impressive on Saturday night, her numbers killed it on Showtime, too. Ronda Rousey is a star.”<sup>450</sup> The *MMA Mania* article, penned by Jesse Holland, elaborated further: “White even went so far as to say he could envision a Ronda Rousey

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<sup>448</sup> Rob Sargent, “McMann, Baszler Discuss Invicta FC 2 Fight Of The Night,” MMArising.com, July 29, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/07/29/mcman-baszler-discuss-invicta-fc-2-fight-of-the-night/>.

<sup>449</sup> “Strikeforce: Rousey Vs. Kaufman,” Tapology.com, Accessed July 27, 2021. <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/events/14280-strikeforce-rousey-vs-kaufman>.

<sup>450</sup> John Morgan, “UFC President Dana White: 'I am warming up to women's MMA'” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, August 22, 2012. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2012/08/ufc-president-dana-white-i-am-warming-up-to-womens-mma>.

vs. Cris Cyborg fight as a future main or co-main event in the UFC.”<sup>451</sup> Holland also opined: “Women's MMA, while prevalent overseas in Japan and Australia, is limited to mostly regional promotions in the United States, with the occasional superfight televised under the Strikeforce banner when one or more of its top stars, like Rousey, are available. But the recent success of Invicta Fighting Championship could help tip the scales once and for all. Stay tuned.”<sup>452</sup>

Readers contributed 134 comments underneath Holland’s article. WISETOAD surmised: “If midget fighting could make dana money he’d probably ‘warm up’ to the idea as well.”<sup>453</sup> He calls WMMA a novelty act, not actual fighting, and questions their technical competence. He delves into aspects of VMA Traits 1 and 4. RRRENAN projected his sexual desire, writing: “Have them all ointed with olive oil and then we’re talking,” which consisted of Toxic Traits 1 as well as VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>454</sup> LETTER19 espoused: “I’ve never been interested in women's mma. Whether its welcomed in the ufc or not.”<sup>455</sup> Several posts infer that Rousey was having sex with White and **Strikeforce** president Scott Coker as an enticement to put her fights on the card.<sup>456</sup> WISETOAD graphically detailed: “Guaranteed shes taken coker and uncle dana at the same time. The question is, was it 2 in the pink or a 1-1 split.”<sup>457</sup> This statement heavily shifted from hegemonic to toxic masculinity, featuring Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 through 4.

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<sup>451</sup> Jesse Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3259943/strikeforce-ratings-showtime-dana-white-warming-up-womens-mma>.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Wisetoad, August 22, 2012 (10:03am), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

<sup>454</sup> RRRenan, August 22, 2012 (10:59am), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

<sup>455</sup> Letter19, August 22, 2012 (10:20am), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

<sup>456</sup> Jesse Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3259943/strikeforce-ratings-showtime-dana-white-warming-up-womens-mma>.

<sup>457</sup> Wisetoad, August 22, 2012 (10:07am), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

There was only one positive post about WMMA, FYASKO87 exclaiming:

Who the fuck cares if its women or men. They are athletes . . . If youve never trained before I could see you talking shit about women fights being garbage but any real fight fan could care less about the gender. The shit you are saying now sounds like the shit boxing fans say about mma and its the same shit a lot of people were talking about 145 & 135 pound fighters right before ufc absorbed them. wmma is growing and soon it will be undeniably viable for a promoter like Dana white and the ufc to market to its fan base. Stop all the hate and enjoy. Everyone loves Anderson for his ability to destroy opponents but not rousey?<sup>458</sup>

HEYHEYHEY retorted: “Fuck no. Let them walk around an hold the round cards. Im not buying any ppv that has a female bout on the main card. If anyone wants to see this shit then their fucking retarded.”<sup>459</sup> He emphasized the same opinion many of the posters above him expressed, that WMMA is athletically inferior to the male version and that a woman’s only career in the sport is to stand off to the side and look attractive. In doing so, HEYHEYHEY displayed the first traits of both toxic masculinity and VMAs.

A month later, Brent Brookhouse posted a counterpart article to *Bloody Elbow*. Brookhouse quoted Dana White's interview with *MMA Fighting*, where the UFC president stated: “She's a (expletive) unique individual. She's like a Diaz brother . . . Inside like a (expletive) dude trapped in this beautiful body. The reason I got interested in women's MMA is because of her ... everyone is like it's cause she's good-looking . . . Gina Carano is good-looking too. She's very pretty. There's (expletive) something different about Ronda Rousey.”<sup>460</sup>

Brookhouse elaborated:

Dana did go on to explain that he isn't sure that they can bring Ronda to the UFC because it would significantly disturb the way that women's MMA is structured. Dana's reasoning is

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<sup>458</sup> Fyasko87, August 22, 2012 (11:58am), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

<sup>459</sup> Heyheyhey, August 22, 2012 (12:44pm), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

<sup>460</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body',” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, September 17, 2012.

<https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/9/17/3347658/dana-white-ronda-rousey-in-ufc-strikeforce>.

basically that the talent has very limited ways to move up in the sport and it would "shut down the path" for other women to get to Ronda. And I do think there is a little bit of merit to that. Anyone who says that women's MMA doesn't have problems with depth is lying. I've watched the Invicta shows, they put out a good product and there are some good fighters. But the gulf between the very good fighters and the very mediocre is huge and there just isn't the depth yet to really flesh out divisions that are strong enough if you pull the talent across Invicta, Strikeforce and the UFC.<sup>461</sup>

White focused on a merger between Rousey's emphasized feminine physical appearance and her almost hegemonic masculine demeanor, which he compared to the infamous trash-talking Diaz brothers. Both White and Brookhouse seemingly refrained from emphasized feminine promotion when they concluded that the former could not bring Rousey to the UFC without disrupting the then-current structure of WMMA, which allegedly had "problems with depth."<sup>462</sup> However, the latter doubted most of WMMA's fighters' technical competence, calling them "very mediocre."<sup>463</sup>

There were 114 comments posted to the article, many of which focused on spreading the rumor or making unsubstantiated sexist jokes about White sleeping with Rousey.<sup>464</sup>

WARREN305 espoused: "Hes nailing her, Im sure of it."<sup>465</sup> FLOJO opined: "To me it (their alleged sexual relationship) was apparent after she flustered up in that vlog of his . . . She started playing with her hair, and was just reverted to the 'im getting plowed by this man and now I gotta act right in front of all these people' mode."<sup>466</sup> He was basing this conclusion from her alleged emphasized feminine body language, as women are supposed to be submissive and fragile to men during sex. Both commenters engaged in Toxic Trait 1 in tandem with VMA

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> Warren305, September 17, 2012 (3:39pm) Comment on Brookhouse, "Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'."

<sup>466</sup> FLOJO, September 17, 2012 (7:12pm) Comment on Brookhouse, "Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'." Parentheses mine.

Traits 2 and 4. DANKNABBOT disagreed, countering: “I think that the excessive cussing and creepy public misogyny . . . will one day result in a fall from grace (for White).”<sup>467</sup> Unlike *MMA Mania*, plenty of comments also talked about the depth of WMMA in a positive fashion.<sup>468</sup>

Based on Brookhouse’s assertions of the lack of WMMA depth, ZACHARY KATER asked: “I wonder if Zuffa would ever look to purchase Invicta if it continued its success.”<sup>469</sup> HEDONISMBOT replied: “Shannon Knapp would probably be thrilled if that happened. She seems to honestly care more about getting women’s MMA off the ground than being rich and famous. Also, she’d probably end up as matchmaker anyway.”<sup>470</sup> EMPTY THOUGHTS echoed: “I think you are right. Every time I’ve seen her interviewed she just seems to care more about getting the spotlight on WMMA than anything else. That’s a pretty cool quality for a promoter.”<sup>471</sup> SPORTSWAMICON openly questioned both White and Brookhouse’s refusal to move women to the **UFC**, exclaiming:

Guess the question then to Dana, Brent Brookhouse and other MMA writers and promoters that fans and fighters have is HOW DO YOU BUILD WOMEN’S MMA? For all the bluster Dana has thrown at boxing, he acts like some of these promoters in boxing whom don’t try to build the damn sport up . . . Under Dana’s reasoning, the UFC then should kill off Heavyweight, 205 and 185 as all three divisions have the same problem that women’s 135 has in lack of depth and that the elite are vastly better than the next level. If the UFC and Bellator want to get to the next level then they have to sport paying fighter more money and go out and recruit better athletes to get better women’s MMA fighters.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> DankNabbot, September 17, 2012 (5:17pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>468</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body',” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, September 17, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/9/17/3347658/dana-white-ronda-rousey-in-ufc-strikeforce>.

<sup>469</sup> Zachary Kater, September 17, 2012 (3:13pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'.”

<sup>470</sup> Hedonismbot, September 17, 2012 (3:19pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'.”

<sup>471</sup> Empty Thoughts, September 17, 2012 (3:26pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'.”

<sup>472</sup> Sportswamicon, September 17, 2012 (4:35pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'.”



WONDERFULSPAM countered: “That’s a terrible comparison. W-135 not only suffers from lack of depth in terms of quality, it also suffers from lack of depth in terms of name recognition. To answer your question: no matter what anyone does or doesn’t do, it’s going to take time. It’s only just now that it’s become somewhat feasible to be a WMMA fighter . . . so it’ll be years before the divisions are fleshed out. Let Invicta build a handful of sustainable divisions and then we can revitsit the subject in a few years.”<sup>473</sup> While WONDERFULSPAM was not promoting emphasized femininity, he was absolving the **UFC** of any responsibility towards building up these divisions. SPORTSWAMICON responded:” I agree it will take time, but for women’s MMA to grow they need the UFC and Bellator to invest time and money into it. The problem I have with Dana and Bellator is they sort of have this attitude of ‘oh well it looks like we need to work at it... screw it’ and that isn’t how you build a sport.”<sup>474</sup> This entire back and forth is an antithesis to both hegemonic/toxic masculinity and emphasized femininity as both participants agree that a fully fleshed out set of WMMA weight classes will be a reality, they just disagreed on the best route to get there. Neither invoked the male gaze, sociability over technical competence, or female fragility in their arguments.

*MMA Fighting’s* counterpart, which contained a Dana White interview, was penned by Andy Samuelson. White was quoted: “‘There’s Invicta where they can fight and train. But that’s only one (expletive) show out there other than Strikeforce where women can work their way up. I just fear bringing Rhonda to the UFC just shuts down the path for other talent to get to Ronda. It’s tough, but I’m telling you right now I think she’s one of the pound-for-pound best in the

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<sup>473</sup> Wonderfulspam, September 17, 2012 (4:41pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey’s Appeal: ‘She’s Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body’.”

<sup>474</sup> Sportswamicon, September 17, 2012 (9:03pm) Comment on Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey’s Appeal: ‘She’s Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body’.”

world. She's ripping apart all the best girls in the world.”<sup>475</sup> The twenty-seven comments posted to the article showed entrenchment in emphasized feminine norms. At least five posts discussed whether Rousey and White slept together,<sup>476</sup> containing the same three traits (Toxic 1, VMA 2, and 4) as earlier comments. POO\_GHOST espoused: “I hope she (Rousey) gets ktfo (knocked the fuck out) in her next fight. I really don’t understand how fighting poor competition, while only ever being able to grapple and only using one move gets you to be one of the biggest stars in mma. Don’t tell me it is only cause of her looks either, cause she is pretty-man-ugly compares to a lot of other fighters.”<sup>477</sup> This exclamation contained a plethora of harmful masculinity, featuring Toxic Trait 3 in addition to VMA Traits 1 and an inverse of 2. He questioned Rousey’s technical competence and doubted her ability to titillate his masculine desire. BEARCAT7400 similarly declared Rousey’s rival, Miesha Tate, “ugly.”<sup>478</sup> To this, FORWHO responded: “Wow . . . You’re fucking gay.”<sup>479</sup> BEARCAT7400 did not find Miesha Tate attractive, a woman FORWHO found titillating. As such, the latter implied that the former was homosexual and a subordinate masculinity, utilizing Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 4.

TBEAST showed his disdain for the women’s division, writing: “This hype you guys give her (Rousey) is effing embarrassing. WMMA is ridiculous. There was more talent on the crappiest season of tuf than in the entirety of WMMA. Ronda beat 2 of the “best in the world” at 35 the same way she was beating horrible cans at 45. Thats how good wmma is. Since when can

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<sup>475</sup> Andy Samuelson, “Dana White: Ronda Rousey Will Be a 'Rock Star',” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, September 17, 2012. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2012/9/17/3345986/dana-white-says-ronda-rousey-a-rock-star>.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Poo\_Ghost, September 17, 2012 (12:29pm) Comment on Samuelson, “Dana White: Ronda Rousey Will Be a 'Rock Star'.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>478</sup> Bearcat7400, September 18, 2012 (1:13pm) Comment on Samuelson, “Dana White: Ronda Rousey Will Be a 'Rock Star'.”

<sup>479</sup> Fourwho, September 19, 2012 (3:57am) Comment on Samuelson, “Dana White: Ronda Rousey Will Be a 'Rock Star'.”

no one defend an armbar? This isn't 1996."<sup>480</sup> TBEAST claimed female fighters could not be good because of gender, engaging in VMA Traits 1 and 4. He further shows the divide between the MMA media and fans across all the websites examined and how **Invicta** was covered and discussed differently than Ronda Rousey.

The online MMA news media collective largely ignored engaging in hegemonic masculine/emphasized feminine discourse surrounding **Invicta** and Ronda Rousey, let alone perpetrating toxic masculine practices or performing VMAs. *Sherdog* and *MMA Rising* staff writers covered **Invicta** cards like they would **Strikeforce** or the **UFC**. Brian Hemminger, *MMA Mania*'s primary writer on **Invicta**, always acknowledged the technical competence abundant within WMMA and chastised readers claiming otherwise. He occasionally contributed to the male gaze atmosphere but never came close to shifting from hegemonic to toxic masculinity. *Bloody Elbow* writer Brent Brookhouse sometimes chastised female fighters' seeming inability to make weight and frequently dismissed the technical competence of WMMA, minus Rousey. However, he never shifted from hegemonic to toxic behavior. Mookie Alexander did go on a toxic masculine rant, but he was clearly in the minority amongst his *Bloody Elbow* colleagues. *MMA Fighting* gave barebones coverage to **Invicta** and Rousey, providing little available article space for their writers to engage in hegemonic or toxic masculine activities.

Regarding Ronda Rousey, *MMA Fighting* readers frequently participated in toxic masculine behaviors surrounding multiple elements of emphasized feminine norms. The article posted after Rousey defeated Miesha Tate was balanced evenly between commenters not engaging in hegemonic/toxic masculine activities, those utilizing hegemonic, and those shifting

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<sup>480</sup> Tbeast, September 17, 2012 (3:04pm) Comment on Samuelson, "Dana White: Ronda Rousey Will Be a 'Rock Star'." Parentheses mine.

to toxic. However, after “Rowdy” defeated Sarah Kaufman, their fanbase overwhelmingly wrote comments containing toxic masculine and VMA traits. Concerning **Invicta FC 2**, *MMA Fighting* contributors were more split on WMMA acceptance, with just as many fans supporting the company’s sophomore event as there were making hegemonic/toxic statements against individual fighters or the sport itself. In contrast, *Bloody Elbow* readers were one-sided regarding their hegemonic/toxic masculine usage in discussing Rousey and **Invicta**. They sometimes questioned fighter technical competence, and there were a handful of occasions where they expressed toxic and VMA traits. However, most *Bloody Elbow* chat participants focused on being positive towards Invicta and combating the few who insisted on sexualizing fighters, occurring throughout the live streams for both cards. The opposite was true for the denizens of *MMA Mania* comment sections.

As far as the *MMA Mania* readership was concerned, whether it was **Invicta** or Ronda Rousey, they heavily utilized toxic masculine and VMA tactics, primarily when discussing their respective male gaze opinions of WMMA fighters. *MMA Mania* comment sections contained a saturated male gaze atmosphere, as posters engaged in Toxic Traits 1 and 2. In the weigh-in coverage for both **Invicta** cards, their fanbase portrayed women (fighters, ring girls, and promoters) involved in one of two ways. The first was to overly sexualize the women, with readers detailing which sex acts they wanted to perform or who they would sleep with. The second was to do the opposite, loudly proclaiming which women they did not find physically attractive, often mocking fighters’ perceived masculinity or sexual orientation. The latter technique was most prominent when discussing Sarah D’Alelio vs. Vanessa Porto, two openly

lesbian competitors.<sup>481</sup> It was not enough for *MMA Mania* readers to state they were not attracted to Fighter X; they invoked Toxic Trait 2 ad nauseam by accusing Fighter X of secretly being a man or implying she was lesbian for being too masculine.

These tactics continued with similar comments during both **Invicta** cards, again focusing on the male gaze, albeit with other discussion topics in the live stream threads. Some *MMA Mania* readers talked about the fighting acumen and technical competence the fighters put on display, but they were a definite minority within the site's fanbase. *MMA Mania* posts mirrored *The Underground* thread and the YouTube comment section surrounding **Invicta FC 2**. The former saw users heavily engage in sexualizing fighters, while the latter saw posters preoccupied with mocking female masculinity and portraying lesbianism as unnatural. While *MMA Mania's* writing staff went above and beyond to cover **Invicta FC 1** and **2** in-depth, their readers conversed about their respective male desires to a toxic masculine degree. This same dynamic was in play for how the *Mania* writers and fans conducted discourse surrounding Ronda Rousey.

In a similar discourse to that surrounding **Invicta**, *MMA Mania* readers were outright hostile towards not just Ronda Rousey but the mere idea of women possibly joining the **UFC**. In the two articles examined for this study, the site's fans visually objectified or denigrated Rousey in one of three ways. Rousey was either seen through Toxic Trait 1, her physical appearance praised while fans discussed certain sex acts they wished they could engage in with her, or through Toxic Trait 2, the same appearance portrayed as too masculine. In a few instances, posters who found Rousey unattractive would question the heterosexuality of those fans who did. Finally, readers sexualized her through unsubstantiated rumors of her sleeping with Dana White,

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<sup>481</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198443/invicta-fc-2-weigh-in-photos-gallery-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>

some describing the imagined encounters in graphic detail. In addition, many commenters openly expressed their displeasure at women, possibly making it into the “heterosexual, homosocial” atmosphere of the **UFC**. Most of this dialogue remained in the hegemonic realm of emphasized feminine promotion, some criticizing what they viewed as the lack of WMMA talent depth, others claiming female fragility. Albeit some discourse was toxic, with posters comparing WMMA to “midget fighting”<sup>482</sup> and calling WMMA fans “retarded,” fitting closely alongside their dialogue surrounding **Invicta**.<sup>483</sup>

Concerning the coverage both topics received as a whole, there was one primary difference between how the various groups discussed **Invicta** and Ronda Rousey. The glimpse through the mainstream media window of Rousey’s rapid rise and how she might open the doors for WMMA appearing in the **UFC** made it clear that online fans were “protective” of this masculine preserve. If women joined the **UFC**, it threatened the sanctity of all-male cards at the sport’s highest level. Conversely, while **Invicta** had more than its fair share of detractors, most negative attention treated the company as something not worth their time but not something that hindered their enjoyment of MMA in general. An excellent example of this is when PDL compared **Invicta** to regional-level male fight cards. He criticized the card’s talent depth but was ambivalent about the promotion’s existence. **Invicta** could thrive or fail on its own, posing no threat to the casual male fan’s enjoyment of the **UFC**. Rousey was just such a threat.

In the subsequent chapter, the divisions between the staff writers at the various Vox Media outlets, readerships of said outlets, and forum users only grew and widened as 2012 ended

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<sup>482</sup> Wisetoad, August 22, 2012 (10:03am), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

<sup>483</sup> Heyheyhey, August 22, 2012 (12:44pm), Comment on Holland, “Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA.”

and 2013 began with the arrival of WMMA in the **UFC**. *MMA Mania*'s fanbase's vigilant use of the toxic male gaze and questioning WMMA's talent depth increased concerning **Invicta** and a likely UFC women's division. Readers at *Bloody Elbow* welcomed more **Invicta** events with open arms, rarely expressing toxic masculine and VMA traits. Most importantly, how the media and their fans utilized hegemonic/toxic masculine tactics when discussing emphasized femininity in **Invicta**, when compared to how they did so regarding Ronda Rousey and the **UFC**, came further into focus.

## Chapter 6

### “The Phoenix, the Queen, and the Octagon”: October 2012-January 2013, Invicta FC and Women Join the UFC

“Invicta is using what they have very smartly and I think will continue to grow. And yes I’m crushing pretty hard on (Jessica) Penne.”- *Bloody Elbow* Staff Writer T.P. Grant<sup>1</sup>

#### Section 1: Invicta FC 3

##### August 2012- October 2012

After **Invicta FC 2** drew praise from the MMA news media, Shannon Knapp quickly announced its next event. On August 15, 2012, **Invicta** submitted a press release announcing its third fight card would occur on October 6.<sup>2</sup> The promotion marketed the event around an inaugural atomweight title fight between Jessica Penne and Naho Sugiyama, along with the co-main event of Shayna Baszler vs. Sarah D’Alelio.<sup>3</sup> The card received visible promotion, coverage, and feedback from the MMA media outlets and their respective readerships. As shown below, the different MMA online news sources, primarily the three Vox Media sites, *Sherdog*, *MMA Rising*, and one specific article from *MMA Junkie*, discussed various opinions regarding WMMA fighters. On **Invicta FC 3**, those opinions either promoted or decried emphasized feminine adherence via hegemonic/toxic masculine narratives.

*MMA Mania* maintained the same reporting strategy for discussing **Invicta FC 3** they utilized with the company’s prior two events, publishing seventeen articles. Brian Hemminger

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<sup>1</sup> T.P. Grant, October 7, 2012 (12:58pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>2</sup> Press Release, “Invicta FC 3: ‘Penne vs Sugiyama’ announced for Oct. 6 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 15, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/15/3245105/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama-oct-6-kansas-city>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Sargent, “Shayna Baszler Faces Sarah D’Alelio In Invicta FC 3 Co-Feature,” MMArising.com, August 15, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2012/08/15/shayna-baszler-faces-sarah-dalelio-in-invicta-fc-3-co-feature/>.



conducted seven fighter interviews with Jessica Penne, Sarah D’Alelio, Michelle Waterson, Tara LaRosa, Tecia Torres, Jessamyn Duke, and Stephanie Frausto, respectively. He also interviewed **Invicta** owner Shannon Knapp while composing the weigh-in article and the preview/predictions write-up. Jesse Holland announced that the show would stream for free online. Other articles, including one promoting the event, were copied-and-pasted press releases.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned, *MMA Mania* republished **Invicta**’s press release on August 15, announcing both the main card and prelim bouts. The press release read: “The charismatic, 32-year-old Baszler helped create an electric atmosphere at Memorial Hall on July 28 by engaging McMann in an all-out war . . . A fearsome grappler, Baszler has earned the respect of the fight world by earning 13 of her 14 victories with submissions.”<sup>5</sup> Terms like “all-out war,” “fearsome grappler,” and “charismatic” are not emphasized feminine descriptions.<sup>6</sup>

Jesse Holland debuted the preview poster for **Invicta FC 3**, ironically not writing one word about the advertisement in question. Instead, Holland proclaimed: “Who’s the baddest atomweight of them all? We’re about to find out when Naho Sugiyama puts her undefeated record on the line against the dangerous Jessica Penne in the Invicta Fighting Championships 3 105-pound main event . . . This is women’s mixed martial arts (MMA), kid, don’t act like you didn’t know.”<sup>7</sup> First, “don’t act like you didn’t know” contained a hyperlink to an article in which

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<sup>4</sup>“Search results for Invicta,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed October 3, 2021 <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=127&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=124&q=invicta>.

<sup>5</sup> Press Release, “Invicta FC 3: ‘Penne vs Sugiyama’ announced for Oct. 6 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 15, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/15/3245105/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama-oct-6-kansas-city>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Holland, “Invicta FC 3 poster pic for ‘Penne vs Sugiyama’ on Oct. 6 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3260360/invicta-fc-3-poster-pic-penne-vs-sugiyama-oct-6-kansas-city>.

Dana White espoused his Ronda Rousey fandom.<sup>8</sup> Second, that last line could be read as enthusiasm for WMMA or sarcastic disdain. Given that the rest of the article contained one-sentence previews for other main card fights, it is reasonable to assume that Holland somewhat respected WMMA.<sup>9</sup>

Hemminger wrote the card's preview and prediction article. For the co-main event, he posited: "Shayna Bazler was a staple of women's MMA about five years ago and she became highly regarded for her incredible submission skills . . . Bazler returned from a long hiatus to headline the last Invicta show against undefeated Olympian Sara McMann . . . losing an extremely close decision . . . there may be no female in MMA right now with more finesse and flair."<sup>10</sup> Hemminger gave similar praise to D'Alelio. Outside of misspelling Baszler's name repeatedly, he focused intently on both women's fighting prowess and technical competence, giving no attention to their physical appearance.<sup>11</sup> Considering that many *MMA Mania* commenters did the opposite, showing their disdain towards D'Alelio at **Invicta FC 2**,<sup>12</sup> Hemminger's avoidance of doing the same revealed that he rarely featured objectifying language in his articles.<sup>13</sup> However, his interviews showcased his willingness to utilize such language in the comment sections.

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<sup>8</sup> Jesse Holland, "Record Strikeforce ratings help Dana White 'warm up' to the idea of women's MMA," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3259943/strikeforce-ratings-showtime-dana-white-warming-up-womens-mma>.

<sup>9</sup> Jesse Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 22, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/22/3260360/invicta-fc-3-poster-pic-penne-vs-sugiyama-oct-6-kansas-city>.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 preview and predictions for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/5/3460176/invicta-fc-3-preview-and-predictions-for-penne-vs-sugiyama-on-oct-6>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Wisetoad, July 28, 2012, (2:13pm) Comment on Mrosko, "Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'."

<sup>13</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 preview and predictions for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/5/3460176/invicta-fc-3-preview-and-predictions-for-penne-vs-sugiyama-on-oct-6>.

Hemminger also conducted a few interviews for **Invicta FC 3**, eight in total. The two relevant to the study he published on the day of the card; the first with Shannon Knapp and the second with Sarah D'Alelio.<sup>14</sup> Hemminger previewed the conversation with the **Invicta** founder, opining: “With her (Knapp) easy-going nature and infectious laugh, it's hard not to like and cheer for her as she strives to lead her upstart all-female promotion . . . into the spotlight”<sup>15</sup> This touches emphasized femininity’s social aspect, with Knapp’s “easy-going” persona. Dana White exudes the opposite of “easy-going” and has many detractors. However, his likability does not factor into a fan’s willingness to watch the **UFC**. This introduction suggested that fans should support **Invicta** because Knapp expressed a sociable demeanor, abiding to emphasized femininity. The interview began with the two discussing the cage canvas’s poor quality for **Invicta**’s first two shows, with Knapp personally overseeing the installation for the third event. After explaining this, she asked Hemminger: “Does this sound like a real ‘girl thing’ that I'm getting worked up about this?” The writer replied: “No, it sounds like the typical promoter perfectionist.”<sup>16</sup> The female promoter asked her male interviewer if she was acting too much like a woman as if being a woman was something to apologize for. Knapp made another emphasized feminine comment when asked by Hemminger: “Have you had to scale down the belts (championship/title belts) to make them a bit smaller? 105 pounds is pretty tiny compared to the heavyweights in the UFC.” She responded: “The best part of the belt is that it's very fitting. It matches a female. It's not some huge oversized belt . . . I think it's very appropriate for what

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<sup>14</sup> “Search results for invicta,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 3, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=124&q=invicta>.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. Parentheses mine. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3465056/trendsetter-invicta-fc-president-shannon-knapp-interview-exclusive>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

we're doing . . . for the female athlete.”<sup>17</sup> “Matches a female” in some respects echoes many commenters’ sentiments of how a woman’s body should titillate men’s desires. Knapp concluded the interview, however, with some emphasized feminine defiance, exclaiming: “I’m extremely confident in the female athletes. That’s what it is. Every time we’ve had an event they’ve come in prepared to battle and they never disappoint me.”<sup>18</sup> Here, the promoter talked up her fighters’ technical competence and commitment to MMA.

Hemminger began his interview with D’Alelio by stating: “Sarah D’Alelio definitely stands out in the crowd. Maybe it’s the tattoos, most likely, it’s the mohawk. You won’t find many of them on females, even the fighters . . . But it’s not her haircut that makes her special, it’s her skill.”<sup>19</sup> D’Alelio’s hairstyle was considered masculine, so much so “even the fighters” were reluctant to sport one. It does not adhere to female fragility. However, Hemminger never chastised her for this, spending the interview discussing “her skill.”<sup>20</sup> Outside of one question regarding her hairstyle, all his queries focused on topics such as: What is D’Alelio’s drive for competing at a high level; what does it mean to be fighting Baszler; comparing her year of inactivity in 2011 versus her year of three fights for **Invicta** in 2012; and her strategy against Baszler.<sup>21</sup> All of these touched upon D’Alelio’s technical competence, defying feminine norms.

Counterparts at *Bloody Elbow* primarily produced the same coverage for **Invicta FC 3** as they did for the prior show; however, they published fewer relevant articles, six in total. They conducted no fighter interviews, preview/predictions writeups, or weigh-in coverage. Bloody

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Phoenix Rising: Invicta FC co-headliner Sarah D’Alelio interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3465702/phoenix-rising-invicta-fc-co-headliner-sarah-dalelio-interview>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Elbow provided a single podcast interview with Shannon Knapp, two articles regarding line-up changes to the card, an article about female fighters' punching power, a follow-up grappling piece, and the original announcement of the event.<sup>22</sup> The announcing of **Invicta FC 3**, written by Ben Thapa, focused on only four of the thirteen scheduled bouts. None of the four fights had more than two sentences dedicated to them.<sup>23</sup> There was a two-question interview that Stephanie Haynes conducted with Shannon Knapp regarding the scheduling of Sarah Kaufman versus Kaitlin Young, featuring neither adherence to nor defiance of emphasized femininity.<sup>24</sup> The same is true for the article announcing Danielle West was replacing Elaina Maxwell to face Julia Budd.<sup>25</sup> The only two articles that featured in-depth WMMA coverage, let alone containing relevant analysis, were the punching<sup>26</sup> and grappling writeups offered by Ben Thapa.<sup>27</sup>

The striking entry, “Is Punching Like A Girl A Neuromuscular Obstacle - And If So, Is It Fixable?” is inherently problematic for a study like this and will not be examined. It delves into academic scientific discussion regarding throwing motion, equating that with a punching movement, Thapa's theories on neuromuscular obstacles, and his statistical analysis on

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<sup>22</sup> “Search for invicta,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 3, 2021. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=148&q=invicta> through <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=148&q=invicta>.

<sup>23</sup> Ben Thapa, “Invicta 3 Full Fight Card Announced: Penne vs. Sugiyama Atomweight Title Bout,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 15, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/8/15/3245289/invicta-3-full-fight-card-penne-vs-sugiyama-atomweight-title>.

<sup>24</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Interview Exclusive: Invicta FC Adds Sarah Kaufman To October 6 Card,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 27, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/8/27/3271671/invicta-fc-adds-sarah-kaufman-to-october-6-card>.

<sup>25</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Danielle West replaces injured Elaina Maxwell against Julia Budd,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/1/3438310/invicta-fc-3-danielle-west-replaces-injury-elaina-maxwell-julia-budd-mma-news>.

<sup>26</sup> Ben Thapa, “Is Punching Like A Girl A Neuromuscular Obstacle - And If So, Is It Fixable?,” Bloodyelbow.com, September 12, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/9/12/3319222/is-punching-like-a-girl-a-neuromuscular-obstacle-if-so-is-it-fixable>.

<sup>27</sup> Ben Thapa, “Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/5/3458854/invicta-judo-chop-jessica-penne-showcases-difference-women-grappling-carmouche>.

knockouts from **Invicta**'s first two shows. Thapa raised an interesting debate: why do men, on average, throw farther and faster than women; is this difference something that can be overcome by training and mental conditioning; or is it hardwired into our genetic structure?<sup>28</sup> The readers of *Bloody Elbow* responded, with 136 comments posted in reply.<sup>29</sup> However, since Thapa's article was scientifically inclined, it was nearly impossible for a historian to discern sociocultural relevance.

The grappling piece entitled: "Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling," on the other hand, provided Ben Thapa with the opportunity to praise women's technical competence with the submission arts, a fertile piece for academic analysis.<sup>30</sup> Thapa posited: "Girls will usually play sports differently than boys. This is almost always rooted in physical differences - upper body strength, muscle/weight ratios, bone structure and so on. But - and this is an important but - the amazing thing about humans and sports is that athletes of both genders are capable of incredible feats . . . Mixed martial arts is (or should be) no different in its distribution of fun moments across genders."<sup>31</sup> Here, Thapa is simultaneously defying and yet adhering to emphasized feminine norms. He argues that because the average physical differences between males and females are distinct, it does not preclude WMMA fighters from being as technically competent or entertaining as their male counterparts. However, via the title of his article, Thapa also implies that most of the amazing athletic feats in

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<sup>28</sup> Ben Thapa, "Is Punching Like A Girl A Neuromuscular Obstacle - And If So, Is It Fixable?," *Bloodyelbow.com*, September 12, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/9/12/3319222/is-punching-like-a-girl-a-neuromuscular-obstacle-if-so-is-it-fixable>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Ben Thapa, "Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/5/3458854/invicta-judo-chop-jessica-penne-showcases-difference-women-grappling-carmouche>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

WMMA come from submissions and grappling, the “feminine” fighting style.<sup>32</sup> Thapa then picks specific bouts from the first two **Invicta** cards to showcase this athleticism, beginning with Jessica Penna vs. Lisa Ellis.<sup>33</sup>

Thapa summarized: “Jessica Penne won her bout against Lisa Ellis . . . by winning the ground game with attacks built upon her tactical knowledge, unyielding spirit and unusual flexibility. Her insane flexibility gave her the edge . . . and the best moment to watch in the fight came when Penne decided to escape side control and go immediately on the attack. This is circus contortionist level stuff and the swiftness with which Penne moves into the crucifix is freakishly awesome.”<sup>34</sup> He specifies individual moments in the fight, breaking down the technical competence behind each of Penne’s movements. Thapa continued: “Penne is on the ground once more and dealing with Ellis threatening to drop on top of her in side control. She uses her arms to push Ellis up off her just enough to wedge the knee in and threaten an armbar on . . . Ellis. Perhaps a smoother entry was possible, but MMA . . . matches are usually much messier than practice.”<sup>35</sup> The Penne discussion consumed some five paragraphs, nearly half the article. Being a grappling practitioner himself, Thapa easily argues how good a ground technician Penne is. After analyzing three other fights in shorter detail, he concluded: “These girls can grapple real good. Show these athletes your appreciation and support the ladies near and dear to you in their pursuit of athletic dreams.”<sup>36</sup> Thapa was actively rallying support, not just for **Invicta** and its fighters, but for female athletes that a reader may know in their personal life. He openly stated

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<sup>32</sup> Hirose, “Men who Strike and Men who Submit,” 190-209.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Thapa, “Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012.

<https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/5/3458854/invicta-judo-chop-jessica-penne-showcases-difference-women-grappling-carmouche>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

that emphasized feminine traits like sociability and fragility are unimportant and that WMMA, and women's sports in general, deserve the same appreciation as their male counterparts.

*MMA Fighting* presented the barest coverage for **Invicta FC 3** out of the three Vox Media sites. The website conducted no interviews, weigh-in coverage, live event thread, or a preview and predictions article. All it published was announcing the event and two articles discussing Sarah Kaufman's addition to and later withdrawal from the card. Three pieces written in over two months between **Invicta FC 2** and **Invicta FC 3** showed a heavy lack of interest from *MMA Fighting* for the latter show.<sup>37</sup> This only leaves the announcement writeup, written by Dave Doyle, open for analysis. After writing five sentences to cover the "when and where" of the card and reveal the main event, Doyle took just four more to finish the article. Wrote Doyle: "Several other names familiar to fight fans will compete on Oct. 6, including veteran Shayna Baszler . . . She'll meet Sarah D'Alelio, who is coming off a submission win."<sup>38</sup> At first glance, no emphasized feminine or hegemonic masculine promotion is present. However, when you combine the blurb of an announcement with negligible coverage afterward, it becomes apparent that *MMA Fighting* staff did not care about **Invicta FC 3**, likely because it was WMMA without Ronda Rousey.

*Sherdog* published just five articles in the leadup to **Invicta FC 3**: One announcing the event,<sup>39</sup> three regarding the shuffle of fighters which resulted in Leslie Smith vs. Kaitlin

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<sup>37</sup> "Search for invicta," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 3, 2021 <https://www.mmafighting.com/search?order=date&page=205&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmafighting.com/search?order=date&page=203&q=invicta>.

<sup>38</sup> Dave Doyle, "Invicta FC Will Crown First Champion on Oct. 6 Fight Card," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, August 15, 2015. <https://www.mmafighting.com/news/2012/8/15/3244625/invicta-fc-will-crown-first-champion-on-oct-6-fight-card>.

<sup>39</sup> "Invicta FC 3- Penne vs. Sugiyama." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed October 3, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-3-Penne-vs-Sugiyama-23857>.



Young/Cat Zingano vs. Raquel Pennington,<sup>40</sup> and one about **Invicta** signing a deal to help Indian company **Super Fight League** introduce and develop WMMA in the Asian country.<sup>41</sup> Like *MMA Fighting* and *Bloody Elbow*, *Sherdog*'s interest in **Invicta FC 3** was superficial. The fight card announcement article by Mike Whitman simply listed the main bouts. Whitman quickly summarized: "Invicta FC 3 takes place Oct. 6 at Memorial Hall in Kansas City, Kan., and will also see Barb Honchak, Tara LaRosa, Leslie Smith, Julia Budd and Michelle Waterson square off with Aisling Daly, Vanessa Porto, Cat Zingano, Elaina Maxwell and Lacey Schuckman, respectively."<sup>42</sup> The Cat Zingano/Raquel Pennington article gave a detailed summary of both fighters' careers, along with how specific injuries led to this bout.<sup>43</sup> However, most of the card, especially Baszler versus D'Alelio, received minimal coverage. *Sherdog* featured no weigh-in article, predictions analysis, or fighter interviews.<sup>44</sup> The sparse coverage contained no emphasized feminine promotion in and of itself. *Sherdog* catered to their male fanbase's general disinterest in WMMA, except when Ronda Rousey was involved.

*MMA Rising*, again, was the most thorough media source for **Invicta FC 3**. When the card was announced, Rob Sargent wrote fourteen individual articles, previewing every fight on the bill.<sup>45</sup> For Baszler's bout against D'Alelio, he stated: "Baszler . . . is one of the most talented grapplers in the sport today and all but one of her 14 career wins have come by way of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Mike Whitman, "INVICTA FC 3 GETS JESSICA PENNE-NAHO SUGIYAMA TITLE BOUT, SHAYNA BASZLER-SARAH D'ALELIO CO-MAIN," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, August 15, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Invicta-FC-3-Gets-Jessica-PenneNaho-Sugiyama-Title-Bout-Shayna-BaszlerSarah-DAlelio-CoMain-44931>.

<sup>43</sup> Mike Whitman, "UNBEATEN CAT ZINGANO REJOINS INVICTA FC 3 BILL, FACES RAQUEL PENNINGTON ON OCT. 6," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, September 26, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> "Invicta FC 3- Penne vs. Sugiyama." *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, accessed October 3, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-3-Penne-vs-Sugiyama-23857>.

<sup>45</sup> "Search for invicta," *MMArising.com*, accessed October 3, 2021. <https://www.mmarising.com/page/38/?s=Invicta> through <https://www.mmarising.com/page/36/?s=Invicta>.

submission. The catch wrestler . . . brought a four-fight winning streak into her Invicta FC debut . . . and faced McMann in the night’s main event. Baszler showcased some impressive counterstriking throughout the fight and attempted submissions on the ground, but all three judges ultimately favored McMann’s aggression and awarded the Olympian the win . . . she may earn a title rematch against McMann if she can get past D’Alelio.”<sup>46</sup> Sargent again praised Baszler’s technical competence as a fighter, even dealing with how she fared in her last bout. He never mentioned Baszler’s physical appearance, emphasized feminine qualities, or her love life.

Readers only wrote three comments to the *MMA Mania Invicta FC 3* announcement article.<sup>47</sup> Staff writer Brian Hemminger opined: “This event, talent-wise, is the best one Invicta has put on yet. I can’t wait!”<sup>48</sup> CHROMIUM speculated that if the **UFC** bought **Invicta**, they could sustain five weight class divisions for the all-female promotion.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 16 Poster for Invicta FC 3<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Rob Sargent, “Shayna Baszler Faces Sarah D’Alelio In Invicta FC 3 Co-Feature,” mmarising.com, August 15, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2012/08/15/shayna-baszler-faces-sarah-dalelio-in-invicta-fc-3-co-feature/>.

<sup>47</sup> Press Release, “Invicta FC 3: 'Penne vs Sugiyama' announced for Oct. 6 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, August 15, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/8/15/3245105/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama-oct-6-kansas-city>.

<sup>48</sup> Brian Hemminger, August 15, 2012 (3:17pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 3: 'Penne vs Sugiyama' announced for Oct. 6 in Kansas City.”

<sup>49</sup> Chromium, August 15, 2012 (8:28pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 3: 'Penne vs Sugiyama' announced for Oct. 6 in Kansas City.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Under Jesse Holland's poster article, there were ten comments, two of which stated that the fighters pictured on the poster (Baszler, D'Alelio, Sugiyama, and Penne) were too physically masculine for their liking.

U308MAN posited: "That's quite the poster. Better check some of those 'gals' for tuck backs."<sup>51</sup> DRAGONASSAULT pontificated: "Diesel dykes with mohawks.thats awesome."<sup>52</sup>

Both posters engaged in VMA Trait 4 and Toxic Trait 2, with the former also participating in an inverse of VMA Trait 2. OJR joked about atomweight being a division, explaining: "105 lb division? The ref . . . can just separate the fighters with a hard sneeze in their direction."<sup>53</sup>

However, there were pro-WMMA comments, with UFC CHAMP 420 mentioning: "I used to train with tecia torres. shes gonna ruin some chicks lives."<sup>54</sup> CHROMIUM, making a pitch for

**Invicta** to host a women's 125-pound tournament, proceeded to hype-up the talent that the promotion currently had in that division.<sup>55</sup> This was surprisingly diverse for an MMA Mania article, containing posts that contributed to toxic masculinity and those focused on pro-WMMA narratives.

Pro-WMMA comments, though limited in number, did feature on Hemminger's weigh-in article. There were only four posts, each regarding whether Lacey Schuckman and Tara LaRosa

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<sup>51</sup> U308man, August 22, 2012 (1:19pm) Comment on Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City." Tucking is when a man sticks his penis between his own legs.

<sup>52</sup> Dragonassault, August 22, 2012 (2:17pm) Comment on Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City." Depending on who uses it, diesel dyke is either a pejorative or complementary term for a masculine lesbian.

<sup>53</sup> OJR, August 22, 2012 (1:29pm) Comment on Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City."

<sup>54</sup> UFC Champ 420, August 22, 2012 (1:52pm) Comment on Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City."

<sup>55</sup> Chromium, August 22, 2012 (5:13pm) Comment on Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City."

could make weight on their second try.<sup>56</sup> This pattern remained consistent in Brian Hemminger's preview and predictions article. Each of the five comments were positive regarding **Invicta FC 3**.<sup>57</sup> ROBBEYED ROBBIE EDWARDS exclaimed: "ill bet the invictafc card will have had the most entertaining exciting competitive fights!, the ladies just always seem to be hungrier, plus i think they are just nasier when they get scrapping . . . The days of saying there isnt enough depth in wmma is quickly becoming a non issue."<sup>58</sup> ANGRYTWINKIE echoed: "Invicta card > UFC card this weekend. Those ladies always come to scrap, no one is trying to win a 'safe' fight."<sup>59</sup> The former disputed the notion of feminine sociability and lack of technical competence, while the latter combatted the promotion of female fragility. I hypothesize that this reduction in negative comments and total comments is because a large portion of the *MMA Mania* readership ignored these articles as WMMA does not appeal to their interests.

Under the Knapp interview, fans contributed twenty-two comments, most of them WMMA positive, although several featured a toxic masculine twinge.<sup>60</sup> For example, NINJA OREO, loudly proclaimed: "COUGAR ALERT!," showcasing VMA Traits 2 and 4, including Toxic Trait 1.<sup>61</sup> FOSFORITO11 further objectified the **Invicta** owner, stating: "I would smash that!!! All day! I like how the conversation goes to the bedroom and leather. Were you testing

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<sup>56</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Penne vs Sugiyama'" MMAMania.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/5/3459504/invicta-fc-3-weigh-in-results-live-from-kansas-city-for-penne-vs>.

<sup>57</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 preview and predictions for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City," MMAMania.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/5/3460176/invicta-fc-3-preview-and-predictions-for-penne-vs-sugiyama-on-oct-6>.

<sup>58</sup> robbyedRobby Edwards, October 5, 2012 (1:19pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 preview and predictions for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City."

<sup>59</sup> AngryTwinkie, October 5, 2012 (3:17pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 preview and predictions for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City."

<sup>60</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAMania.com," MMAMania.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3465056/trendsetter-invicta-fc-president-shannon-knapp-interview-exclusive>.

<sup>61</sup> Ninja OreO, October 6, 2012 (4:25pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAMania.com."

the waters Hemmi?”<sup>62</sup> referring to a joke the writer made about breaking in the title belt like a baseball glove by putting it under a mattress.<sup>63</sup> FOSFORITO11 also engaged in the last three VMA Traits along with Toxic Trait 1. In response, Hemminger quipped that he was indeed “testing the waters,”<sup>64</sup> being complicit with VMA Trait 4. These comments were in the minority, however. Most expressed excitement for the fight card. GRETZKYOVERYOURJETSKI said: “I hope she's able to keep Invicta FC going for a long time.”<sup>65</sup> CHRIS SARDA remarked: “Her (Knapp) passion has gotten me interested. That plus . . . Invicta II was pretty damn exciting.”<sup>66</sup>

The comments on *MMA Mania* that featured the clearest examples of toxic masculinity and VMA promotion were attached to four of the seven fighter interviews Hemminger conducted.<sup>67</sup> In response to Hemminger’s conversation with main eventer Jessica Penne, MY\_CRACK\_ITCHES wrote: “As usual another good interview Hemmi. Unfortunately I am a total pig, and since she is not hot, I am not paying attention to her.”<sup>68</sup> This post expressed Toxic Trait 1 while utilizing VMA Traits 1, 4, and an inverse of 2. Hemminger responded by posting a picture of Penne, disagreeing with that assessment.<sup>69</sup> For his interview with Stephanie Frausto, which only solicited five comments, Hemminger asked: “where are the comments you pervs!”

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<sup>62</sup> Fosforito11, October 6, 2012 (7:06pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>63</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012.

<https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3465056/trendsetter-invicta-fc-president-shannon-knapp-interview-exclusive>.

<sup>64</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (7:09pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>65</sup> Gretzkyoveryourjetski, October 6, 2012 (5:20pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>66</sup> Chris Sara, October 6, 2012 (5:52pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>67</sup> “Search results for Invicta,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed October 3, 2021

<https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=127&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=124&q=invicta>.

<sup>68</sup> My\_crack\_itches, October 3, 2012 (8:16am) Comment on Hemminger, “Making waves: Invicta FC 3 headliner Jessica Penne interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>69</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 3, 2012 (8:2am) Comment on Hemminger, “Making waves: Invicta FC 3 headliner Jessica Penne interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

seemingly complaining about the lack of sexism, encouraging VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4.<sup>70</sup>

Hemminger's conversation with Tecia Torres produced seven comments, all heavily utilizing "penis ratings" to discuss the Massachusetts-born fighter.<sup>71</sup> Upon discovering that Torres got into MMA by watching Carano fight, DARKSIDE3744 noted: "I thought the whole Gina Carano thing was more for the guys than the girls but it looks like it did some good for the ladies as well."<sup>72</sup> Hemminger replied by attaching a picture of Torres, exclaiming: "She's flexible too!"<sup>73</sup> DARKSIDE3744 retorted: "At 5'1" the possibilities are endless."<sup>74</sup> Both Hemminger and DARKSIDE3744 participated in VMA Traits 2 and 4. JONNYBOY6969 echoed: "Who doesn't like short girls? Gay guys thats who."<sup>75</sup> In two sentences, he invoked VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4, in addition to Toxic Trait 2. FOSFORITO11 also was titillated, asking: "When she (Torres) says she started rolling no gi, does that mean without a bra too?"<sup>76</sup> Hemminger replied: "I'll have to ask her next time."<sup>77</sup> Both Hemminger and FOSORITO11 reflected VMA Traits 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1. ROOSEVELTDUNN ended the discussion by posting a GIF of an erupting volcano labeled "Testicles."<sup>78</sup> One word was enough to feature the last three VMA Traits in tandem with

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<sup>70</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 5, 2012 (9:00am) Comment on Hemminger, "Monkey Business: Invicta FC 3 fighter Stephanie Frausto interview exclusive with MMAmania.com." Perv is slang shorthand for pervert.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 4, 2012.

<https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/4/3457720/tiny-tornado-invicta-fc-3-pro-debuter-tecia-torres-interview>.

Ironically in 2017, Torres would become engaged to fellow WMMA fighter, Raquel Pennington. They married in 2022 and had their first child on June 1, 2023.

<sup>72</sup> Darkside3744, October 4, 2012 (10:03pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>73</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 4, 2012 (10:11pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>74</sup> Darkside3744, October 4, 2012 (10:16pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>75</sup> Jonnyboy6969, October 4, 2012 (10:34pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>76</sup> Fosforito11, October 4, 2012 (10:40pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com." Parentheses mine.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 4, 2012 (11:05pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>78</sup> Rooseveltdunn, October 4, 2012 (11:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."



Toxic Trait 1. The four comments under Hemminger's interview with Jessamyn Duke featured Hemminger and a reader exchanging pictures of Duke, making them both complicit in VMA Trait 2.<sup>79</sup> The fighter interviews provided *Mania*'s readership opportunities to objectify female fighters crassly.

Attached to the **Invicta FC 3** announcement article on *Bloody Elbow* were twenty-four comments. Most posts were either knowledgeable about WMMA or sought to learn about it.<sup>80</sup> After most people expressed confusion at the term "atomweight," REBBYSC explained: "Since there is a bit of confusion, here are the weight classes that Invicta FC uses: Atomweight – 105, Strawweight – 115, Flyweight – 125, Bantamweight – 135, Featherweight – 145."<sup>81</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG espoused: "This card looks very good,"<sup>82</sup> with UWCB concurring: "I'll watch anything Invicta puts on."<sup>83</sup> Unlike their *MMA Mania* counterparts, *Bloody Elbow* readers readily showed acceptance of WMMA without sexualizing the athletes.

Thapa's grappling article had seventeen comments, each praising WMMA, continuing the absence of toxic masculinity, and emphasizing feminine promotion.<sup>84</sup> WAMARSH stated: "Another great post . . . it involves fighters I know nothing about, and would likely not have

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<sup>79</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Goal-Oriented: Invicta FC 3 fighter Jessamyn Duke interview exclusive with MMAmania.com," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 3, 2012.

<https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/3/3450770/invicta-fc-3-fighter-jessamyn-duke-interview-exclusive-with-mmamania>.

<sup>80</sup> Ben Thapa, "Invicta 3 Full Fight Card Announced: Penne vs. Sugiyama Atomweight Title Bout," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, August 15, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/8/15/3245289/invicta-3-full-fight-card-penne-vs-sugiyama-atomweight-title>.

<sup>81</sup> RebySc, August 15, 2012 (8:00pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta 3 Full Fight Card Announced: Penne vs. Sugiyama Atomweight Title Bout."

<sup>82</sup> Christopher Muldong, August 15, 2012 (10:16pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta 3 Full Fight Card Announced: Penne vs. Sugiyama Atomweight Title Bout."

<sup>83</sup> Uweb, August 15, 2012 (8:36pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta 3 Full Fight Card Announced: Penne vs. Sugiyama Atomweight Title Bout."

<sup>84</sup> Ben Thapa, "Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012.

known about otherwise.”<sup>85</sup> GZL5000 explained: “I think the most impressive part about it... Is not so much the flexibility, but the dexterity she (Penne) shows. The use of her feet and legs to trap the arm uses very fine motor control . . . which most people don’t have a ton of in their lower extremities.”<sup>86</sup> The writer praises Penne’s technical competence, avoiding any emphasized feminine promotion. ROBTWEAVER added:

This is why I love WMMA. It’s sort of like the argument for people who love college ball versus pro: the athletes are still in love with the game and they put so much more effort into what they do. You can see the willingness to go out there and give it their complete effort, and I rarely see a woman fight ‘safe.’ Getting to watch these Invicta fights for free, and then getting to watch them over and over again as often as I want, makes Invicta my favorite promotion by far these days. Great post Ben.<sup>87</sup>

The *MMA Fighting* article disclosing that Sarah Kaufman would fight Kaitlin Young at the PPV featured eleven comments, ten of which fully supported WMMA and **Invicta**.<sup>88</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG wrote: “These InvictaFC cards are really strong on paper as far as Womens MMA standards are concerned.”<sup>89</sup> RUGERK91 replied: “woman strikeforce fighters need to fight often with peanuts they are being paid.”<sup>90</sup> The only hegemonized masculine

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<sup>85</sup> Wamarsh, October 5, 2012 (8:14am) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women’s Grappling.”

<sup>86</sup> Gzl5000, October 5, 2012 (12:51pm) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women’s Grappling.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>87</sup> RobtWeaver, October 5, 2012 (11:24am) Comment on Thapa, “Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women’s Grappling.”

<sup>88</sup> Luke Thomas, “Invicta Announces Sarah Kaufman vs. Kaitlin Young for Oct. 6th Event,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, August 27, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/8/27/3271661/invicta-sarah-kaufman-vs-kaitlin-young-october-6th-mma-news>.

<sup>89</sup> Christopher Muldong, August 27, 2012 (11:43pm) Comment on Thomas, “Invicta Announces Sarah Kaufman vs. Kaitlin Young for Oct. 6th Event.”

<sup>90</sup> RugerK91, August 27, 2012 (8:00pm) Comment on Thomas, “Invicta Announces Sarah Kaufman vs. Kaitlin Young for Oct. 6th Event.”



comment was MMA757 calling GIN145 a liar<sup>91</sup> for claiming he found Michelle Waterson physically attractive, perpetuating an inverse of VMA Trait 2.<sup>92</sup>

Six comments were posted on the second Sarah Kaufman article, which announced her withdrawal from Invicta FC 3. Only one remark contributed to toxic masculinity.<sup>93</sup> TBEAST complained: “Welcome to womensmmafighting.com,” insinuating that WMMA somehow dominated *MMA Fighting*’s article output.<sup>94</sup> This remark was clearly false, as the site only published three WMMA stories leading up to **Invicta FC 3**.<sup>95</sup> TBEAST clearly viewed MMA as a male preserve, as shown by reflecting VMA Traits 1 and 4, which had no place for women as combatants, and as a result, WMMA should not be featured on *MMA Fighting*. Such comments were rare in the brief promotion that *MMA Fighting* gave to **Invicta FC 3**, but the small sample size makes it hard to judge the readership’s opinions on toxic masculinity.

Shayna Baszler’s twenty-second pro fight occurred on October 6, 2012, again at Memorial Hall, squaring off against Sarah “The Monster” D’Alelio in **Invicta FC 3**’s co-main event.<sup>96</sup> Dave Meltzer reported that 380 fans paid for tickets even though some 600 people watched in the building.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Mma757, August 27, 2012 (2:4p7m) Comment on Thomas, “Invicta Announces Sarah Kaufman vs. Kaitlin Young for Oct. 6th Event.”

<sup>92</sup> Gin151, August 27, 2012 (12:47pm) Comment on Thomas, “Invicta Announces Sarah Kaufman vs. Kaitlin Young for Oct. 6th Event.”

<sup>93</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Sarah Kaufman’s Invicta Debut Canceled by Injury,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, September 17, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/9/17/3348328/kaufmans-injury-pulls-her-off-oct-6-invicta-show>.

<sup>94</sup> Tbeast, September 17, 2012 (4:01pm) Comment on Meltzer, “Invicta Announces Sarah Kaufman vs. Kaitlin Young for Oct. 6th Event.”

<sup>95</sup> “Search for invicta,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 3, 2021 <https://www.mmafighting.com/search?order=date&page=205&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmafighting.com/search?order=date&page=203&q=invicta>.

<sup>96</sup> “Invicta FC 3- Penne Vs. Sugiyama” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed October 4, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-3-Penne-vs-Sugiyama-23857>.

<sup>97</sup> Dave Meltzer, “OCT. 23, 2012 WRESTLING OBSERVER NEWSLETTER: SECOND ISSUE OF THE WEEK, UFC 153, ROH IPPV AND TNA BOUND FOR GLORY REVIEWS, NEWS AND MORE,” f4wonline.com, October 19, 2012. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/oct-23-2012-wrestling-observer-newsletter-second-issue-week-ufc-153>.

As in Baszler's previous bout, Mauro Ranallo, Muhammed Lawal, and Julie Kedzie offered "on-air" commentary. Clips of sit-down interviews with both fighters aired just before the contest. During the video package, Baszler stated:

I just know that when I'm 100 percent Queen of Spades, in that ring, nobody can compete with me . . . And that's not something that I believe . . . That's something I know because I've been there . . . I know because I've proven it and she knows because she has yet to prove it . . . Two same beliefs at two totally different ends of the spectrum and that's why you are going to see fireworks tonight. You gonna use that for the video? Good.<sup>98</sup>

Ranallo called Shayna one of the best grapplers in the sport, male or female. When Baszler appeared on stage with her guitar, the crowd roared. Ranallo said Baszler credited Josh Barnett for teaching her the marketing aspect of being a fighter, alluding to the art of cutting a pro wrestling style promo. Kedzie added: "She's created for herself such a presence, such a persona in the cage . . . it's hard for people not to know who the Queen of Spades is at this point. Such a great fighter, such a fun person to watch."<sup>99</sup> The ring announcer, Joe Martinez, referred to Baszler as a "twenty-one fight veteran." The crowd cheered lustily after hearing Baszler's name announced.<sup>100</sup>

After a brief Muay Thai kick exchange to start the first round, Baszler got the takedown. She eventually got into a position where she was riding D'Alelio's back. Ranallo again referred to Baszler as "One of . . . the most skilled grapplers in mixed martial arts."<sup>101</sup> Remaining on the "Monster's" back, Baszler stomped her foot repeatedly on D'Alelio's exposed calf and ankle. Ranallo and Kedzie praised this strategy, while Lawal remarked: "Y'all girls are mean."<sup>102</sup> Baszler struck D'Alelio with a knee early in the second frame, knocking her down. Baszler

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<sup>98</sup> "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs Sugiyama," October 6, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:48:34, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34390/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

quickly re-established control on her opponent's back. After a few punches to the side of the head, she locked in the rear-naked choke, forcing D'Alelio to tap. The "Queen of Spades" pointed to either side of the cage before doing an air guitar celebration.<sup>103</sup>



*Figure 17 Shayna Baszler celebrates with her air guitar following her submission win at Invicta FC 3<sup>104</sup>*

After Baszler was announced the winner, Kedzie briefly interviewed her. In a promo similar to the one she gave in 2008, Baszler reiterated: "I'm in a groove, no one can beat me. . . I'm just now hitting my stride, so everybody else better start shaking in their boots cuz I'm here, and you gotta come in here and take this from me."<sup>105</sup> Afterward, both Ranallo and Lawal praised Baszler for her "great promo."<sup>106</sup> Lawal concluded: "She went from the Queen of Spades to the evil Queen of Spades."<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Esther Lin, "The Queen's Manifesto: Shayna Baszler's TUF 18 Blog, Week Eight," TheMMAcorner.com, October 23, 2013. <http://themmacorner.com/2013/10/23/the-queens-manifesto-shayna-baszlers-tuf-18-blog-week-eight/>.

<sup>105</sup> "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs Sugiyama," October 6, 2012 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 2:48:34, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34390/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Baszler was nonadherent or defiant towards emphasized feminine norms in the pre-fight video segment. She was not wearing makeup, had her hair in corn rows, and was dressed in her fight gear. Although in the post-fight interview, Baszler praised D'Alelio, she did not do so beforehand. Baszler did not insult D'Alelio, but she did imply she was a level above her opponent. Again, she offered this opinion in the somewhat cocky style of a pro wrestling promo, which grates against the sociability aspect expected of women.<sup>108</sup> While walking to the cage, she again sported the baseball cap, holding her electric guitar high above her head. Ranallo listed several significant achievements that Baszler had made during her career, such as having fourteen submission wins, and applauded her marketing prowess in the art of the promo. Ring announcer Joe Martinez added to the perception of Baszler's technical competence by emphasizing that her win-loss record made her a "twenty-one fight veteran."<sup>109</sup>

As for the fight itself, most of it featured the commentators focusing strictly on technical competence. On several occasions, Ranallo praised both fighters' skill and pugilistic abilities. When Baszler employed a foot stomp, Ranallo and Kedzie admired her technical ingenuity, underscoring the damage the stomp did to D'Alelio's calf and Achille's tendon.<sup>110</sup> After the first stomp, the crowd became louder, appreciating the maneuver. In one of the lone emphasized feminine comments of the night, Lawal joked: "Y'all girls are mean."<sup>111</sup> This plays into the stereotype that women "fight dirty" while using "mean" to joke about WMMA fighting styles. This dismisses Baszler's technical competence and women's fighting abilities in general. The second round further demonstrated technical skill for almost the entire minute it lasted. The air guitar celebration continued to defy emphasized femininity, an act far from sociable or demure.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

In post-fight proceedings, a brief measure of sportsmanship was displayed towards D'Alelio by Baszler, but she then fully turned her attention towards the rest of the **Invicta** locker room.<sup>112</sup> Baszler's words showed she wanted to establish herself as the top fighter in **Invicta**'s bantamweight division. Then came Ranallo's and Lawal's appraisal of Baszler's promo ability.

On the one hand, both men complimented her work. However, Lawal's "the Queen of Spades to the evil Queen of Spades" remark can be read in various emphasized feminine contexts. Lawal likely meant it as a compliment, i.e., Baszler now shows her serious side. But when juxtaposed with his "y'all girls are mean," one can make the argument that calling her "evil" was akin to calling her "catty." That aside, the **Invicta** broadcast, the commentators' dialogue, and the fighters' actions refrained from promoting emphasized feminized norms.<sup>113</sup>

*Sherdog*'s Brian Knapp gave a simple non-hegemonic description of all the fights on the main card, stating of the Baszler-D'Alelio bout: "Baszler caught a break early in the second round, when D'Alelio slipped while firing a right hook. 'The Queen of Spades' moved in with punches, transitioned to D'Alelio's back during a subsequent scramble and locked in the choke."<sup>114</sup>

On the live stream for *MMA Mania*, Brian Hemminger stated: "D'Alelio throws a heavy right hand but slips. Baszler pounces and attacks with heavy ground and pound . . . Baszler takes D'Alelio's back, sinking in a rear naked choke without hooks. D'Alelio has no escape and she's

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Brian Knapp, "JESSICA PENNE TRIANGLES NAHO SUGIYAMA, CAPTURES ATOMWEIGHT GOLD AT INVICTA FC 3," *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Jessica-Penne-Triangles-Naho-Sugiyama-Captures-Atomweight-Gold-at-Invicta-FC-3-46279>.

forced to tap. Damn! Baszler looked so good here.”<sup>115</sup> For *MMA Rising*, Robert Sargent again published live play-by-play text commentary. He wrote: “Baszler pounced with big punches from the top and took D’Alelio’s back in a scramble. Baszler locked on a rear-naked choke and this time D’Alelio was unable to escape and had to tap out.”<sup>116</sup> Knapp, Hemminger, and Sargent each treated the co-main event similarly to a male MMA bout, focusing on Baszler’s technical competence as a fighter. Conversely, SHINSPLINTS, moderating the live fight stream for *Bloody Elbow*, once again did not provide a play-by-play,<sup>117</sup> and *MMA Fighting* did not even post a live fight thread.<sup>118</sup>

On *MMA Mania*’s live fight thread, moderated by Brian Hemminger, viewers wrote 481 comments. Like previous website streams, many posters promoted emphasized feminine and toxic masculine aspects as their ideal norm for WMMA. Unlike the comments regarding the first two **Invicta** cards, the same fans praised fighters’ technical competence during **Invicta FC 3**.<sup>119</sup>

During the prelims’ opening contest between Ediane Gomes and Katalina Malungahu, BROTHERWOLF commented: “Almost got a nip slip,”<sup>120</sup> amidst a conversation admiring the

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<sup>115</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6),” MMAmania.com, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3464304/invicta-fc-3-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>116</sup> Rob Sargent, “Invicta Fighting Championships 3 Live Play-By-Play & Results,” MMArising.com, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/10/06/invicta-fighting-championships-3-live-play-by-play-results/>.

<sup>117</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/6/3465198/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama-live-thread-and-discussion-mma>.

<sup>118</sup> Dave Doyle, “Invicta FC 3 Results: Penne vs. Sugiyama,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/10/6/3460420/invicta-fc-3-results-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>119</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6),” MMAmania.com, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3464304/invicta-fc-3-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>120</sup> Brotherwolf, October 6, 2012 (7:17pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

latter fighter's legs, making him compliant with VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>121</sup> During the night's second bout, Hemminger announced: "Torres works for a cruise line booking vacations. I'd like to book one with her,"<sup>122</sup> openly exuding in VMA Traits 2 and 3, a sentiment soon echoed by JONNYBOY6969.<sup>123</sup> After the fight, FOSOFRITO11 exclaimed: "man, that Kaiyana lady is tough, she was taking a good pounding."<sup>124</sup> To this, OILCHECK responded: "Whoa . . . Did she squirt?," making a joke regarding the word "pounding" as a slang term for having sex.<sup>125</sup> OILCHECK participated in VMA Traits 2 and 4 along with Toxic Trait 1. The website's moderators were apparently agreeable with him doing so.

As the Zingano-Pennington contest began, WOLFMAN13 exclaimed: "I know this sounds chauvinistic or sexist or something but am I the only one looking at the girls in the short shorts asses bouncing around when they're in the clinch?" He continued: "I'm not saying I don't appreciate the technique or the fights themselves . . . But as a dude, it's hard not to be distracted."<sup>126</sup> Both comments featured VMA Trait 2. Instead of chastising WOLFMAN13, Hemminger replied: "You want ass bounce in a fight watch Pennington's first fight in Invicta vs Sarah "Cheesecake" Moras. Moras has the bounciest ass I've ever seen."<sup>127</sup> Then, he posted a video clip of that first fight, exclaiming: "Here's your distraction. I don't even remember who

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<sup>121</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)," MMAmania.com, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3464304/invicta-fc-3-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>122</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (7:41pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."

<sup>123</sup> Jonnyboy6969, October 6, 2012 (7:44pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."

<sup>124</sup> Fosforito11, October 6, 2012 (7:44pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."

<sup>125</sup> OilCheck, October 7, 2012 (3:20pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."

<sup>126</sup> Wolfman13, October 6, 2012 (9:35pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."

<sup>127</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (9:37pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."



won it was so bad for me.”<sup>128</sup> Hemminger’s expressed sentiments reflected VMA Traits 2 and 4. However, for Leslie Smith vs. Kaitlin Young, Hemminger returned his focus to technical competence. He pontificated: “This fight is going to be INSANE. Seriously, if you’re not a fan of WMMA, you’ll be a fan after this one for sure.”<sup>129</sup> WOLFMAN13 noted: “Chick fights are actually pretty badass a lot of the time.”<sup>130</sup> ANGRYTWINKIE added: “Talent pool is growing deeper.”<sup>131</sup> During the video introduction to Baszler-D’Alelio, WOLFMAN13’s remarks: “Baszler is kinda cute...but her teeth are weird...Not saying she’s super hot... but I would probably flirt with her if I met her,”<sup>132</sup> slightly featured VMA Trait 2. When the fight concluded, MAUIWAVES wrote: “I hope Baszler is at every Invicta event.”<sup>133</sup> ANGRYTWINKIE, MAUIWAVES, and WOLFMAN13 commented on her skills being much better than a first glance at her 15-7 record might indicate.<sup>134</sup> However, admiration of WMMA’s technical competence does not erase or diminish a fan’s evident objectification of the competitors.

Conversely, *Bloody Elbow* mostly refrained from promoting emphasized feminine narratives. The live fight stream hosted on *Bloody Elbow* generated 1,313 posted comments.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (9:40pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>129</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (10:38pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>130</sup> Wolfman13, October 6, 2012 (10:52pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>131</sup> AngryTwinkie, October 6, 2012 (10:56pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>132</sup> Wolfman13, October 6, 2012 (10:58pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>133</sup> MauiWaves, October 6, 2012 (11:10pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>134</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6),” MMAmania.com, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3464304/invicta-fc-3-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>135</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/6/3465198/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama-live-thread-and-discussion-mma>.



At the beginning of the thread, a commenter posted a link to a photo gallery of the weigh-ins.<sup>136</sup> DANKNABBOT's admission: "I hate commenting on female fighters appearances, I tend to feel disrespectful. But Damn dude. Wowza," praised a female fighter's physical attractiveness by expressing "regretful" participation in VMA Trait 2.<sup>137</sup> HORSELOVER FAT replied: "If I was on (MMA) Mania I would say things, but I'm afraid to here,"<sup>138</sup> lamenting being restricted from partaking in VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4. He notes the differing standards of accepting online misogyny between the two websites. Conversely, commenters praised Jessamyn Duke's technical competence after she won her fight via submission. GZL5000 noted: "Decent guard, nice use of her reach and mixing up the jab and lead hook. She's one to watch."<sup>139</sup> When the main card began with a video rundown of the upcoming fights, several commenters applauded Shannon Knapp. BVANDIETPEPSI announced: "My serious crush on Shannon Knapp aside, I freaking love this promotion and how they do things."<sup>140</sup> HORSELOVER FAT noted: "She seems really nice and genuine, like you'd want her as your mother (not in a weird way)."<sup>141</sup> To this, PDL replied, "With the viewership she reports? Genuine isn't a word I'd use," thus accusing her of inflating the company's popularity.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Horselover Fat, October 6, 2012 (7:05pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

<sup>137</sup> DankNabbot, October 6, 2012 (7:07pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

<sup>138</sup> Horselover Fat, October 6, 2012 (7:08pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion." Parentheses mine.

<sup>139</sup> Gzl5000, October 6, 2012 (7:57pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

<sup>140</sup> BVandDietPepsi, October 6, 2012 (8:29pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

<sup>141</sup> Horselover Fat, October 6, 2012 (8:31pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

<sup>142</sup> Pdl, October 6, 2012 (8:36pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

Following the eighth fight of the card, VICTOR RODRIGUEZ asked: “i wonder if any of the fighters realize they’re part of something big as far as advancing the sport for women?”<sup>143</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG answered: “Female fighters have a hard enough time getting fights. They now have an organization that can provide them fights on a consistent basis, and there’s some buzz about the product.”<sup>144</sup> MOLLCUTPURSE added: “plus it incentivizes other women to train and compete more. there is a problem with a lot of jiu-jitsu comps where as a woman you might pay money to sign up, show up, and nobody will even be there for you to fight. it’s really demoralizing and a lot of women . . . don’t even bother.”<sup>145</sup> Readers primarily focused on the company's performance and the technical competence displayed in the various bouts. When the co-main event began, VIOLENT NEWT exclaimed: “Baszler looked really good in the McMann fight And has good taste in music. I hope she wins.”<sup>146</sup> Twelve comments discussed the viciousness and technical competence of Baszler’s foot stomps without any reference to emphasized femininity.<sup>147</sup> D.E.O. remarked: “heel strikes to the calf tendon and foot YES.”<sup>148</sup> VICTOR RODRIGUEZ echoed: “those stomps are the most gangsta shit i’ve seen all week.”<sup>149</sup> HEAD-SPLITTER wrote: “Damn, Shayna was scary in that fight.”<sup>150</sup> Following the

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<sup>143</sup> Victor Rodriguez, October 6, 2012 (9:21pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>144</sup> Christopher Muldong, October 6, 2012 (9:24pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>145</sup> Mollcutpurse, October 6, 2012 (9:30pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>146</sup> Violent Newt, October 6, 2012 (11:00pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>147</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/6/3465198/invicta-fc-3-penne-vs-sugiyama-live-thread-and-discussion-mma>

<sup>148</sup> D.E.O., October 6, 2012 (11:08pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>149</sup> Victor Rodriguez, October 6, 2012 (11:08pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>150</sup> Head-splitter, October 6, 2012 (11:10pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

event, ZACHARY KATER expressed: “I’m really hoping this promotion lasts.”<sup>151</sup> ME(LISSA) concluded: “So, instead of TUF on Fridays, can we just have a couple WMMA fights? It would let the UFC build up the sport, and we wouldn’t have to watch a bunch of dudebros pranking each other.”<sup>152</sup> The emphasized feminine narrative was far more restrained on *Bloody Elbow* than on *MMA Mania*, with virtually non-existent toxic masculinity.

Over 400 comments were posted to the *Underground*, a mixture of positive recognition of fighters’ technical competence and toxic expectations for emphasized feminine adherence in WMMA.<sup>153</sup> UGCTTT TRENTLY remarked: “Anyone betting on the uglier chicks and rooting for the better looking ones? Only recognize a couple names in this card but can't wait to see these girls fight!”<sup>154</sup> This poster engaged in VMA Trait 2. SIMONPE cheered: “nip slip!” during the card’s opening contest,<sup>155</sup> complicit in VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 1. Conversely, JACINTO admitted: “Never really watched women's mma but these fights so far have been really good!”<sup>156</sup> MAYBEJOEROGANNOSE echoed: “Dana White is missing out on a fat pile of WMMA money.”<sup>157</sup> AUTHORITY\_FIGURE commented: “It just occurred to me that I would enjoy if the women's bra sizes were included in the vitals that posted before each fight. Sue me.”<sup>158</sup> This reflected VMA Traits 2 and 4 along with Toxic Trait 1. HOLYAVENGERP5 admitted his male

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<sup>151</sup> Zachary Kater, October 6, 2012 (11:26pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>152</sup> Me(lissa), October 6, 2012 (11:36pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion.”

<sup>153</sup> Underground\_Feed “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET,” Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, October 2012. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-3-discussion-thread-sat-7-pm-et/2069372>.

<sup>154</sup> UGCTT\_Trentley, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>155</sup> Simonpe, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>156</sup> Jacinto, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>157</sup> MaybeJoeRoganNose, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>158</sup> Authority\_Figure, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

gaze was appeased by Michelle Waterson, proclaiming: “When the karate hottie is on, i am depanting.”<sup>159</sup> He engaged in the latter three VMA Traits in tandem with Toxic Trait 1.

However, in a later comment, he also confessed: “dude, these girls do not sit around and ride out wins. i like it.”<sup>160</sup>

Regarding the Jessamyn Duke victory, OCEAN6 asked: “Anyone got a gif of the armbar earlier? I was fapping and missed it.”<sup>161</sup> OCEAN echoed the identical VMA and Toxic Traits as HOLYAVENGERP5. ASIMPLEFAN joked: “If the women ever want to be considered true equals they have to lose the tops. Too much grip for the sub artists. Not an even playing field IMO,” displaying Toxic Trait 1 in addition to VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>162</sup> On the Baszler-D’Alelio bout, SADISTICSOLDIER pontificated: “I’d like a gif of those Achilles tendon stomps by Baszler. It was pretty sick.”<sup>163</sup> IGOTCMSPUNKED concurred: “Fucking ouch those stomps.”<sup>164</sup> TFK\_OTHREE represented the overall attitude that the commenters on the *Underground* thread displayed towards **Invicta FC 3**. Earlier in the broadcast, he stated he wanted to bury his face in “(Barb) Honchak’s swamp ass,”<sup>165</sup> exemplifying Toxic Trait 1 with VMA Traits 2 and 3. Conversely, after the show, he declared: “Yeah dude, I am absolutely loving Invicta. I haven't missed a single event, the fights are fucking 100% greatness.”<sup>166</sup> Essentially, fans on the *Underground* would not hold back in announcing their “penis ratings” of **Invicta** fighters but

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<sup>159</sup> HolyAvengerP5, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ocean6, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>162</sup> Asimplefan, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>163</sup> Sadisticsolider, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>164</sup> IGotCMSpuned, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>165</sup> TFK\_othree, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. Different comment, but because no posts have timestamps, there is no way to differentiate the citations.

would concurrently praise their fighting prowess. However, this is not enough to mitigate their toxic masculine behavior.

On *Sherdog*, Brian Knapp gave each of the eight main card matches an entire paragraph. For the co-main event, Knapp stated: “Shayna Baszler . . . submitted Sarah D’Alelio with a rear-naked choke a little more than half a minute into the second round of their bantamweight co-main event . . . Baszler caught a break early in the second round, when D’Alelio slipped while firing a right hook. ‘The Queen of Spades’ moved in with punches, transitioned to D’Alelio’s back during a subsequent scramble and locked in the choke.”<sup>167</sup> His analysis primarily focused on Baszler’s technical competence, with no emphasized feminine narratives presented.

Brian Hemminger, for *MMA Mania*, wrote:

In the evening's co-main event, long-time veteran Shayna Baszler put the entire women's 135 pound division on notice by delivering a beating to Sarah D'Alelio . . . Baszler scored on the feet and especially on the canvas . . . hunting for submissions in a first round that saw all kinds of transitions. She even closed out the frame by stomping and crushing D'Alelio's calf with her heel which looked extremely painful. "The Queen of Spades" continued to showcase a rebirth of aggression . . . in the second round . . . After blasting D'Alelio with an assortment of strikes, she dove on her exposed neck and forced a tap despite never even getting her hooks in.<sup>168</sup>

Like Knapp, Hemminger presented Baszler-D’Alelio by focusing on the fighting prowess displayed, particularly Baszler’s submission acumen. Specifically, he gave credence to the foot stomps, calling them a “rebirth of aggression,” which is not likely to be found in feminine sociability. Hemminger gave no attention to Baszler or D’Alelio’s failure/success of titillating

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<sup>167</sup> Brian Knapp, “JESSICA PENNE TRIANGLES NAHO SUGIYAMA, CAPTURES ATOMWEIGHT GOLD AT INVICTA FC 3,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Jessica-Penne-Triangles-Naho-Sugiyama-Captures-Atomweight-Gold-at-Invicta-FC-3-46279>.

<sup>168</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results recap: Penne crowned inaugural Invicta champion, Baszler shines,” *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, October 7, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/7/3467612/invicta-fc-3-results-recap-penne-crowned-inaugural-invicta-champion>.

the male audience. The only narrative Hemminger gave credence to was Baszler's dominance of the bout.<sup>169</sup>

In an article that summed up several MMA cards that took place the same weekend as

**Invicta FC 3**, Hemminger described **UFC** on FX and **Bellator 75**:

While the UFC main card was relatively incident free, the big story of the night was the arrest of one Jeremy Stephens for felony assault charges. The lightweight Stephens was expected to battle Yves Edwards . . . but his chances of actually competing that night were put in major jeopardy . . . Bellator 75 main event between heavyweights Eric Prindle and Thiago Santos was an exercise in futility. The first bout between Prindle and Santos had ended controversially when Santos had soccer kicked Prindle between the legs . . . resulting in a no-contest . . . (in the rematch) what did Prindle do? He lifted his left leg high up in the air and axe kicked his opponent . . . directly in the groin.<sup>170</sup>

In comparison, **Invicta** was thoroughly praised, with Hemminger pontificating:

Once again redefining the phrase "Fights like a girl," the ladies of Invicta showcased their passion for four and a half consecutive hours of nearly non-stop girl-on-girl fight action. These were women with something to prove. They were out to verify that they could put on just as good of a show as the boys, if not better. And they've been doing it ever since the promotion debuted its first event earlier this year in April. Once again, the ladies brought it with 10 of the 14 fights getting finished and all four of the decisions being very exciting battles which featured multiple displays of pure heart. After 39 bouts contested with the promotion, you can count the amount of lackluster fights on one hand. There simply seems to be more of a sense of urgency with the fighters, as if these ladies are finally getting an opportunity to showcase their talents on a larger stage and they'll do anything to make sure people remember their performances . . . Perhaps when you're fighting for more than yourselves, but for an ideal, the bar gets raised just a little bit higher.<sup>171</sup>

Hemminger focused the above paragraph on the quality and technique of the fights.

Noting how 71% of **Invicta FC 3**'s bouts ended with a finish and even the four fights that went to the judge's scorecards were "exciting battles . . . of pure heart," the author made the case that

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/8/3471446/women-of-invicta-lead-by-example-after-ufc-and-bellator-drop-the-ball>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

WMMA was just as entertaining and valuable to the sport as its male counterpart.<sup>172</sup> Most interestingly, he portrayed the women involved as “fighting for more . . . for an ideal.”<sup>173</sup> Instead of fighting for a bigger payday, **Invicta** competitors were fighting for a home for WMMA. Not only did Hemminger summarize the event without resorting to emphasized femininity, but he also managed to portray the fighters with a “fighting because we love it” mentality.<sup>174</sup>

The rest of the online MMA news media, except for *MMA Rising*, provided little coverage of **Invicta FC 3**'s aftermath. In an interview with *Bloody Elbow*, Shannon Knapp commented:

People are coming into this space (MMA outside of **UFC**), trying to build promotions that Zuffa might come in and buy. That's not my mindset, though. My mindset is to do the best that I can to help grow this side of the sport . . . At the end of the day, and I've said this all along, it really comes down to what is best for the female athletes. That's why I do this. If it was about making money, I would be doing something else [laughs]. I just want to do what best for the sport. Whatever that ends up being down the road, I don't know. I'm never going to say never, but at this moment, I'm not going to say it's going to happen, because right now, my objective is to continue to grow Invicta, under our guidance.<sup>175</sup>

Like Hemminger, Knapp defined **Invicta** as striving for an ideal, not a buyout from the **UFC**. Her goal was not to make a large profit but to provide a space for the world's best WMMA fighters to compete.<sup>176</sup> *Bloody Elbow* staff writer T.P. Grant refused to see the company in the same light. In his fight weekend overview, Grant stated: “I originally wanted to compare Invicta to Bellator when it just started out, but . . . Invicta has to collect a lot more talent before they can even hope for a TV deal on that level, but with Strikeforce in its death throws Invicta seems to be

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Shannon Knapp discusses working relationship with the UFC,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, November 9, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/11/9/3621610/shannon-knapp-discusses-working-relationship-with-the-ufc>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

the destination for up-and-coming female fighters.”<sup>177</sup> Unlike Hemminger, Grant did not think highly about the talent level and technical competence of the then **Invicta** roster while admitting a fighter influx was coming. Unlike Knapp, he viewed success and failure in terms of profits and TV deals, not how they helped grow WMMA.

Similar to *MMA Mania*, *MMA Fighting* provided a detailed recap of each of the eight main card fights. For Baszler-D’Alelio, Dave Doyle wrote: “In the co-main event, bantamweight Shayna Baszler scored an impressive victory over Sarah D’Alelio . . . While D’Alelio (6-3) managed to fend off the Sioux Falls native in the opening stanza, she had no answer in round two. Baszler . . . unleashed a ground-and-pound flurry, and swiftly worked her way into a rear-naked choke for the submission.”<sup>178</sup> Like Hemminger, Doyle focused solely on Baszler’s technical competence and D’Alelio’s durability, never resorting to emphasized feminine descriptors of the action.

In Shaun Al-Shatti’s morning report for *MMA Fighting*, the writer summarized the fight weekend by exclaiming: “Literally, we had a little taste of everything that makes this sport so unique . . . Dana White ripping into the media for perceived slights that didn't actually exist? Check . . . An injury crashing and burning another championship fight? Unfortunately, check . . . A pair of fights ending via nausea-inducing groin strikes . . .? Huge check. The women outshining everyone else regardless? Check, check, check.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> T.P. Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/7/3467162/ufc-Bellator-Invicta-one-fc-results-sunday-perspective-winners-losers>.

<sup>178</sup> Dave Doyle, “Invicta FC 3 results: Jessica Penne finishes Naho Sugiyama, wins first atomweight title,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/10/6/3467260/invicta-fc-3-results-jessica-penne-finishes-naho-sugiyama-wins-first>.

<sup>179</sup> Shaun Al-Shatti, “Morning Report: Thunderous highs and painful lows of a busy fight weekend,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/10/8/3463332/morning-report-thunderous-highs-painful-lows-busy-fight-weekend-ufc-on-fx-5>.



In a weekly opinion column called *MMA Roundtable*, Luke Thomas and Dave Doyle gave their opinion on **Invicta FC 3**. The latter wrote, “Saturday night was the first time I watched an Invicta fight card live from start to finish. Previously, like others, I got around to watching great fights like the first Kaitlin Young-Leslie Smith bout and Sara McMann vs. Shayna Baszler . . . when buzz about the fights spread . . . Whether Invicta can make a go of it financially is up for debate, but that's not the subject at hand. As a product, Invicta has proven that the women's MMA game is rapidly coming of age and women belong on the big stage. In that sense, Invicta is already an artistic success.”<sup>180</sup> Conversely, Thomas opined:

It's hard to not watch the current product and notice what's lacking. Some of the fighters are sensational athletes, some are pretty average. That's true for a lot of MMA organizations, but the disparity is more pronounced at Invicta. After all, they aren't just trying to stage MMA fights among women, but help fix and reorganize the sport entirely. That wouldn't be a mission statement if there weren't a few things missing and a consistently high level of athlete is one of them. On the other hand, Invicta gives off the feeling they're building towards something. A new TV deal? More developed weight classes? A real super fight that captures the MMA community's attention? I don't know. But I can feel the momentum. They're on their way to somewhere.<sup>181</sup>

Like Grant, Thomas primarily focused on the alleged lack of talent (technical competence). Unlike Grant, he seemingly understood that **Invicta** was about an ideal, not necessarily about making a profit.<sup>182</sup> In another *MMA Roundtable* article, when discussing Dana White being committed to bringing women to the **UFC**, Luke Thomas brought the feasibility of doing so into question, stating: “I'd like to add two more concerns, though, that should also be considered: roster space if women come to the UFC and the role of Invicta . . . Bringing women

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<sup>180</sup> Luke Thomas, “MMA Roundtable: Bonnar beating Silva, Alvarez's future, Mayhem's reality and more,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, October 11, 2012. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2012/10/11/3488482/mma-roundtable-bonnar-beating-silva-alvarezs-future-mayhems-reality>.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

over to the UFC either requires hosting nearly twenty fights to the occasional card, cutting some portion of the existing roster of men or adding yet more shows . . . If you throw women into the mix, then all of a sudden you have yet more fighters and fights that need space. And Ronda Rousey ain't fighting on the prelim card, so that means something has to give, be it roster space or the number of shows.”<sup>183</sup>

Thomas ascertains that women will be taking jobs away already earned by male fighters or that adding WMMA will result in lengthier **UFC** cards than before, making the product less enjoyable. This comment is steeped in hegemonic masculinity, implying that if a bout is open for consideration between two male and two female fighters, the females in question must step aside in a show of sociability. Conversely, Thomas also expressed: “Invicta's value-add right now is clear and while the resources might be nice, doesn't need Zuffa's control.”<sup>184</sup> This showed while Thomas embraced Shannon Knapp’s mission statement, he dismissed WMMA succeeding in the major leagues of the **UFC**.

*MMA Rising*’s Rob Sargent’s recap article gave an extensive blow-by-blow account of the main card fights, particularly applauding Baszler’s efforts. Sargent wrote: “In one of her more impressive performances to date, Baszler (15-7-0) snapped D’Alelio’s (6-3-0) two-fight winning streak with a second-round rear-naked choke.”<sup>185</sup> In addition, Sargent also conducted a phone interview with the “Queen of Spades” a few days after **Invicta FC 3**, which relied on discussing her technical competence and showcasing her masculinity, each without utilizing

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<sup>183</sup> Mike Chiappetta, “MMA Roundtable: Women in the UFC, covered-up drug tests, VADA and more,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, October 24, 2012. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2012/10/24/3548502/mma-roundtable-women-in-the-ufc-covered-up-drug-tests-vada-and-more>.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Rob Sargent, “Invicta FC 3 Results: Jessica Penne Captures Atomweight Title,” MMArising.com, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/10/06/invicta-fc-3-results-jessica-penne-captures-atomweight-title/>.

emphasized feminine talking points. Sargent portrays the opening exchange of the interview by quoting Baszler: “‘I’ve got to warn you, I’m shopping for beer right now so I might be a little distracted,’ says Shayna Baszler, who proceeds to flawlessly multitask as we discuss her career for the next 40 minutes.”<sup>186</sup> Sargeant further quoted Baszler: “‘D’Alelio, I think I’m a better wrestler than her, so it was back to basics and back to old-school Shayna, taking someone down and submitting them.”<sup>187</sup> He added: “When . . . Baszler was unable to sink in a rear-naked choke, she brought the crowd back to life by repeatedly slamming her foot down against D’Alelio’s Achilles. To those watching, it appeared that Baszler was merely . . . looking for a way to deal out some extra damage. In reality, she was using her catch wrestling experience to try to set up a toe hold.”<sup>188</sup> As expected, Sargent employed a mass of technical jargon to explain Baszler’s tactics.

Readers wrote twenty-one comments on the Hemminger article, where he opined that Invicta put on the best MMA event of the weekend.<sup>189</sup> J\_M\_I HIMSELF complained: “I thought bellator was good . . . And . . . the fx (UFC card on the FX TV channel) was exciting. Maybe your too close sometimes Hemmi,” implying the sportswriter was too invested with WMMA to be a fair judge.<sup>190</sup> Hemminger retorted: “I didn't say they were bad. My argument was more the moral side (not getting arrested or disqualified).”<sup>191</sup> SIMON WEST also espoused that *MMA Mania* was: “More and more like bloody elbow every day, it's sad to say i think i need to start

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<sup>186</sup> Rob Sargent, “Shayna Baszler Eyes Invicta FC Title, Sara McMann Rematch,” MMArising.com, October 11, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/10/11/shayna-baszler-eyes-invicta-fc-title-sara-mcmann-rematch/>.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/8/3471446/women-of-invicta-lead-by-example-after-ufc-and-bellator-drop-the-ball>.

<sup>190</sup> J\_M\_I Himself, October 8, 2012 (10:06am) Comment on Hemminger, “Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>191</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 8, 2012 (11:56am) Comment on Hemminger, “Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend.”

looking for a new MMA site.”<sup>192</sup> Both commenters opined that a WMMA event on the same weekend as three other major fight cards could not be the best weekend card because of the gender involved, each participating in VMA Trait 1. Hemminger responded: “so after over several hundred interviews, extensive fight breakdowns plus coverage of countless events. I’m not allowed to have an opinion?”<sup>193</sup> While far from promoting toxic masculinity, many *MMA Mania* readers believed that the emphasized feminine ideal of non-athletic and unskilled women was enough to disprove the statement: **Invicta** put on quality events.

All but three of twenty-five comments on Hemminger’s **Invicta** recap article focused on praising WMMA technical competence, rare for *MMA Mania*.<sup>194</sup> Unsurprisingly, there was the usual visual objectification, such as when JON ESTRADA SR. bragged: “Make no mistake about it. I want to get Jessica Penne pregnant. I found a pornstar that looks like her and I been happy letting my wife sleep in all mornin.”<sup>195</sup> JON ESTRADA SR enthusiastically utilized Toxic Trait 1 and VMA Traits 2 through 4. But others both engaged in and refrained from similar behavior, such as JONBON JOEY stating: “I think female grappling is more fun then mens. not becuae they’re all sexy & shit, well not only that, but they are much more flexible & agile than guys so the scrambles became so wild & sexy....i mean crazy.”<sup>196</sup> He openly engaged in VMA Traits 2 and 4 while praising WMMA's athleticism. Others focused solely on technical

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<sup>192</sup> Simon West, October 8, 2012 (6:37am) Comment on Hemminger, “Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend.”

<sup>193</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/8/3471446/women-of-invicta-lead-by-example-after-ufc-and-bellator-drop-the-ball>

<sup>194</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results recap: Penne crowned inaugural Invicta champion, Baszler shines,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 7, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/7/3467612/invicta-fc-3-results-recap-penne-crowned-inaugural-invicta-champion>.

<sup>195</sup> Jon Estrada Sr., October 7, 2012 (11:37am), Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results recap: Penne crowned inaugural Invicta champion, Baszler shines.”

<sup>196</sup> JonBon Joey, October 7, 2012 (1:03pm), Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results recap: Penne crowned inaugural Invicta champion, Baszler shines.”

competence, like when GRETZKYOVERYOUJETSKI espoused: “That card was great, and I can't wait for Invicta FC 4. Once SF folds all the women can fight for Invicta FC.”<sup>197</sup>

Readers posted thirty-two reader comments to Stephanie Haynes’ interview with Shannon Knapp for *Bloody Elbow*. In the wake of the Ronda Rousey signing, the vast majority debated whether **Invicta** would get bought out by Zuffa and its possible future status as a minor league feeder system to the **UFC**.<sup>198</sup> None of the comments focused on emphasized feminine narratives, outside a handful proclaiming that they wanted to marry Knapp.<sup>199</sup>

On T.P. Grant’s post-fight week recap article, fans wrote fifty-seven comments.<sup>200</sup> ROBBYEDROBBY EDWARDS exclaimed: “I think invictafc is going in the right direction, all three have easily outperformed every ufc . . . card, knapp knows more about the mma business than you, so i think she is proving what works, the ladies have never recieved the amount of exposure that they are getting now. If only the mma media realized that there are lots of talented women not named rousey, once strikeforce folds i hope the ufc is smart enough to add at least 135 and 115 pd women div.”<sup>201</sup>

A few readers disagreed with ROBBYEDROBBY EDWARDS, including STEVE4192, who argued: “I enjoy Invicta and appreciate what they are doing for WMMA, but statements like

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<sup>197</sup> Gretzkyoveryourjetski, October 7, 2012 (4:51pm), Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results recap: Penne crowned inaugural Invicta champion, Baszler shines.”

<sup>198</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Shannon Knapp discusses working relationship with the UFC,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, November 9, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/11/9/3621610/shannon-knapp-discusses-working-relationship-with-the-ufc>.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> T.P. Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/7/3467162/ufc-Bellator-Invicta-one-fc-results-sunday-perspective-winners-losers>.

<sup>201</sup> RobbyedRobby Edwards, October 7, 2012 (10:14am) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.”

this (**Invicta** outperforming **UFC**) are downright ludicrous.”<sup>202</sup> PDL added: “It’s like the ‘UFC will be bigger than soccer!’ talk. It’s not true and never will be for tons of reasons, and that’s ok. Nothing wrong with being a fun niche.”<sup>203</sup> In reply, SPORTSWAMNICOM countered: “The Invicta cards as of late have outperformed the summer Bellator cards. The Bellator card was unimpressive as the three of the four matches were quasi uneventful or one sided (the other was a DQ due to the axe kick to the balls). Watch the Waterson-Schuckman fight and you will see striking, grappling, and submissions that you didn’t get from men’s heavyweights.”<sup>204</sup>

DUCK noted after three **Invicta** events: “We’re to the point we’re judging the cards on the fights themselves rather than the novelty of a all-women’s card. That’s a good thing . . . the fights, the total production seems fine. No glaring errors, no promotional mistakes, not WTF? moments to be had. To pull off 3 live events with live streams and to have everyone talking about the fights themselves rather than outside-the-cage matters has to be a plus. Totally professional effort.”<sup>205</sup> In response to PDL, claiming Shannon Knapp was lying about the viewership numbers again,<sup>206</sup> CHRISTOPHER MULDONG rebutted: “InvictaFC is very good at social media. All the fighters are on Twitter and Facebook, and a good amount of them are attractive female fighters. They constantly tweet that they are fighting in InvictaFC, and especially if they are attractive, I think it’s safe to say that men (and women) will tune in.”<sup>207</sup>

The author, T.P. Grant, entering the comment section himself, made an interesting comparison about the state of WMMA. He wrote: “To me this seems to perfectly parallel major

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<sup>202</sup> Steve4192, October 7, 2012 (12:28pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>203</sup> Pdl, October 7, 2012 (12:34pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.”

<sup>204</sup> Sportswamicom, October 7, 2012 (1:47pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.”

<sup>205</sup> Duck, October 7, 2012 (12:45pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.”

<sup>206</sup> Pdl, October 7, 2012 (12:58pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.”

<sup>207</sup> Christopher Muldong, October 7, 2012 (6:07pm) Comment on Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective.”

promotion MMA (UFC) and regional promotion MMA and fan reaction to one or the other. Invicta, talent wise, is somewhere in between so you get really fun, technical matches and fights that are sloppy as all hell. Invicta is using what they have very smartly and I think will continue to grow. And yes I'm crushing pretty hard on Penne," compliant with VMA Trait 2.<sup>208</sup> Outside of that last sentence, Grant largely avoided emphasized feminine talking points. However, JAMES BRADY did not let it go unnoticed, remarking: "Ugh that's one issue with it all. we 'crush hard' on the female fighters. so much for legitimacy."<sup>209</sup> Grant countered: "As long as Penne is respected as an athlete and I respect the hell out of her grappling and fighting ability. why is this a problem? Male athletes, like Tom Brady, become famous for not just good play but also their looks, did that make them any less legitimate?"<sup>210</sup> Here, Grant fails to realize that while Brady may be considered handsome by female fans, comparing that to sports journalists and broadcast commentary teams making such statements about female athletes contributes to an atmosphere of online misogyny.

On the *Morning Report* article published by *MMA Fighting*, only one of seven comments focused on WMMA, one which severely downplayed women's technical competence in fighting.<sup>211</sup> POO\_GHOST opined: "Please don't bring women into the UFC. How have they deserved it exactly? They have Invicta, let them grow that and really earn it. They want to earn a man's pay in the UFC, but women have never worked to build the UFC to that point. If you really want to earn it, build your own women's brand, don't piggy back off of someone else."<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> T.P. Grant, October 7, 2012 (12:58pm) Comment on Grant, "UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective."

<sup>209</sup> James Brady, October 7, 2012 (5:08pm) Comment on Grant, "UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective."

<sup>210</sup> T.P. Grant, October 8, 2012 (2:48pm) Comment on Grant, "UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective."

<sup>211</sup> Shaun Al-Shatti, "Morning Report: Cormier's trainer wants Werdum; Bonnar preparing post-UFC 153 exodus from Brazil, October 11, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/10/10/3479602/morning-report-cormiers-trainer-wants-werdum-bonnar-preparing-ufc-153-exodus-brazil#comments>.

<sup>212</sup> Poo\_Ghost, October 11, 2012 (5:18pm) Comment on Al-Shatti, "Morning Report: Cormier's trainer wants Werdum; Bonnar preparing post-UFC 153 exodus from Brazil."

This is a hegemonic masculine view, borderline toxic, as it expects women who are denied the opportunity to fight for many major promotions to build a brand all on their own, equivalent to the top men's major league, to gain parity. POO\_GHOST'S statement that women like Shayna Baszler, who have been fighting since the early 2000s, do not belong in the **UFC** because they did not participate in its fundamental growth is ignorant of women's fighting prowess, the sacrifices they made to be fighters, and the general ambivalence shown towards WMMA until **Invicta** and Ronda Rousey.<sup>213</sup> This thought process openly engages in VMA Trait 1 and Toxic Trait 1, a rare example of the latter being utilized without sexualizing women.

On the final *MMA Roundtable* of October, half of the eight comments expressed emphasized feminine and toxic masculine adherence.<sup>214</sup> DFDFDFD stated: "Give UFC women's MMA 3 fights... then its back to the Kitchen ladies . . . or bedroom....almost forgot that one."<sup>215</sup> Here the poster focuses on women appealing to his "desire" and them aspiring to feminine sociability that he wishes WMMA fighters would fulfill. He reflected Toxic Trait 1 mixed with VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4. Overall, DFDFDFD was saying that women do not belong in the **UFC**, which many commenters on several articles were rallying around as a men's only league.

In response, GRIZZLY907 wrote: "So what you're sayin.. is that you'd rather watch two huge sweaty dudes fight over watching two hot and sweaty girls pull guard?"<sup>216</sup> While he disagrees that women do not belong in the **UFC** like DFDFDFD, GRIZZLY907 portrays

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<sup>213</sup> "Shayna Baszler," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019.

<https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>214</sup> Mike Chiappetta, "MMA Roundtable: Women in the UFC, covered-up drug tests, VADA and more," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, October 24, 2012. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2012/10/24/3548502/mma-roundtable-women-in-the-ufc-covered-up-drug-tests-vada-and-more>.

<sup>215</sup> Dfdfd, October 24, 2012 (3:41pm) Comment on Chiappetta, "MMA Roundtable: Women in the UFC, covered-up drug tests, VADA and more." Two separate posts but both made by same commenter at same timestamp.

<sup>216</sup> Grizzly907, October 24, 2012 (7:00pm) Comment on Chiappetta, "MMA Roundtable: Women in the UFC, covered-up drug tests, VADA and more." Two separate posts but both made by same commenter at same timestamp.



hegemonic masculinity. First, he clarified that WMMA fighters must be hot and sweaty, visually objectifying them. Second, he implied that if DFDFFD does not enjoy women fighting, he must be gay for not being aroused by it, which suggests homosexuality is something worth mocking. This attacks subordinate masculinities, of which gay men are a prominent group.<sup>217</sup> So despite his attempt to defend WMMA, he exuded Toxic Trait 2 as well as VMA Traits 2 and 4.

A few days after **Invicta FC 3**, sportswriter Ben Fowlkes published a lengthy article for *MMA Junkie*, which covered a behind-the-scenes look at the all-WMMA card.<sup>218</sup> Having been invited by Shannon Knapp to the event, Fowlkes tried to humanize the fighters and WMMA in a multi-faceted human-interest story. Before analyzing the article, I must explain why this is the only article examined from *MMA Junkie* in this section. For the most part, *MMA Junkie* is absent from both this chapter and the one that preceded it. With the amount of data available from the three Vox Media websites, *Sherdog*, and *MMA Rising* about both **Invicta FC** and Ronda Rousey during 2012 and 2013, adding *MMA Junkie*'s extensive library of articles to those analyzed would only serve to create more pages in this study, not contributing anything new or different to the various narratives.<sup>219</sup> However, Fowlke's article was too in-depth an op-ed to ignore in covering aspects of the **Invicta** production process and correcting misconceptions that the primarily male audience held about WMMA.

Fowlkes opened with his thoughts on **Invicta** before their third event, remarking:

For me, the appeal was Invicta itself, which, I admit, sounded to me like a losing idea when I first heard about it. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy women's MMA. I just wasn't sure the crowded landscape of the sport had room for an organization that does nothing but female fights . . . And yet, after two events, Invicta had a decent buzz going. The fights were quality . . . and hardcore

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<sup>217</sup> Connell, *Gender and Power*, 184.

<sup>218</sup> Ben Fowlkes, "Behind the scenes at Invicta FC 3," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today Sports, October 8, 2012. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2012/10/ben-fowlkes-behind-the-scenes-at-invicta-fc-3>.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

fight fans – or at the least the subset of hardcore fight fans that actively follows women’s MMA – had begun talking about Invicta like it was an organization to be taken seriously . . . The women at or near the top of the card can expect to make three or four grand to show and another three or four grand to win. That’s ‘fair market value,’ according to Knapp, but it’s also better than most female fighters can do anywhere else in the current climate.<sup>220</sup>

Based on these words, Fowlkes initially felt **Invicta** would not succeed due to its all-WMMA focus. The MMA landscape was predominately geared toward male fighters and fans, so presenting more than a handful of WMMA fights on a card might fail to draw. However, the promotion managed to win over a small yet dedicated fanbase after two fight cards. Most importantly, Fowlkes said Invicta was willing to lose money to ensure their fighters were well compensated. After a paragraph featuring the debuting Tecia Torres’ declaration that she could not afford to quit her job to be a fulltime fighter, Fowlkes exclaimed: “These are the stories we love as fight fans. The girl taking the bus to the gym, trying to make enough to get a crappy car, which will in turn allow her to spend more time in the gym so she can win more fights, maybe eventually making enough to quit her crappy job. That’s the dream, right? That’s why it feels good to think that Invicta is making it happen, rewarding the sacrifice and hard work of female fighters, whose blood is just as red as what you’ll see on the canvas at a UFC event . . . the way they go at it, they’ve got just as much heart as the men, maybe more.”<sup>221</sup> Fowlkes pointed out the hypocrisy of many MMA fans, who praised **UFC** male fighters for having undergone monetary struggles early in their career. However, they would ignore a female counterpart going through the same experiences and having the same drive to succeed.

He next discussed the hegemonic masculine environment of MMA, both in the gym and online. He quoted Julie Kedzie: “You can’t go around f—ing the guys in the gym and creating

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

drama. You just can't."<sup>222</sup> Fowlkes then elaborated: "Because even if you don't, there are those who will assume that you have. They'll write you off as a woman playing a man's game. They'll hit you with all manner of sexist crap in Internet comments and message board rants, and it will be so tired and expected . . . as to be more boring than offensive. Women like Kedzie and Knapp know this, just like they know there's no real money in this for women. The fact that they do it anyway tells you how much they love it, almost in spite of themselves."<sup>223</sup> Fowlkes outlined clearly how misogynistic MMA gym and fan culture can be towards female fighters. Especially noteworthy was Fowlkes's description of the online sexist treatment of WMMA as: "So tired and expected and unsurprising as to be more boring than offensive."<sup>224</sup> This statement is one of the lone examples of an MMA writer directly calling out the massive amount of online misogyny found in article comment sections.

Fowlkes then addressed individual fights on the card, writing about the co-main event: "Shayna Baszler walks out to a heavy metal soundtrack, clutching a flying-V guitar . . . then proves once again how good and how mean she is when she stomps repeatedly on Sarah D'Alelio's ankle before finishing her with a rear-naked choke."<sup>225</sup> Fowlkes did not participate in criticizing any of Baszler's visible defiance to emphasized femininity. He almost seemed to be applauding it. This attitude was what was lacking across the various MMA news websites. Many sportswriters did not mention emphasized feminine norms, but few celebrated its noted absences. For example, while *MMA Rising* did not focus on emphasized femininity, it also did not give much description to acts by fighters that defied the will of gender hegemony. In the case of

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

Shayna Baszler, Fowlkes specified her love of heavy metal music, applauded her unsociable stomps to D'Alelio's ankle, and praised her technical fighting competence.<sup>226</sup>

Fowlkes concluded: "As much as MMA fans love to idolize the warrior spirit of all those men who boast that they'd fight for free, such is their love for the thrill of unarmed combat, it's the women who are coming the closest to actually living that ideal. A female fighter who does this for money is a person who either has an extremely high estimate of her own ability to beat the odds, or else someone who has a poor understanding of math."<sup>227</sup> Interestingly, this reminds me a lot of amateurism literature, promoting of the ideals of a "true sportsman." However, unlike famed amateur athletic advocate former IOC president Avery Brundage, Fowlkes spoke fondly of the female athlete.<sup>228</sup> He believed that MMA is not a preserve reserved solely for male participants.<sup>229</sup> This article was published just one month before the **UFC** signed Ronda Rousey, to whom Fowlkes inadvertently drew a parallel when he surmised that a female fighter solely out to make money was: "a person who either has an extremely high estimate of her own ability to beat the odds, or else someone who has a poor understanding of math."<sup>230</sup> Rousey was the example of the former, while the rest of WMMA, in Fowlkes words, were motivated primarily by the love of the sport. Yet, in a display of emphasized femininity's popularity, it was mostly Rousey that WMMA fans and detractors gravitated towards.

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Allen Guttmann. *The Games Must Go on: Avery Brundage and the Olympics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>229</sup> Ben Fowlkes, "Behind the scenes at Invicta FC 3," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today Sports, October 8, 2012. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2012/10/ben-fowlkes-behind-the-scenes-at-invicta-fc-3>.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

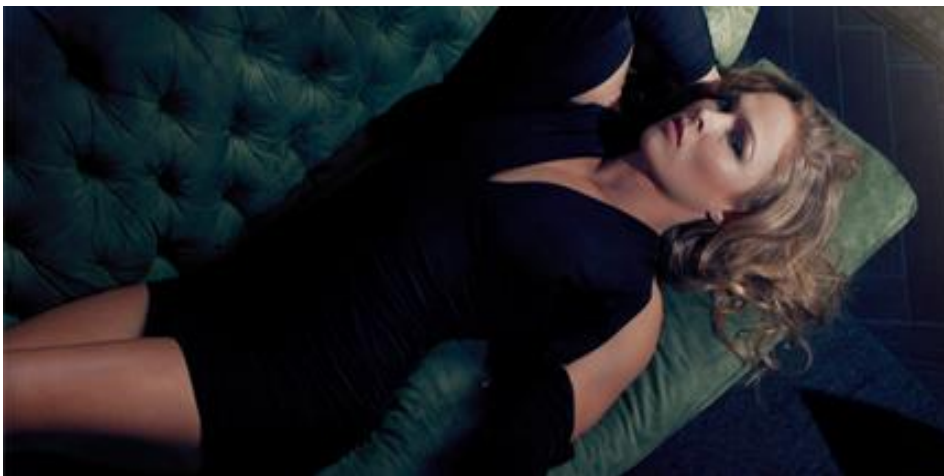


Figure 18 Ronda Rousey posing for Muscle & Fitness after winning the Strikeforce Women's Bantamweight Championship<sup>231</sup>

## Section 2: Ronda Rousey Joins the UFC

### November 2012

A month later, the **UFC** announced they had signed Ronda Rousey. Outside of the live fight streams, articles about Rousey once again drew considerably more web traffic than **Invicta** coverage. For *MMA Mania*, Thomas Myers wrote: “Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) President Dana White apparently wasn't kidding when he recently boasted that he was 'absolutely' committed to introducing a women's division sometime in the near future. In fact . . . it's going to happen much sooner rather than possibly expected. White has reportedly inked female Strikeforce Bantamweight Champion Ronda Rousey to a UFC contract . . . it's unclear who she would fight first, but Sara McMann, Cristiane Cyborg and Miesha Tate were mentioned as possibilities. Meow.”<sup>232</sup> The “meow” implies a catfight, women fighting to titillate men,

<sup>231</sup> Austin Hargrave, “STRIKEFORCE BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION RONDA ROUSEY,” muscleandfitness.com, JW Media, 2012. <https://www.muscleandfitness.com/athletes-celebrities/strikeforce-bantamweight-champion-ronda-rousey/>.

<sup>232</sup> Thomas Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/11/8/3620578/report-strikeforce-folding-jan-2013-showtime-ronda-rousey-ufc>.

allowing one word to imply VMA Traits 2 and 4. What the readers wrote in the attached comments mirrored this emphasized feminine promotion, along with added toxic masculinity.

Many of the 242 comments posted insisted that Rousey was romantically involved with Dana White, as they felt that was the only way the UFC would sign a female fighter.<sup>233</sup> STR8\_RIGHT exclaimed: “Fuck Ronda in the UFC Im sure Dana did.”<sup>234</sup> THE\_COMEDIAN echoed: “The Ronda sex tape Will be better known as the Dana white sex tape this guy is clearly bangin her I mean come on!”<sup>235</sup> Both posts featured Toxic Trait 1 while displaying VMA Traits 2 and 4. UNAMBIG undermined women’s technical competence, pontificating: “Women’s MMA. It's 1,000 times less skilled than Men's MMA, but they have vaginas and vaginas are, on the whole, good.”<sup>236</sup> STRENGTHU darkly theorized: “This is true. Well, they say men would have taken out all the women a long time ago if they didn't have vaginas.”<sup>237</sup> STR8\_RIGHT agreed, arguing: “vagina and titties are the only thing keeping women in existence.”<sup>238</sup> These three posts imply that if it were not for feminine sex appeal, men would exterminate women because the latter gender would cease to serve a societal function. This text exchange is the ultimate example of toxic masculine behaviors expressed in the various quotations analyzed, exuding Toxic Traits 1 and 3 amidst VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4.

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Str8\_right, November 9, 2012 (10:44am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>235</sup> The\_Comedian, November 8, 2012 (10:10pm) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>236</sup> Unambig, November 8, 2012 (9:36am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>237</sup> STRENGTHU, November 8, 2012 (11:41Pm) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>238</sup> Str8\_right, November 9, 2012 (10:43am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

JONNYBOY6969 declared: “I’m sure everyone on this site,excluding the gays,would definitely bang her (Rousey) if they had the chance,”<sup>239</sup> reflecting the first three traits of VMAs and the first two of toxic masculinity. He stated earlier that he felt neither she nor any other woman would ever deserve the main event position on a card.<sup>240</sup> BNF was harsher, expositing: “Fucking UFC. I will never buy a PPV with chicks on it.”<sup>241</sup> Both these comments skirted the line of expressing VMA Trait 1. JTC5150 doubted Rousey would appear much on **UFC** PPVS, theorizing: “I bet she’ll be the one exception to the loaning fighters out clause and that Dana will loan her out to Invicta . . . that gushes over Dana so much. He’ll keep her for the Cyborg fight, and maybe buy Invicta or borrow their fighters. It’s the only way I can see they could get her fights.”<sup>242</sup> FNFRANCHISE replied: “Loaning or Pimping?” once again stating the importance of satisfying their male gaze, utilizing VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>243</sup> DRAIN remarked: “women are supposed to be making sammiches and giving head nobody wants to see a she-beast kicking ass, it’s just not that sexy.”<sup>244</sup> DRAIN represented VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4, along with Toxic Trait 1. There were, however, two solitary dissenters. First, 10THDEGREEWHITEBELT opined: “Most fo you sound like cunts. Why hate on women’s MMA?? there not as good as the guys? This is the infancy . . . let it grow! Remember how one dimensional shit was back in the day? Bring on women’s MMA and all the titties that come with it,”<sup>245</sup> managing to feature VMA Trait 2 in his

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<sup>239</sup> Jonnyboy6969, November 9, 2012 (10:54am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>240</sup> Jonnyboy6969, November 8, 2012 (9:48am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>241</sup> BNF, November 8, 2012 (9:55pm) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>242</sup> Jtc5150, November 8, 2012 (10:02am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>243</sup> FnFranchise, November 8, 2012 (10:03pm) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>244</sup> Drain, November 9, 2012 (9:45am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>245</sup> 10thDegreeWhiteBelt, November 9, 2012 (1:25am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

otherwise progressive stance. CATANACH concurred: “I agree, reading through the majority of these comments makes a lot of you sound pretty pathetic.”<sup>246</sup> Containing over 300 instances of VMAS, this comment section showed how much Rousey, let alone the idea of her entering the UFC’s male preserve, highlighted toxic masculinity within *MMA Mania*’s readership.

Ariel Helwani wrote the counterpart article for *MMA Fighting*, which contained no hint of emphasized feminine narratives beyond repeating Dana’s quote about Ronda being a dude “trapped in a beautiful body.”<sup>247</sup> Helwani announced: “Ronda Rousey is on the verge of making history. The Strikeforce women's bantamweight champion has fought her final fight for the promotion and is set to make her UFC debut in the near future.”<sup>248</sup>

101 comments were posted to the article, featuring a variety of narratives.<sup>249</sup> NISA.KAJOL@YAHOO.COM argued: “Women’s division is still very shallow. UFC will have to search the world for the best female fighters.”<sup>250</sup> DBKKK countered: “You have no idea what you are talking about. womens 135 has plenty of talent, its better than the two midget divisions feather weight and bantam weight, what depth do they have? . . . such a typical argument of someone that doesnt follow womens mma.”<sup>251</sup> OMAXX joked about adding women to an upcoming season of *The Ultimate Fighter*, speculating: “How bout a mixed house with girls and guys...Then all the booze would make sense,” likely referring to drunken people being

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<sup>246</sup> Catanatch, November 9, 2012 (5:17am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

<sup>247</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January,” *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/11/8/3620614/report-ronday-rousey-set-to-join-ufc-strikeforce-to-hold-last-event>.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Nisa.kajol@yahoo.com, November 8, 2012 (9:47pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>251</sup> Dbkkk, November 8, 2012 (11:10pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”



supposedly more willing to engage in sexual activities, instigating VMA Trait 4.<sup>252</sup>

SAMHYMAN opined: “I just think that WMMA is not deep enough yet for a full competitive division. For it to stick with the casual audience, there needs to be consistent product. If the UFC just throws on a single WMMA fight every couple of months it would attract a following. It has been hard for the (male) flyweights. . . to pick up a full fanbase amongst the casuals. Rousey may be a budding star but . . . I’m just afraid that this is too soon and if it fails, there is only one first impression.”<sup>253</sup> DANAISMYDAD complained: “MEH Time for me to quit. Fought my first fight in 1992 tough man contest — 1997 fought my first MMA fight. Gone are the good ol days,” inferring that the good old days were when women did not intrude on his MMA fandom, reflecting VMA Trait 1.<sup>254</sup> EYEBROWSMULLIGAN furthered the notion of women solely being good at sex, exclaiming, “Don’t know what Ron did to him (Dana White) behind tinted limo windows, but the guy can’t shut his trap about her,” along with VMA Trait 4 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>255</sup> VINCHENZO replied: “These childish comments...from lonely guys about Rousey are getting so predictable. I know you’re lonely since childish predictable guys don’t get laid.”<sup>256</sup>

VOXMEDIAUSER698731 admitted: “I’m happy for the women mma fighters & fans but – i don’t care, i don’t mean it in a bad way but, i’m not interested in watching women fight.”<sup>257</sup>

EDDIE HAYMAKER countered arguments about lack of depth in WMMA, pontificating:

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<sup>252</sup> Omaxx, November 9, 2012 (1:31am) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>253</sup> Samhyman, November 8, 2012 (9:13pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>254</sup> Danaismydad, November 8, 2012 (10:13pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>255</sup> EyebrowsMulligan, November 8, 2012 (10:34pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>256</sup> Vincenzo, November 8, 2012 (11:33pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>257</sup> VoxMediaUser698731, November 8, 2012 (11:57pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

“come on ufc round em all up - and you HAVE a competitive division,” proceeding to list ten WMMA bantamweights.<sup>258</sup> Both JAMESGLORY and THE3ROOSTER agreed with HAYMAKER’s assessment.<sup>259</sup> However, the latter also commented: “If it really ever got thin they could always go with Ladyboys from Thailand.”<sup>260</sup> Despite promoting WMMA, EDDIE found a way to engage in toxic masculinity, specifically Toxic Trait 2 and VMA Trait 4. EDDIE HAYMAKER furthered his original point, arguing: “They always said the problem was depth – but I never understood or accepted that angle at all. IMO the ufc was just worried about the mainstream watching bloody fist fights with women and becoming anti-mma.”<sup>261</sup> DANAGO concluded the comments section by remarking: “Its officially official, MMA as we know it is dead. Give me back the days when there were 5 weight divisions over this watered down garbage any day of the week.”<sup>262</sup> DANAGO complained about the mere presence of women competing in the UFC, dismissing any potential technical competence WMMA fighters might possess, slightly participating in VMA Trait 1.

ShinSplints wrote the version for *Bloody Elbow*. He summarized: “It's looking like UFC president Dana White's recent talk about WMMA coming to the sport's premier promotion will happen sooner rather than later. White's made it no secret that he's become a big fan of . . .

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<sup>258</sup> Eddie Haymaker, November 9, 2012 (12:40am) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.” He listed Rousey, Kaufman, Davis, Tate, McMann, Baszler, Carmouche, Nunes, D’Alelio, and Zingano.

<sup>259</sup> Ariel Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/11/8/3620614/report-ronday-rousey-set-to-join-ufc-strikeforce-to-hold-last-event>.

<sup>260</sup> Th3Rooster, November 9, 2012 (1:05am) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>261</sup> Eddie Haymaker, November 8, 2012 (9:47pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

<sup>262</sup> Danago, November 9, 2012 (7:06am) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.”

Ronda Rousey. Rumors are surfacing now about Rousey's move to the UFC . . . If this gets confirmed it will be a huge win for WMMA.”<sup>263</sup>

Readers contributed 290 comments to the ShinSplints article, with a wide range of opinions on the Rousey signing.<sup>264</sup> ASILVA remarked: “Women in UFC? No thanks.” To this, D.E.O. posted a GIF from the film *The Big Lebowski* where the title character exclaims: “Yeah, well, that’s just, like, your opinion, man.”<sup>265</sup> JOHN DANAHER’S HAIR complained, stating: “The dude’s not allowed to not like wmma? C’mon now- I love the sport, but outside of maybe 6 fighters, the skill level and depth of the women’s divisions are just awful. They’re not immune from criticism just because of their gender. Shit- the quality on TUF is better than women’s fights out of the top 5.”<sup>266</sup> ME(LISSA) did not concur, proclaiming: “Tate vs Kedzie was bonkers. Kaufman vs Davis was a blood bath. The fights in Invicta have been consistently enjoyable. I’d rather watch that than a couple bottom of the barrel TUF contestants dry hump each other for 10-15 minutes.”<sup>267</sup> She added: “People are allowed not to enjoy WMMA. But dismissing, as if it is irrelevant, is sexist.”<sup>268</sup> CATCHNJ687 wrote: “Women have just as much right to participate in the sport they love. This also means better financial compensation and more of a reason for higher quality female athletes to get involved in the sport which is a great thing . . . from my experience even on the local scene the girls always come to fight and usually

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<sup>263</sup> ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter,” BloodyElbow.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/11/8/3620524/report-ronda-rousey-to-become-first-female-ufc-fighter-wmma>.

<sup>264</sup> Asilva, November 8, 2012 (8:59pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>265</sup> D.E.O., November 8, 2012 (9:06pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>266</sup> John Danaher’s Hair, November 8, 2012 (9:32pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>267</sup> Me(lissa), November 9, 2012 (2:33pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>268</sup> Me(lissa), November 9, 2012 (2:34pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

put on a hell of a show.”<sup>269</sup> This sparked off a lengthy debate about the popularity of women’s sports. BIGWEEZE espoused:

In general, women’s sports rely on novelty . . . They are inferior sportsmen, and unless the limitations that females have in MMA don’t change the sport in palatable way to me. There are less abrupt endings, more face mashing/bruising, and less clean & impressive techniques. The WNBA isn’t a better or more skilled game of basketball just they have no skillless dunking machines. Ronda is impressive yes, but mostly because of her character and portrayal as a loudmouth destroyer. But this destruction is as much about her as the level of competition. The conundrum is that a deeper women’s division would legitimize WMMA, but dim its brightest star and reduce WMMA’s buzz.<sup>270</sup>

MEMITIM countered: “Rousey’s insanely brutal and technical armbars have nothing to do with her rise among MMA fans? It’s just her trash talk? Her trash talk is mediocre at best. Her armbar submissions are fucking amazing.”<sup>271</sup> LEBRON’S HAIRLINE replied: “It seems to be called sexist or chauvinistic to make a factual point these days: women are physically inferior to men in strength, speed, stamina, and arguably coordination. Therefore, women’s sports will never be as entertaining as men’s sports.”<sup>272</sup>

CHRISTOPHER MULDONG claimed: “In MMA, skill level doesn’t necessarily equate to entertainment. Flyweights who are highly skilled get booed . . . Fights that are STAND AND BANG with skill tossed out the window generally get Fight of the Night. There are still people who boo once a fight hits the ground . . . Entertainment is subjective. You are correct that women

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<sup>269</sup> CatchNJ687, November 8, 2012 (10:10pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>270</sup> Bigweeze, November 8, 2012 (9:44pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>271</sup> Memitim, November 8, 2012 (10:02pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>272</sup> Lebron’s hairline, November 9, 2012 (12:31am) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

are physically inferior to men (in general), but that doesn't mean that they generate less entertainment in MMA bouts."<sup>273</sup>

PUNISHER BASS pointed out the emphasized feminine notion of a sole face of WMMA, noting: "I think they're making a mistake building WMMA on Ronda's shoulders alone. It's not a very strong foundation, and things could easily come crashing down in/when she gets beaten . . . I look forward to WMMA in the UFC, I just don't want it to be a showcase for a single fighter."<sup>274</sup> The conversation then turned to a cornerstone of emphasized femininity, mandated female fragility. BLOODY L expressed: "I think grappling heavy WMMA fights are way more friendly to casual viewers than rock-em sock-em ladies boxing."<sup>275</sup> DARTHKITTY retorted: "So you are saying it looks natural for a woman to be on her back with someone inbetween her legs," featuring Toxic Trait 1 in unison with VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>276</sup> THA DUDE agreed with BLOODY L, writing: "Viewers don't want to watch women punch each other in the face . . . it doesn't matter what channel they are on . . . she's (Rousey) a novelty act."<sup>277</sup> Espousing VMA Trait 1, DISHONEST ABE echoed *MMA Mania* readers: "They should have just let Invicta keep all the women. This is stupid. I want Invicta to be like the WNBA and handle ALL of those responsibilities. This should not be a co-ed thing. Doesn't make any

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<sup>273</sup> Christopher Muldong, November 9, 2012 (12:45am) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter."

<sup>274</sup> Punisher Bass, November 8, 2012 (9:01pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter."

<sup>275</sup> Bloody L, November 9, 2012 (2:22am) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter."

<sup>276</sup> DarthKitty, November 9, 2012 (2:28am) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter." Parentheses mine.

<sup>277</sup> Tha dude, November 10, 2012 (9:32pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter." Parentheses mine.

sense.”<sup>278</sup> D.E.O. sarcastically retorted: “DAMN RIGHT! Women! Know your place.”<sup>279</sup>

Overall, the *Bloody Elbow* readership uttered a few emphasized feminine statements, debated the talent depth of the women’s division, arguing over female fragility and the athletic ability/technical competence differences between the genders. While it did feature posters who promoted emphasized feminine/toxic masculine gender myths and ideals, there was a visible majority counterbalance opposing these narratives. In particular, “penis ratings” were largely absent.<sup>280</sup>

A day later, Dave Meltzer published an article for *MMA Fighting* about the uncertainty of the money Rousey would bring in by headlining a **UFC PPV**. Detailing the history of the company’s stance towards WMMA, Meltzer exclaimed: “White and UFC CEO Lorenzo Fertitta were publicly negative for years on women's fighting. White first thought women shouldn't fight, and questioned whether the public would want to see it. When Carano became a big star, he changed his stance to that there just wasn't enough depth to introduce a women's division. When someone with the obvious marketing potential of Rousey came along, they opened their doors.”<sup>281</sup> This remark openly addresses how important it was to abide by emphasized feminine norms to catch the attention of Dana White. Carano frequently marketed herself as appealing to the male gaze, often emitting a sociable attitude.<sup>282</sup> While Rousey’s brash nature was more

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<sup>278</sup> Dishonest Abe, November 8, 2012 (11:19pm) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>279</sup> D.E.O., November 9, 2012 (12:10am) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”

<sup>280</sup> ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter,” *BloodyElbow.com*, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/11/8/3620524/report-ronda-rousey-to-become-first-female-ufc-fighter-wmma>.

<sup>281</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Uncharted waters for a Ronda Rousey headlined pay-per-view,” *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, November 25, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/11/25/3680322/uncharted-waters-for-a-rousey-headlined-pay-per-view>.

<sup>282</sup> “Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired),” sstorm10, February 7, 2010, video, 6:47. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05EReI>.

confrontational than Carano's, she also used the feminine sex factor in her marketing. She argued that she deserved to fight Tate for the **Strikeforce** title because Rousey felt that number 1 contender Sarah Kaufman was not as physically attractive as she or Tate.<sup>283</sup>

Meltzer continued: "Having been in arenas seeing women's fights for years, the reaction is no longer gender-based. It was a little when first introduced, and came off like a novelty act in the early days . . . Today, if a woman is a star or the fight is exciting, people are with it every bit as much as the men. If the fight is boring, and the personalities don't click, the crowds are usually not as quick to turn on it, but lose interest just the same."<sup>284</sup> Unlike his analysis of White's preference for feminine WMMA fighters, Meltzer grossly oversimplified how the increased presence of WMMA on the main stage of the sport changed audience reactions toward the women's game. For example, he did not mention the 2010 Strikeforce Kaufman-Hashi title fight, in which the perceived boredom sent fans heading for the exits before it concluded.<sup>285</sup> The Kaufman-Hashi fight was later used as evidence by sportswriters, such as Jonathan Snowden<sup>286</sup> and Brent Brookhouse, to keep women from headlining major MMA cards.<sup>287</sup> Meltzer also questioned the staying power of Rousey, stating: "When Santos beat Carano, and Carano left the

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<sup>283</sup> Jennings, *She's a Knockout!*, 145-149.

<sup>284</sup> Dave Meltzer, "Uncharted waters for a Ronda Rousey headlined pay-per-view," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 25, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/11/25/3680322/uncharted-waters-for-a-rousey-headlined-pay-per-view>.

<sup>285</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Strikeforce Challengers: Kaufman vs. Hashi - Post-Hangover Thoughts," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, February 27, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/2/27/1329126/strikeforce-challengers-kaufman-vs>.

<sup>286</sup> Jonathan Snowden, "Sarah Kaufman's Dramatic Knockout Not Enough for Strikeforce Diva," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/7/24/1585937/sarah-kaufmans-dramatic-knockout>.

<sup>287</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Strikeforce Challengers: Kaufman vs. Hashi - Post-Hangover Thoughts," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, February 27, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/2/27/1329126/strikeforce-challengers-kaufman-vs>.

sport, no such thing happened. I was actually amazed at how little of a fan base Santos had in her subsequent fights considering the high profile and magnitude of her win.”<sup>288</sup>

Meltzer forgot that, unlike Rousey and Carano, Cyborg was virtually never portrayed as abiding by emphasized feminine norms and often had her female gender called into question due to her musculature. She never used the male desire for titillation to entice the MMA audience.<sup>289</sup> “If she (Rousey) continues to win and becomes a big draw, as a woman who looks like she does in a fighting sport, it's almost inevitable outside offers from the action-film world will start coming her way. If she doesn't continue to win, women's MMA is going to have to show enough to stay in a crowded nine-or-more division battlefield.”<sup>290</sup> This statement posed an interesting scenario. On the one hand, a Rousey victory meant that success would be primarily for her, with the rest of WMMA’s UFC contingent receiving little, if any, benefit. However, based on Meltzer’s words, a Rousey loss would make it harder for her fellow WMMA fighters than if she won. Most important, however, is the statement: “As a woman who looks like she does in a fighting sport.”<sup>291</sup> Meltzer admits that to be marketable in WMMA, at a bare minimum, one must adhere to emphasized feminine styles of physical appearance. Sex appeal seemed to be the ultimate emphasized feminine narrative when it came to MMA media and fans in late 2012 when discussing women joining the UFC, the sport’s version of the major leagues.

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<sup>288</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Uncharted waters for a Ronda Rousey headlined pay-per-view,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 25, 2012.

<sup>289</sup> Williams, *Mixed Martial Arts and the Quest for Legitimacy*, 105-107.

<sup>290</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Uncharted waters for a Ronda Rousey headlined pay-per-view,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 25, 2012. Parentheses mine.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.



### Section 3: Invicta FC 4

#### November 2012- January 2013

In the same month as the Rousey signing, **Invicta** announced they would hold their next event on January 5, 2013: **Invicta FC 4**.<sup>292</sup> On this card, Shayna Baszler was again fighting in the co-main event slot, this time in a rematch from 2010 against the Canadian Alexis Davis. The main event featured Carla Esparza and Claudia Gadelha, billed to fight for the inaugural **Invicta** Strawweight Championship.<sup>293</sup>

Unlike the other websites, which published their **Invicta FC 4** announcements in late November, *Sherdog* did not announce that the card was happening until it published a fight being added to the lineup, Leslie Smith vs. Raquel Pennington, on December 3. Tristen Critchfield wrote: “The 12-bout card goes down on Jan. 5 . . . and features a 115-pound title tilt between undefeated Brazilian Claudia Gadelha and . . . Carla Esparza. In the co-main event, submission specialist Shayna Baszler locks horns with former Strikeforce talent Alexis Davis.”<sup>294</sup> The only other articles *Sherdog* produced in the leadup to **Invicta FC 4** were: a blurb declaring that Gadelha was pulling out of the main event with Bec Hyatt replacing her, a weigh-in article, and three podcast interviews.<sup>295</sup> The analysis of the fight card took place in the weigh-in article,

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<sup>292</sup> Press Release., “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 23, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/11/23/2568907/invicta-fc-4-gadelha-vs-esparza-fight-card-jan-5-kansas-city-mma>.

<sup>293</sup> Rob Sargent, “Shayna Baszler vs Alexis Davis Rematch Added To Invicta FC 4,” MMArising.com, November 9, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2012/11/09/shayna-baszler-vs-alexis-davis-rematch-added-to-invicta-fc-4/>.

<sup>294</sup> Tristen Critchfield, “INVICTA FC 4 UPDATE: BANTAMWEIGHTS LESLIE SMITH, RAQUEL PENNINGTON ADDED TO MAIN CARD,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, December 3, 2012. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Invicta-FC-4-Update-Bantamweights-Leslie-Smith-Raquel-Pennington-Added-to-Main-Card-47911>.

<sup>295</sup> “Invicta FC 4- Esparza vs Hyatt,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed October 6, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-4-Esparza-vs-Hyatt-26535>.

which listed the main card bouts, giving additional focus to the main event.<sup>296</sup> The lone promotion that Baszler received was Tim Leidecker listing her upcoming bout as the top fight occurring outside the **UFC**, **Strikeforce**, and **Bellator**.<sup>297</sup> He wrote: “In her third Invicta Fighting Championships appearance . . . Baszler will take on . . . Davis in a clash of two of the top female bantamweights in the world. It will be a rematch of their 2010 encounter . . . The “Ally-Gator” has since fought far more frequently and against tougher competition . . . Can she avenge her defeat to the “Queen of Spades?”<sup>298</sup> All of *Sherdog*’s marketing utilized the promotion of technical competence, never contributing to online misogyny. However, the limited number of published articles, most containing barebones information, suggested the website felt WMMA stories unrelated to Ronda Rousey were not newsworthy.

*MMA Mania*’s coverage of an **Invicta** event once again was handled mainly by Brian Hemminger, with two exceptions being promotional press releases.<sup>299</sup> On December 19, Hemminger wrote about the recent announcement from Shannon Knapp that **Invicta FC 4** would be an online PPV instead of a free video stream. He stated: “Sorry fellas, the ladies are no longer free of charge. After a scorching 2012 that saw the debut of . . . Invicta Fighting Championships, the promotion is ready to start cashing in . . . The ladies of Invicta put on some of the most entertaining top-to-bottom fight cards of 2012 . . . Would you be willing to buy in?”<sup>300</sup> Hemminger did note that it was “quite a big risk considering the relative youth of the

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<sup>296</sup> Tristen Critchfield, “INVICTA FC 4 WEIGH-INS: CARLA ESPARZA, BEC HYATT ON POINT FOR 115-POUND TITLE CLASH,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, January 4, 2013.

<https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Invicta-FC-4-WeighIns-Carla-Esparza-Bec-Hyatt-on-Point-for-115Pound-Title-Clash-48787>.

<sup>297</sup> Tim Leidecker, “10 JANUARY TUSSELS WORTH WATCHING,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, January 4, 2013. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/10-January-Tussles-Worth-Watching-48775>.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>300</sup> Brian Hemminger, “All-female Invicta Fighting Championships will debut via online pay-per-view in 2013,” *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, December 19, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/12/19/3785948/all-female-invicta-fighting-championships-debut-online-ppv-2013-mma>.

promotion,” but he left opinions on the matter to *MMA Mania*’s readership.<sup>301</sup> In his preview and predictions article, Hemminger again refrained from asking for emphasized feminine adherence from **Invicta**’s fighters. Discussing the Baszler-Davis co-main event, he exclaimed:

Shayna Baszler has been a long-time veteran of the sport but after years of fighting women bigger just to stay active, she's finally found a home with Invicta. Alexis Davis has long been considered one of the best Canadian female fighters on the planet and . . . she really came into her own in 2012 . . . with her Fight of the Year . . . against Sarah Kaufman . . . Baszler has some of the most unique grappling skills of all female fighters on the planet, but Davis proved she can hang with anyone . . . Look for Baszler to be more aggressive both on the ground and on the feet, trying to make Davis back down. It's unlikely that there will be a finish here simply due to how competent both ladies are on the canvas.<sup>302</sup>

In Hemminger’s interview with Shayna Baszler, one of only three interviews he conducted (with Bec Hyatt and Paige VanZant) before **Invicta FC 4**,<sup>303</sup> he began: “No one makes an entrance quite like Shayna Baszler. With her trademark electric guitar raised above her head as she makes her way to the cage, ‘The Queen of Spades’ has really come to embrace the spectacle as well as the sport of mixed martial arts,” thus acknowledging her showmanship, and presenting it as a positive attribute to her repertoire.<sup>304</sup> He described her upcoming bout: “She's got more on the line than just pride. With a victory, she (Baszler) could be putting her name forth as the next potential title contender for Ronda Rousey in the UFC.”<sup>305</sup> By placing Baszler’s name alongside Rousey’s, Hemminger thought highly of her technical skills. Every question he asked in the interview ignored gender narratives, such as Baszler being voted the best MMA fighter in

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 preview and predictions for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' on Jan. 5 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 3, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/3/3833140/invicta-fc-4-preview-and-predictions-for-esparza-vs-hyatt-on-jan-5-in>.

<sup>303</sup> “Search for invicta,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 6, 2021. <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=122&q=invicta>.

<sup>304</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Queen Bee: Invicta 4 bantamweight Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 3, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/3/3833150/queen-bee-invicta-4-bantamweight-shayna-baszler-interview-exclusive>.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

South Dakota, her recent change in strength and conditioning training, and commenting on her composure during the McMann and D’Alelio fights.<sup>306</sup> When bringing up Baszler’s prior fight with Davis, the author noted: “Just based off the last fight, you were both attacking each other from all sorts of angles and positions. I just feel like there's never going to be a moment in this rematch where either of you are perfectly safe and that really makes it interesting for me.”<sup>307</sup>

Hemminger was clearly invested in the Baszler-Davis rematch for reasons beyond his male desire. It was their technical competence and fight acumen which interested him. Concluding the interview, he asked: “Have you thought about what could happen with the fallout of this fight considering that if you win, you could be next for Ronda Rousey . . . this fight could almost be a tryout?”<sup>308</sup> Baszler responded:

There's no doubt that if they're talking about women's fights in the UFC in a weight class I've been successful in, I guarantee my name has been thrown around . . . as well as Alexis. I think this is a huge fight for both of us . . . not that I don't want to fight in the UFC, but I'm not one of those people that's going to blow up my twitter and start really campaigning for a UFC fight because a fight is a fight. Invicta is doing a good job and I just want to fight the best girls there are. Wherever there's a body to bend in a way that shouldn't be bent, I will be there and attempt to do that.<sup>309</sup>

Again, Baszler put her showmanship and swagger on display, inserting her name into the discussion to fight Rousey. This was not a sociable, timid woman.

As stated earlier, Hemminger wrote more articles leading up to **Invicta FC 4**. The journalist commented on a few main card matchups for his weight-cut piece and announced the weigh-in results. Unlike Brookhouse, who would have taken a single woman missing weight as a

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

sign of the inconsistency of WMMA, Hemminger just listed the stats. He remarked: “Of the 26 ladies who stepped on the scales, 25 successfully made weight. Only Veronica Rothenhausler from the preliminary card missed the mark, coming in 0.6 pounds over the 146-pound weight limit.”<sup>310</sup> However, despite emphasizing technical competence when covering WMMA, Hemminger also engaged in sexualizing the athletes.

For the first four **Invicta** events, Hemminger appeared to treat the women he interviewed with respect, accenting how great athletes they were compared to what anti-WMMA readers had to say in the comment sections. It would be a fair assumption to say “Hemmi” supported decreasing emphasized femininity in WMMA. However, as part of the research, it must be acknowledged that Hemminger was actively discussing his “penis ratings” with readers. Under his published fighter interviews, he frequently engaged with commenters discussing their appearance. On a few occasions, Hemminger sent readers pictures of the fighter in question if they commented on her physical attractiveness. This trend occurred in the comments for his **Invicta FC 3** interviews with Jessica Penne,<sup>311</sup> Tecia Torres,<sup>312</sup> and Jessamyn Duke.<sup>313</sup> It also happened in his **Invicta FC 4** sit-down with Paige VanZant. REX\_KWON\_DO complained: “Could have posted a hotter pic of this girl. Nonetheless, I’m sure I’d hit it.”<sup>314</sup> Hemminger

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<sup>310</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in results LIVE from Kansas City for 'Esparza vs Hyatt',” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/4/3834854/invicta-fc-4-weigh-in-results-live-from-kansas-city-for-esparza-vs>.

<sup>311</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Making waves: Invicta FC 3 headliner Jessica Penne interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 3, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/3/3447786/making-waves-invicta-fc-3-headliner-jessica-penne-interview-exclusive>.

<sup>312</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/4/3457720/tiny-tornado-invicta-fc-3-pro-debuter-tecia-torres-interview>.

<sup>313</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Goal-Oriented: Invicta FC 3 fighter Jessamyn Duke interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 3, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/3/3450770/invicta-fc-3-fighter-jessamyn-duke-interview-exclusive-with-mmamania>.

<sup>314</sup> Rex\_Kwon\_Do, January 5, 2013 (10:23am) Comment on Hemminger, “Model citizen: Invicta FC 4 strawweight Paige VanZant Interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

replied: “This one's for you Rex,” attaching another picture of VanZant.<sup>315</sup> Both men participated in Toxic Trait 1 along with VMA Traits 2 and 4. On the **Invicta FC 3** live stream thread, Hemminger openly stated that he wanted to date Tecia Torres<sup>316</sup> and went along with a joke on an interview with Shannon Knapp that implied he was trying to get the promotion’s owner to date him, portraying VMA Traits 2, 3, and 4.<sup>317</sup>

In an article published a fortnight before the upcoming **Invicta** card, the *MMA Mania* staff wished its fans a Merry Christmas with a photo shoot submitted by part-time model and fighter Paige VanZant. Hemminger said: “Merry Christmas, Maniacs! There aren't many female fighters who first got their start . . . as ring girls, but after taking look through "12 Gauge" Paige VanZant's Christmas gallery, it probably comes as no surprise . . . it's open thread and discussion time -- do what you do best (within reason)!”<sup>318</sup> This greeting saw him encouraging the first, second, and fourth VMA traits. Ironically, Hemminger touted VanZant’s fighting prowess between “no surprise” and “it’s open thread and discussion time.”<sup>319</sup>

The day before **Invicta FC 3**, Hemminger composed that week’s edition of *Best of the Best*, a weekly column that compiled what the *MMA Mania* staff enjoyed out of the sport during that particular week. Above the article was a picture of a sultry woman that the piece failed to

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<sup>315</sup> Brian Hemminger, January 5, 2013 (10:19am) Comment on Hemminger, “Model citizen: Invicta FC 4 strawweight Paige VanZant Interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>316</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (7:41pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6).”

<sup>317</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (7:09pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Trendsetter: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>318</sup> Brian Hemminger, “MMAmania.com would like to wish you a Merry Christmas via Invicta FC 4's Paige VanZant,” MMAmania, Vox Media, December 25, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/12/25/3801820/invicta-fc-4-preliminary-card-fighter-paige-vanzant-merry-christmas-mma>.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

identify.<sup>320</sup> On the one hand, under the Interview of the Week winner, “Hemmi” also listed his sit-downs with Shayna Baszler and Bec Hyatt as discussions for readers to examine.<sup>321</sup> On the other, he also nominated his Obligatory TNA of the week. Beneath it was a GIF showing an unidentified woman in a bikini and Santa Claus hat in a kitchen shaking her buttocks back and forth. Hemminger’s caption read: “If this was the only thing girls ever did in the kitchen, I wouldn’t complain,” espousing Toxic Trait 1 while featuring VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>322</sup> Several paragraphs earlier, the sportswriter referenced his non-hegemonic interviews with one-half of **Invicta’s** main event and co-main event. Conversely, he was now openly suggesting women either belonged in the kitchen or must sexually arouse men. Entitling the segment Obligatory TNA, he promoted adherence to emphasized femininity because the word obligatory implies that sexualizing women is a job required of an MMA journalist. By making it an “award,” Hemminger suggested that sharing lingerie photos of female models is equally important to his career as was interviewing WMMA fighters, thus contributing to toxic masculinity. This brings to mind the photo spread from John Snowden and Kendall Shields’ *MMA Encyclopedia*, where they dubbed both the **UFC** octagon and ring girls as important symbols of MMA.<sup>323</sup> Hemminger’s lowering of his Baszler and Hyatt interviews to the same tier as “Obligatory TNA” raises two questions. First, did he feel WMMA is legitimate? Second, did Hemminger feel that TNA was appropriate for a WMMA discussion?

Despite a large portion of the *Bloody Elbow* readership supporting WMMA, the website gave little coverage to **Invicta FC 4**. The site did not announce the card until January 1, though it

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<sup>320</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Best of the Best: MMAmania.com’s UFC/MMA week in review (12/30/12),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/4/3834708/best-of-the-best-mmamania-coms-ufc-mma-week-in-review-12-30-12>.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid. Interview of the Week was awarded to MMA trainer Javier Mendez.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. TNA is short hand for Tits and Ass.

<sup>323</sup> Snowden, *The MMA Encyclopedia*, 282.

interviewed Rose Namajunas before that date.<sup>324</sup> Namajunas' interview was a blend of emphasized feminine adherence and defiance. Stephe Haynes, the interviewer, asked Namajunas if she had plans to raise a family someday, which assumes a woman's place is in the home, not in the cage. That aside, Haynes' other questions focused on how **Invicta** had treated her, her strategy for fighting her opponent Emily Kagan, and her opinion on how Ronda Rousey represented WMMA.<sup>325</sup> For that final question, Namajunas responded: "She's definitely an inspiration . . . Her mentality, and that intimidation factor ... she's going in there to kill you, pretty much. I can relate to that, and I do look up to her, in that aspect, and in what she's been able to do."<sup>326</sup> Here, Namajunas was admiring Rousey's emphasized feminine defiance as the mindset of "going in there to kill you" is not demur or sociable and rebels against the notion of female fragility.

On January 1, *Bloody Elbow* wrote its **Invicta FC 4** announcement article, which consisted of writer ShinSplints simply listing the fight card with a three-sentence blurb about the Esparza-Hyatt main event.<sup>327</sup> There were two articles about the weigh-ins, one featuring a YouTube video of the weigh-in and the fight card written underneath the video link.<sup>328</sup> The second, written by ShinSplints, listed the weigh-in results and a blurb describing the two main bouts. Though he mentioned that Baszler-Davis was a rematch, it was another example of

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<sup>324</sup> "Search for invicta" Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 6, 2021.

<https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=145&q=invicta>.

<sup>325</sup> Stephe Haynes, "Rose Namajunas hopes to build on what Ronda Rousey has done for WMMA." MMAmania.com, Vox Media, December 27, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/12/27/3804512/rose-namajunas-hopes-to-build-on-what-ronda-rousey-has-done-for-wmma>.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt fight card," Bloodyelbow, Vox Media, January 1, 2013.

<https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/1/3824926/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-fight-card>.

<sup>328</sup> Nate Wilcox, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Weigh-In Video," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3839362/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-weigh-in-video>.



ShinSplits not caring to write about WMMA in-depth.<sup>329</sup> On January 4, Stephe Haynes interviewed emergency replacement Bec Hyatt, who took Claudia Gadelha's spot in the main event.<sup>330</sup> When Haynes asked why WMMA is more exciting than its male counterpart, Hyatt replied: "I think it's because we always go out there like we've got something to prove. There's always someone saying that we shouldn't be doing this, so we've got a big chip on our shoulders. We're out to prove everyone wrong. We're pretty feisty and we get very competitive when it comes to another girl."<sup>331</sup> Hyatt was not subscribing to the emphasized feminine dictum of being sociable. Sociable women do not try to gain entrance into the typically hegemonic male role of an MMA fighter. However, the Australian also described being physically appealing to the male audience as necessary for female competitors. Hyatt said: "I definitely think it's good to be marketable, so I try to capture the media as much as I can. Ronda Rousey is great at this. She's a fit looking, Olympic athlete, with long, flowing blonde hair, and is probably the best person to represent women's MMA."<sup>332</sup>

Regarding quantity, *MMA Fighting* stepped up their coverage from the prior three **Invicta** cards. On November 23, Dave Meltzer wrote an article about **Invicta FC 4**, analyzing the card. The professional wrestling historian exclaimed: "The co-main event will pit Shayna Baszler (15-7) against Alexis Davis (12-5) . . . Baszler . . . finished Sarah D'Alelio via choke on Invicta's last show on Oct. 6. Davis last fought on July 28, submitting Hitomi Akano. Before that, she lost the decision in a war with Sarah Kaufman on March 3 . . . that was one of the best

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<sup>329</sup> ShinSplits, "Invicta FC 4: Carla Esparza (114.8) vs. Bec Hyatt (115.0) live weigh in results," Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/4/3836622/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-weigh-in-results>.

<sup>330</sup> Stephe Haynes, "'Rowdy' Bec Hyatt: There's always someone saying that we shouldn't be doing this," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/4/3835770/rowdy-bec-hyatt-invicta-carla-esparza-ronda-rousey>.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

fights, male or female, held this year.”<sup>333</sup> Meltzer was concise and technical in assessing both fighters’ recent bouts.

In a January 3 edition of *MMA Roundtable*, the question was asked of Dave Doyle and Luke Thomas: “Invicta returns to action Saturday. A lot has changed in the women's MMA world since the company's last show. How do you see Zuffa's foray into WMMA affecting Invicta?”<sup>334</sup> Doyle responded: “While there's no doubt the Rouseys and Cyborg Santos will fight with the big group (the **UFC**), they still need a solid core of opponents to make it work. So keeping Invicta healthy and occasionally sending them, say, a Sarah Kaufmann-level fighter, is in Zuffa's best interests.”<sup>335</sup> Thomas espoused: “Invicta's model of all-women fight cards creates a certain kind of novelty that I acknowledge could create special developments . . . Invicta will serve as a feeder organization. Maybe that status as the only feeder that specializes in women's fighting will help boost its popularity, but either you're a fan of women fighting or you're not. And even if you are, are you really that interested in seeing them compete at the regional level? I have my doubts.”<sup>336</sup> Here, Thomas emerged as dismissive toward WMMA. First, by calling **Invicta** a regional fight promotion, he questioned the technical competence of its fighters. While based out of Kansas City, Kansas, all three of **Invicta**’s prior cards had been streamed free around the globe. That fact translates to calling them a regional promotion highly questionable. Nevertheless, Thomas doubled down on his remarks, claiming they would serve as a feeder system or minor league for the **UFC**’s female divisions. He stated that by this point, one is either

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<sup>333</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Invicta will crown 115-pound champion to headline Jan. 5 date in Kansas City,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 23, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/11/23/3682790/invicta-crown-115-pound-champion-headline-jan-5-date-mma-news>.

<sup>334</sup> Luke Thomas, “MMA Roundtable: 2013 predictions, Invicta's future, UFC in Mexico and more,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 3, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/3/3826446/mma-roundtable-2013-predictions-invictas-future-ufc-in-mexico-bellator-more>.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

a proponent of WMMA or a detractor. **Invicta** shows will not change their market size as most fight fans have decided whether to support WMMA or not. His last statement: “And even if you are (a fan of WMMA), are you really that interested in seeing them compete at the regional level? I have my doubts,” cemented Thomas’ low value on the women’s side of the sport.<sup>337</sup> “Even if” implies that Thomas might not be a WMMA fan.

*MMA Fighting* published three more relevant articles before **Invicta FC 4**: a rundown of the weigh-ins as well as interviews with fighter Bec Hyatt and promoter Shannon Knapp.<sup>338</sup> The weigh-in feature, produced by Luke Thomas, solely consisted of the fight card, with the respective competitors’ weights listed beside their names.<sup>339</sup> Mike Chiapetta interviewed Bec Hyatt. It was clear that her dual nature of marketing her feminine attributes, yet speaking loudly and proudly about how tough she was, emulated the mantra she put forth in her prior sit-down with *Bloody Elbow*. Chiapetta wrote: “With short-cropped, bleach-blonde hair sometimes accentuated with a pink streak, and heavily tattooed, Hyatt is probably not used to being ignored. And anyway, that's not her style. She earned the nickname ‘Rowdy’ because of her willingness to say what's on her mind and to stand out from the crowd.”<sup>340</sup> Chiapetta spoke about the extensive marketing campaign Hyatt had built up via a “Facebook page, Twitter feed, video blogs, and frequent postings on popular MMA forums.”<sup>341</sup> Now on its own, this might be seen as defying emphasized femininity. But, based on how she praised Rousey’s marketing in a different

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> “Search for invicta” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2015.

<https://www.mmafighting.com/search?order=date&page=201&q=invicta>.

<sup>339</sup> Luke Thomas, “Invicta 4 weigh-in results: Esparza, Hyatt make strawweight limit for title bout,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/4/3837152/invicta-4-weigh-in-results-esparza-hyatt-make-strawweight-limit-mma-news>.

<sup>340</sup> Mike Chiapetta, “For Invicta title fighter Bec Hyatt, shortcut to stardom was always part of the plan,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2014. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/5/3835542/for-invicta-title-fighter-bec-hyatt-shortcut-to-stardom-was-always>.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

interview,<sup>342</sup> combined with two years later how she would post a picture on social media posing nude, holding a sign which read “Fuck Feminism,” this seems unlikely.<sup>343</sup> At a minimum, Hyatt probably felt titillating male viewers was paramount to cultivating a fan following to thrive in WMMA financially.

Dave Doyle’s interview with Shannon Knapp raised some interesting points surrounding the different treatment that fans gave WMMA compared to the male side of the sport. Doyle quoted Knapp, stating: “If you're truly a fan of mixed martial arts, you can't be gender biased . . . If MMA is about fighters competing in actual weight divisions and having competitive fights, that's what we have. If you don't like that, you're not a true fan of the sport. You can't be gender biased and be a true fan.”<sup>344</sup> Here, Knapp directly challenges the notion of WMMA lacking talent depth and technical competence. Talent is talent, regardless of gender. Doyle largely ignored the implications of this, simply noting: “So far, enough MMA fans have picked up on Knapp's challenge to keep the company chugging along.”<sup>345</sup> He also mentioned: “A year ago, for all but diehard WMMA fans, women's MMA was still seen as something that passed its peak as soon as Gina Carano lost to "Cyborg" Santos.”<sup>346</sup> Doyle quietly acknowledged that fan support for WMMA declined when the “sole face” of the sport retired, one who physically appealed to male fans. Knapp concluded: “Back in the day, when I tried to get a women's fight on a card, [the promoter would] say ‘no you're not, you're taking a spot from one of my boys, . . . you believe in

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<sup>342</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “‘Rowdy’ Bec Hyatt: There's always someone saying that we shouldn't be doing this,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/4/3835770/rowdy-bec-hyatt-invicta-carla-esparza-ronda-rousey>.

<sup>343</sup> Quinney, “The @UFC and Third Wave Feminism,” 49.

<sup>344</sup> Dave Doyle, “Shannon Knapp ready for new challenges in Invicta's second year,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2015. <https://www.mmfighting.com/ufc/2013/1/4/3836118/shannon-knapp-ready-for-new-challenges-in-invictas-second-year>.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

something strong enough, it might take some time, but you'll get there."<sup>347</sup> This again brings up the notion that Fowlkes and other media writers mentioned that Invicta existed for an ideal, not profit. In a way, WMMA athletes are the “true fighters,” as opposed to their male counterparts.

*MMA Rising* again gave the most in-depth reporting, as they did for the first three Invicta shows. Rob Sargent wrote individual articles for all thirteen fights on the card. He also published stories about the event’s official announcement, Hyatt replacing Gadelha in the main event, and interviews with Carla Esparza and Tecia Torres.<sup>348</sup> For the Baszler-Davis fight, Sargent stated: “After more than 20 months away from competition, Baszler returned to the cage in the main event of Invicta FC 2 in July. She engaged in a hotly-contested battle with undefeated Olympic medallist Sara McMann, but came up just short . . . Not to be deterred, Baszler got back on the winning track with a slick submission win over fellow grappling ace Sarah “The Monster” D’Alelio . . . She now finds herself potentially one win away from a shot at the vacant Invicta FC Bantamweight Championship.” Sargent did the same for Davis, laying out how her career had panned out since their first 2010 encounter.<sup>349</sup> Again, respect for WMMA fighters, their technical competence, and fighting acumen was apparent in Sargent’s coverage of **Invicta**.

Fans contributed twenty comments on *MMA Mania*’s **Invicta FC 4** press release, all but four heavily entrenched in emphasized feminine ideals. They tended to either applaud a fighter adhering to their respective “penis ratings” or criticize one for failing to do so.<sup>350</sup> Referring to a picture of Carla Esparza, which appeared above the article, RANDLEMAN complained: “No tits

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> “Search for invicta,” MMArising.com, Accessed October 6, 2021.

<https://www.mmarising.com/page/36/?s=invicta> through <https://www.mmarising.com/page/34/?s=invicta>.

<sup>349</sup> Rob Sargent, “Shayna Baszler vs Alexis Davis Rematch Added To Invicta FC 4,” MMArising.com, November 9, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/news/2012/11/09/shayna-baszler-vs-alexis-davis-rematch-added-to-invicta-fc-4/>.

<sup>350</sup> Press Release., “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 23, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/11/23/2568907/invicta-fc-4-gadelha-vs-esparza-fight-card-jan-5-kansas-city-mma>.

whatsoever,” reflecting an inverse of VMA Trait 2 combined with Toxic Traits 1 and 2.<sup>351</sup> KHAOS\_WARRIOR concurred: “I can see why this girl (Esparza) wanted to become a fighter. She must be mad at the world for being born with only nipples LOL!” also featuring an inverse of VMA Trait 2 in addition to Trait 4 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>352</sup> PABLOXL opined: “Fuck these ugly bitches, Michelle Waterson ftw,” before including three photos of the MMA fighter and model. He engaged in Toxic Trait 1 along with VMA Traits 1 and 2.<sup>353</sup> JONNYBOY6969 thought being a fighter was too masculine for Waterson, espousing: “She should just give up mma and go do porn. Its better for everyone. lol More money for her and more pics like this for us,” advocating for Toxic Trait 1 and all VMA Traits except number 3.<sup>354</sup>

When referring to **Invicta**’s move to PPV, Brian Hemminger asked his readers: “Would you be willing to buy in?” the twenty-three comments posted to his article gave a resounding “no.”<sup>355</sup> MAUIWAVES questioned technical competence within the all-female promotion, declaring: “What made Invicta popular was that it was free and the women of course. I saw alot of decent fighters but at the same time I saw a ton of fighters that are barely worth even recording lol . . . They can expect a significant drop in views if this is going to be in the 20\$+ range. Kind of a shady move to pull after getting all those viewers,” insinuating that paying for an all-women’s card was something MMA fans should not stand for.<sup>356</sup> THE PROFESSOR

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<sup>351</sup> Randleman, November 23, 2012 (3:46pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City.”

<sup>352</sup> Khaos\_Warrior, November 23, 2012 (5:13pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>353</sup> PabloXL, November 23, 2012 (8:26pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City.”

<sup>354</sup> Jonnyboy6969, November 23, 2012 (8:37pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City.”

<sup>355</sup> Brian Hemminger, “All-female Invicta Fighting Championships will debut via online pay-per-view in 2013,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, December 19, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/12/19/3785948/all-female-invicta-fighting-championships-debut-online-ppv-2013-mma>.

<sup>356</sup> MauiWaves, December 19, 2012 (7:12pm) Comment on Hemminger, “All-female Invicta Fighting Championships will debut via online pay-per-view in 2013.”

countered: “The PPV price will probably be quite discounted. To what you’re used to from UFC, it is an online PPV after all. Besides, it’s good for raising the level of legitimacy for WMMA as well as creating a base to help feed the UFC’s future 135 division. But haters gonna hate.”<sup>357</sup>

GSP’S NUTTS, summing up the hegemonic/toxic masculinity of an *MMA Mania* comment thread, echoed: “Seriously, I really liked these bitches slappin each others tits an clits but I aint goona pay real moneys for it.”<sup>358</sup> He firmly adhered to VMA Traits 2 and 4 values, championing Toxic Trait 1. AKADEMIKS1020 presented a more refined response: “You don’t build a brand in three events... Furthermore, they’ve had some type of issue with each and every stream . . . The numbers they’re reporting are skewed due to various reason . . . some of those same viewers that are watching free will not want to pay, and they’re going to be highly disappointed with the results.”<sup>359</sup> These commenters fail to remember that the **UFC** charged \$19.95 for their first event in 1993 before **MMA** was truly established as a sport.<sup>360</sup> Taking **Invicta** to task for charging less than half that for their fourth show is a double standard, on which one assumes that women will deliver a less athletic and less entertaining card.

Readers posted thirty-five comments to the Paige VanZant photoshoot *MMA Mania* published, all focusing on their objectification of the model. No comment mentioned her upcoming bout with Tecia Torres, despite Hemminger boosting the fight in his article.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> The Professor, December 19, 2012 (7:40pm) Comment on Hemminger, “All-female Invicta Fighting Championships will debut via online pay-per-view in 2013.”

<sup>358</sup> Gsp’s Nutts, December 19, 2012 (7:12pm) Comment on Hemminger, “All-female Invicta Fighting Championships will debut via online pay-per-view in 2013.”

<sup>359</sup> Akademiks1020, December 19, 2012 (7:12pm) Comment on Hemminger, “All-female Invicta Fighting Championships will debut via online pay-per-view in 2013.”

<sup>360</sup> Mark La Monica, “How four words from Campbell McLaren shaped the early days of the UFC,” *Newsday.com*, November 13, 2013. <https://www.newsday.com/sports/mixed-martial-arts/how-four-words-from-campbell-mclaren-shaped-the-early-days-of-the-ufc-1.6432181>.

<sup>361</sup> Brian Hemminger, “MMAMania.com would like to wish you a Merry Christmas via Invicta FC 4’s Paige VanZant,” *MMAMania*, Vox Media, December 25, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/12/25/3801820/invicta-fc-4-preliminary-card-fighter-paige-vanzant-merry-christmas-mma>.



QUICKJAB proclaimed: “I’m going to have sex with Paige Vanzant one day. It’s my goal!,” announcing his usage of VMA Traits 2, 3, and being complicit in Toxic Trait 1.<sup>362</sup>

HERETHEREAFTER reminisced: “I still miss the old site sometimes. i would always look forward to going to the page on holidays and the first thing at the top of the page would be some random mma hottie.”<sup>363</sup> GOLDIGGAH said that VanZant: “makes Ronda look like a man,”

featuring an inverse of VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 2.<sup>364</sup> There were nine comments on

Hemminger’s preview and predictions summary, most surprisingly focused on the upcoming

fighters.<sup>365</sup> DARKSIDE3744 wrote: “I’ll be watching because I think Hyatt looks like a sexy

alternative chick. and I like all kinds of mma.”<sup>366</sup> Hemminger’s interview with Shayna Baszler

prompted six posts submitted by readers, only one of which was about the “Queen of Spades.”<sup>367</sup>

RILLY stated: “Baszler . . . Will always have a soft spot for her, she got me into womens mma.

She’s an Amazonian goddess, with a hard body and game.”<sup>368</sup> The weigh-in photo gallery

featured twelve readership opinions, each expressing the male gaze.<sup>369</sup> GSP’S NUTTS

pontificated: “Tits or GTFO. And what the fuck is tat Man Beast in the 6th pic. Seriously.”<sup>370</sup>

KOMPLEXX904 wondered: “What the hell is Amanda Nunes fighting in pic 7? Some of these

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<sup>362</sup> QuickJab, December 25, 2012 (3:13pm) Comment on Hemminger, “MMAMania.com would like to wish you a Merry Christmas via Invicta FC 4’s Paige VanZant.”

<sup>363</sup> Herethereafter, December 25, 2012 (6:58pm) Comment on Hemminger, “MMAMania.com would like to wish you a Merry Christmas via Invicta FC 4’s Paige VanZant.”

<sup>364</sup> GOLDIGGAH, December 25, 2012 (8:03pm) Comment on Hemminger, “MMAMania.com would like to wish you a Merry Christmas via Invicta FC 4’s Paige VanZant.”

<sup>365</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 preview and predictions for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' on Jan. 5 in Kansas City,” MMAMania.com, Vox Media, January 3, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/3/3833140/invicta-fc-4-preview-and-predictions-for-esparza-vs-hyatt-on-jan-5-in>.

<sup>366</sup> Darkside3744, January 3, 2013 (10:50pm)

<sup>367</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Queen Bee: Invicta 4 bantamweight Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAMania.com,” Vox Media, January 3, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/3/3833150/queen-bee-invicta-4-bantamweight-shayna-baszler-interview-exclusive>.

<sup>368</sup> Rilly, January 4, 2013 (6:15am) Comment on Hemminger, “Queen Bee: Invicta 4 bantamweight Shayna Baszler interview exclusive with MMAMania.com.”

<sup>369</sup> Mike Bohn, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City,” MMAMania.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013.

<sup>370</sup> Gsp’s Nutts, January 4, 2013 (10:45pm) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.” He was likely referring to Ediane Gomes.



‘women’ really blur the lines.’<sup>371</sup> GSP’S NUTTS and KOMPLEXX904 each celebrated the first two traits of both VMAS and toxic masculinity. DAFTSHADOW wondered if anyone would masturbate during **Invicta FC 4**, participating in VMA Traits 2 through 4 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>372</sup> Weigh-in photo galleries were a haven for readers gathering to criticize women in a toxic masculine fashion for not conforming to their standards of physical female beauty.

Fans submitted thirty-four comments on the fight card article for *Bloody Elbow*, most of which strayed from emphasized gender narratives.<sup>373</sup> DEYVN RODRIGUEZ supplied some controversy by suggesting that while it was not wrong for **Invicta** to charge for their fourth-ever event, he said it was wrong to charge money for what, in his opinion, amounted to a weak card in terms of fight/entertainment potential.<sup>374</sup> An argument erupted over whether this was the right card to start charging viewers.<sup>375</sup> The remaining readers seemed enthusiastic about the show, with Baszler-Davis, Scottish fighter Joanne Calderwood, and Bec Hyatt receiving praise.<sup>376</sup> On their weigh-in article, the seventeen submitted posts strictly focused on the bouts.<sup>377</sup> There were seventeen reader opinions towards *Bloody Elbow’s* Hyatt interview<sup>378</sup> and twenty-nine on the

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<sup>371</sup> Komplexx904, January 5, 2013 (3:25am) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.” Nunes was facing Sarah D’Alelio.

<sup>372</sup> Daftshadow, January 5, 2013 (9:38pm) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.”

<sup>373</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt fight card,” *Bloodyelbow*, Vox Media, January 1, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/1/3824926/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-fight-card>.

<sup>374</sup> Devyn Rodriguez, January 2, 2013 (7:44am) Comment on ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt fight card.”

<sup>375</sup> ShinSplints, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt fight card,” *Bloodyelbow*, Vox Media, January 1, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/1/3824926/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-fight-card>.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>377</sup> Nate Wilcox, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Weigh-In Video,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3839362/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-weigh-in-video>.

<sup>378</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “‘Rowdy’ Bec Hyatt: There’s always someone saying that we shouldn’t be doing this,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/4/3835770/rowdy-bec-hyatt-invicta-carla-esparza-ronda-rousey>.

Namajunas sit-down.<sup>379</sup> Regarding Namajunas, six comments criticized or praised her boyfriend Pat Barry for dating a woman much younger than him.<sup>380</sup> KING’S\_GAMBIT, for example, exclaimed: “Didn’t know she was only 20. Pat Barry knows how to get it done,” showcasing VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>381</sup> However, most postings complimented either Namajunas as a fighter or **Invicta** as a promotion.<sup>382</sup> LEBRON’S HAIRLINE wrote: “She has some grappling, good kicks and punches, solid ring generalship, and most importantly, SHE BEHAVES LIKE A FIGHTER.”<sup>383</sup> Most comments on Hyatt’s interview with Stephanie Haynes either wished her good luck against Esparza or how they thought she would fare in the main event. Five did center around how her Australian accent sounded attractive.<sup>384</sup> In addition, Stephanie Haynes replied: “Bec is a charming girl I can definitely see her doing well with a variety of fans.”<sup>385</sup> Haynes inferred that being “charming” and sociable was more crucial for a WMMA competitor than technical competence and fighting ability.

Only one reader posted a comment on the *MMA Fighting* article announcing the **Invicta FC 4** card. SUPERFKNMARIO\_ proclaimed: “Why am I suddenly very horny? My wife is going to feel my wrath tonight!!!”<sup>386</sup> Given that SUPERFKNMARIO\_ has proved throughout

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<sup>379</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Rose Namajunas hopes to build on what Ronda Rousey has done for WMMA,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, December 27, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/12/27/3804512/rose-namajunas-hopes-to-build-on-what-ronda-rousey-has-done-for-wmma>.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> King’s Gambit, December 27, 2012 (5:35pm) Comment on Haynes, “Rose Namajunas hopes to build on what Ronda Rousey has done for WMMA.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>382</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Rose Namajunas hopes to build on what Ronda Rousey has done for WMMA,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, December 27, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/12/27/3804512/rose-namajunas-hopes-to-build-on-what-ronda-rousey-has-done-for-wmma>.

<sup>383</sup> Lebron’s hairlines, December 28, 2012 (2:23am) Comment on Haynes, “Rose Namajunas hopes to build on what Ronda Rousey has done for WMMA.”

<sup>384</sup> Stephanie Haynes, “Rowdy’ Bec Hyatt: There’s always someone saying that we shouldn’t be doing this,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/4/3835770/rowdy-bec-hyatt-invicta-carla-esparza-ronda-rousey>.

<sup>385</sup> Stephanie Haynes, January 5, 2013 (10:03am) Comment on Haynes, “Rowdy’ Bec Hyatt: There’s always someone saying that we shouldn’t be doing this.”

<sup>386</sup> Superfknmario\_, November 23, 2012 (10:56pm) Comment on Meltzer, “Invicta will crown 115-pound champion to headline Jan. 5 date in Kansas.”

this study as being firmly against WMMA, it is doubtful he was enthusiastic about the event, especially considering that his words featured VMA Traits 2 through 4 and Toxic Trait 1. More likely, he was reacting to the article's thumbnail image, a portrait shot of Claudia Gadelha. It is not far-fetched to assume that Gadelha aroused SUPERFKNMARIO\_.<sup>387</sup> The article informing readers that Gadelha's injury removed her from the **Invicta** main event featured seven comments, each stating WMMA was not newsworthy.<sup>388</sup> MRBRUTALITY joked: "Whoa that's TOO BAD we are missing out on a totally EPIC FIGHT! . . . Said nobody, ever, about this topic."<sup>389</sup>

Attached to Dave Doyle's interview with Shannon Knapp were eight comments, all supportive of WMMA.<sup>390</sup> RM GOODWIN espoused: "All sports elevate themselves by broadening their base of participation. Mixed martial arts is better because of Invicta and WMMA. Women bring a slightly different dynamic into the cage and I am always impressed with the level of technical skill and courage displayed, particularly on the Invicta cards. It is no different than recognizing that a great fight is now just as likely to be seen on free UFC prelims . . . or Invicta as it is on a \$60.00 UFC PPV."<sup>391</sup> *MMA Fighting's* weigh-in article featured ten comments, most of which concerned the readership's various "penis ratings" of the fighters.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Dave Meltzer, "Invicta will crown 115-pound champion to headline Jan. 5 date in Kansas City," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 23, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/11/23/3682790/invicta-crown-115-pound-champion-headline-jan-5-date-mma-news>.

<sup>388</sup> Dave Doyle, "Injury forces Claudia Gadelha out of Invicta 4 main event," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, December 28, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2012/12/28/3812096/injury-forces-claudia-gadelha-out-of-invicta-4-main-event>.

<sup>389</sup> MrBrutality, December 28, 2012, (6:27pm) Comment on Doyle, "Injury forces Claudia Gadelha out of Invicta 4 main event."

<sup>390</sup> Dave Doyle, "Shannon Knapp ready for new challenges in Invicta's second year," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2015. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2013/1/4/3836118/shannon-knapp-ready-for-new-challenges-in-invictas-second-year>.

<sup>391</sup> RM Goodwin, January 5, 2013 (6:53am) Comment on Doyle, "Shannon Knapp ready for new challenges in Invicta's second year."

<sup>392</sup> Bryan Tucker, "Invicta FC 4 Weigh-In Video," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 4, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/4/3836704/invicta-fc-4-weigh-in-video>.

RORYFLIPYOUFORREALMACDONALD explained: “I counted at least 5 attractive women that Dana White could sign.”<sup>393</sup> TAITER echoed: “The undercard had some serious hotties! HubbaHubba!”<sup>394</sup> Both statements contained VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 1. DANAISMYDAD mockingly suggested: “Hmmm I think this has jello ring written all over it. This is real? I’d laugh my ass off if a couple of them got into slap fights or better yet neither one tap but the fight is called a draw due to double scissors hence making a soft core porn.”<sup>395</sup> These reflected VMA Traits 1, 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1. All twelve comments on Bec Hyatt’s interview with Mike Chiapetta mirrored the same results. BIGPOPPALOVIN summarized: “women’s mma disappeared when Gina lost to that butt ugly steroids pumpin Santos. It reappeared with a vengeance when you had two beautiful women fighting for a championship . . . Tate and Rousey. Its sad to say, you have to have beautiful gorgeous champions in WMMA to go forward. If Rousey loses to Liz . . . well that’s the end of that movement . . . Watching hot women fight in MMA . . . its every man’s dream and excuse.”<sup>396</sup> BIGPOPPALOVIN embraced VMA Traits 1 and 2 along with Toxic Trait 1. BIGPOPPALOVIN said that for WMMA to be financially viable, UFC fighters’ physical appearance must appeal to the average heterosexual male. Moreover, he inferred that WMMA without physically attractive women was not worth watching.

Baszler’s twenty-second pro fight came against Alexis Davis on January 5, 2013. It was the co-main event of **Invicta FC 4**, emanating once again from Memorial Hall.<sup>397</sup> Mauro Ranallo

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<sup>393</sup> RoryFlipYouForRealMacDonald, January 5, 2013 (5:29am) Comment on Tucker, “Invicta FC 4 Weigh-In Video.”

<sup>394</sup> Taiter, January 5, 2013 (2:24pm) Comment on Tucker, “Invicta FC 4 Weigh-In Video.”

<sup>395</sup> Danaismydad, January 5, 2013 (6:27pm) Comment on Tucker, “Invicta FC 4 Weigh-In Video.”

<sup>396</sup> BigPoppaLovin, January 5, 2013 (1:14pm) Comment on Chiapetta, “For Invicta title fighter Bec Hyatt, shortcut to stardom was always part of the plan.”

<sup>397</sup> “Invicta FC 4- Esparza vs Hyatt,” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, Accessed October 6, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-4-Esparza-vs-Hyatt-26535>.

was replaced in his play-by-play role by Dutch MMA veteran Sebastian “Bas” Rutten, with Mo Lawal and Julie Kedzie remaining in the booth. After Leslie Smith vs. Raquel Pennington, Rutten exclaimed: “Coming up, Shayna Baszler . . . with the great submission record vs Alexis Davis,” the broadcast cutting to a video of Baszler flexing.<sup>398</sup>

In the prefight video package, Baszler pontificated:

I wasn't even close to my A game that night (her 2010 fight against Davis) and I still beat her. So I bring my A game tonight and I shouldn't have a problem doing what I always do . . . It's at some point going to hit the ground and as everybody should know by now, you should always be on my team if the fight goes to the ground . . . I can out wrestle her and that's the equalizer. . . I really want to finish this fight because I don't want there to be any more talk about how she could've should've would've. Not gonna happen.<sup>399</sup>

After Davis entered the cage, Kedzie said the Canadian's **Strikeforce** fight with Sarah Kaufman was one of the best fights she had seen: “There was blood everywhere, it was just awesome.” Rutten responded: “You're a sick little puppy.”<sup>400</sup> As usual, the Queen of Spades walked to the cage sporting corn rows, carrying her electric guitar, accompanied by the song Raining Blood by the metal band Slayer. Before Baszler entered the cage, she hugged her girlfriend and fellow fighter, Stephanie Eggink. However, the commentators made no mention of Eggink. During the introductions, the crowd loudly cheered, hearing Baszler's name.<sup>401</sup>

The first round began with an exchange of punches and kicks, with Rutten commenting that Baszler's striking “has a lot of power.” Eventually, the combatants clinched, with Davis falling into Baszler's guard. When the “Queen of Spades” tried to gain top position, Davis's

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<sup>398</sup> “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs Hyatt,” January 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 3:00:05, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34393/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid. Parentheses mine.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid. Davis-Kaufman was on the undercard of Strikeforce: Tate vs. Rousey, March 3, 2012. At the end of the first round, the crowd booed when the officials almost stopped Davis-Kaufman due to blood. At the end of the third round, with both fighters covered in blood, the crowd was on their feet cheering. Kaufman won via split decision.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid

pants slid down, revealing her thong underwear. They continued grappling, with Baszler attempting a calf crusher submission but wound up in a heel hook from Davis for the rest of the frame, giving the former a limp.

Davis started the second round by kicking Baszler's inside leg. Then, Baszler fell into Davis's guard, making the former's limp apparent to the announcers. After some grappling, Baszler stood up and punched Davis's upper chest, still on the mat. Baszler crashed back down when Davis kicked her injured leg, the latter throwing punches to end the round.

Early in the third, they exchanged punches, but Baszler was visibly exhausted. She tried for a takedown but fell to the ground. Davis attacked, blood pouring from her nose all over Baszler's face and arms. When Baszler tried to stand back up, Davis slid onto her back, quickly locking in a rear naked choke. Baszler collapsed and, after a brief struggle, passed out.

Rutten commented, "That's crazy, well, that's stamina,"<sup>402</sup> essentially stating that fatigue makes a fighter more susceptible to being submitted, further exclaiming: "I guess that goes for women as well."<sup>403</sup> He clarified that losing by submission is not the coward's way out, explaining: "Fatigue makes technique disappear."<sup>404</sup> As Davis and Baszler embraced, the Dutchman further reiterated, "Baszler never stopped fighting . . . She refuses to tap and passes out. But that's typical her. I never expected her to tap, so tough."<sup>405</sup> Lawal echoed Rutten's sentiment, "Both of these women are tough; I'd hate to fight them. I'd fight them with pepper spray, though."<sup>406</sup> Following a post-fight interview with Davis where Kedize joked that Davis liked the taste of her own blood, Rutten commented: "Alright, well Mo, so pepper spray it is?"

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

Lawal replied: “I’d use pepper spray and then go for a takedown.”<sup>407</sup> Rutten finished by championing Baszler’s striking power and Davis’s submission skills.<sup>408</sup>

This fight allows examination of hegemonic masculinity’s impact on emphasized femininity in WMMA from various vantage points. First, we have the pre-fight video package, where Baszler cut another promo, showing a cocky side of her persona, which stood against emphasized feminine sociability. Kedzie too, when she praised the Kaufman-Davis fight for being bloody, putting her words at odds with the tenet of female fragility.<sup>409</sup> Rutten’s subsequent comment, calling Kedzie a “sick little puppy,” both promotes and decries emphasized feminine norms. Women are not supposed to fight, let alone enjoy violence. Rutten’s words could get construed as chastising her for enjoying a high level of violence in WMMA while also being condescending. However, upon listening to the audio clip, it seems apparent that Rutten was being sarcastic, not questioning Kedzie’s opinion.<sup>410</sup> This viewing becomes more pronounced based on Rutten’s commentary throughout. Baszler’s entrance is once again an example of defying emphasized femininity, with the added wrinkle of her girlfriend being present. The broadcasters never mentioned their romantic relationship during the broadcast.<sup>411</sup>

Contrast this with Liz Carmouche’s two **Invicta FC** appearances.<sup>412</sup> On both occasions, her homosexuality was, in one way or another, considered a part of her identity.<sup>413</sup> This was not

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> “Liz Carmouche vs. Ashleigh Curry Invicta FC 1,” January 5, 2015 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 9:45. <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34611/liz-carmouche-vs-ashleigh-curry-invicta-fc-1>. Kedzie said “Carmouche is open about her sexuality.”

<sup>413</sup> “Liz Carmouche vs. Kaitlin Young Invicta FC 2,” January 5, 2015 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 17:26. <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34867/liz-carmouche-vs-kaitlin-young-invicta-fc-2>. Carmouche wore a rainbow flag mouthguard.

the case for Baszler and Eggink, so perhaps the broadcast team deliberately ignored their lesbian relationship to make Baszler more attractive to the male viewing audience.<sup>414</sup> However, in a 2021 interview, Baszler stated that any romantic relationship she was involved with would be kept from fans, saying: “I want to keep my private life private just because we are so in the public that . . . I want some piece of me that’s still mine.”<sup>415</sup> The closest she came to publicly admitting she was dating Eggink was in October 2013 on the *MMA Roasted* podcast, saying her romantic partner had just won the **Xtreme Fighting Championship** Strawweight Title.<sup>416</sup> So, this was most likely not mentioned at Baszler’s request.

Most of the first round featured both women trying to lock in submission attempts, participating in the “feminine style of fighting.”<sup>417</sup> However, Ruten not only commented on Baszler’s striking power but also applauded both competitors' submission style and flexibility, adding that this was a dimension of fighting unique to WMMA.<sup>418</sup> Furthermore, when Davis’ pants slid down, revealing her underwear, none of the broadcast team mentioned it. This moment was a perfect opportunity for them to promote emphasized femininity, not even the comedic Ruten capitalized.<sup>419</sup> In fact, during the fight prior, Leslie Smith vs. Raquel Pennington, Smith’s breast slipped out from her sports bra, and Ruten seeing it on his monitor, immediately warned

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<sup>414</sup> “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs Hyatt,” January 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 3:00:05, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34393/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>415</sup> “Shayna Baszler: Oral Sessions with Renee Paquette,” Renee Paquette, March 18, 2021, video, 43:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuP9P1CmlZU&t=198s>.

<sup>416</sup> “TJ Grant, Shayna Baszler, and Keith Berry” October 14, 2013, in *MMA Roasted*, podcast, 1:02:00, <https://mmaroastedclns.libsyn.com/tj-grant-shayna-baszler-and-keith-berry>. Eggink defeated Angela Magana for the title.

<sup>417</sup> Hirose, “Men who Strike and Men who Submit,” 190-209.

<sup>418</sup> “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs Hyatt,” January 5, 2013 on *UFC Fight Pass*, produced by Invicta Fighting Championships, video, 3:00:05, <https://ufcfightpass.com/video/34393/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.



the production crew.<sup>420</sup> The second round was almost identical to the first, with Rutten solely focused on the action.<sup>421</sup>

The final round was as visually anti-emphasized femininity as a WMMA bout could be. First, something alleged by WMMA detractors is that decent human beings do not want to see women bloodied.<sup>422</sup> And yet, while Davis walked to the cage, Kedzie praised her fight with Sarah Kaufman precisely because it was bloody and violent.<sup>423</sup> Davis's nose began to bleed during the third round, and when she locked on the rear naked choke, her blood began staining Baszler's skin. By the time Baszler passed out, Davis had covered her in blood. Blood was not entirely common in televised WMMA fights, yet interestingly, the broadcasters gave it no undue attention. Second, the image of Baszler fighting to her last breath, i.e., not tapping out, went strongly against the emphasized feminine norm of fragility.<sup>424</sup>

Finally, there is the post-fight wrap-up from the commentators, where Rutten and Lawal each made remarks which defied hegemonic masculine views on femininity. First, Rutten went out of his way to specify that being submitted does not make one a "coward," as is often portrayed in MMA fandom. Second, he pointed out that fatigue is why a talented submission expert like Baszler could wind up on the receiving end of a submission. Rutten exclaimed: "Fatigue makes technique disappear," comparing it to a previous **UFC** fight, Dan Henderson vs. Anderson Silva.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

Lawal agreed with Rutten's assessment that both fighters were tough, that he would be scared to fight them, and that he would only be willing to fight either woman if he had pepper spray. Later, Rutten asked him to double down on his pepper spray statement, which Lawal did "and try to avoid being submitted." Lawal is giving up some of his hegemonic masculinity by saying he would need pepper spray to take on either Davis or Baszler. Rutten's asking him if he wanted to retract that statement was the Dutchman bringing, however jokingly, Lawal's masculinity into question. Lawal, doubling down on his remark, including that he would have to stay on the offensive if he had any chance of not being submitted, again gives up some hegemonic masculinity. Baszler-Davis, as an MMA bout, along with how the **Invicta** broadcast crew portrayed it, largely distanced itself from emphasized feminine adherence.<sup>426</sup>

On the *MMA Mania* live stream article, Brian Hemminger once again provided round-by-round commentary on each of the six main card fights. Each paragraph focused on the respective competitors' technical competence in strikes and grappling. For Baszler-Davis, he espoused: "Baszler looks slowed down considerably here, eating another leg kick and her punches don't look like they're anything Davis needs to be worried about. Another low kick from Davis and she's finding a home for her lead left hand. Baszler slips while attempting a kick and Davis unloads some knees and punches, pouncing with some heavy offense. Davis hops on Baszler's back and she sinks in a rear naked choke, choking Baszler unconscious!"<sup>427</sup>

For the first time since **Invicta FC 1**, *Bloody Elbow* provided play-by-play written commentary for an **Invicta** card, courtesy of T.P. Grant. Grant's blow-by-blow accounts are

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

much like Hemminger's. They contained no emphasized feminine narratives, only hyping a fighter's technical competence. For the Baszler-Davis third round, Grant described: "Baszler throwing punches, but she doesn't seem to be able to plant on the knee that was in the heel hook in the first round . . . Baszler falls again . . . and Davis is going to work on Baszler . . . Davis takes the back and sinks in a deep choke, and Baszler is out."<sup>428</sup>

*MMA Fighting* once again simply updated the fights as winners became announced, leaving no additional commentary on the bouts themselves.<sup>429</sup> *MMA Rising* did the opposite, giving a detailed play-by-play analysis of all thirteen fights on the card. For the first round of Baszler-Davis, Sargent noted:

The fight began with an exchange of punches and body kicks. Baszler clinched and landed uppercuts, but Davis broke away with a right hook over the top. Davis landed a hard flurry and Baszler pulled her to the mat. Davis wound up on top in Baszler's half-guard. She moved to North-South position and Baszler kicked her legs back to try to take Davis's back. Davis wound up with back control and she attempted a rear-naked choke. Baszler escaped and stood up as Davis worked for a heel hook. Baszler dropped down with hammerfists and elbows. Davis nearly finished with an inverted heel hook before time expired.<sup>430</sup>

Readers contributed almost 900 comments to *MMA Mania*'s live stream thread.<sup>431</sup> The first two comments complained about it being a PPV, with FNFRANCHISE exclaiming: "Thank GOD For My Stream Sites. LET EM BANG!"<sup>432</sup> ANGRYTWINKIE responded: "Don't be a cunt. They put out a great product and deserve to be paid in exchange for it. Pony up the \$8,

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<sup>428</sup> T.P. Grant, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>429</sup> Mike Chiappetta, "Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt," *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2013/1/5/3838038/invicta-fc-4-results-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>430</sup> Rob Sargent, "Invicta Fighting Championships 4 Live Play-By-Play & Results," *MMArising.com*, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2013/01/05/invicta-fighting-championships-4-live-play-by-play-results/>.

<sup>431</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)," *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>432</sup> FnFranchise, January 5, 2013 (2:53pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

don't be a little bitch. If you want Invicta to stay around, they need to make money.”<sup>433</sup> DEATH KICK SUBJECTION complained: “I was watching the weigh in last night commenting about how i would ram half of the women from behind and comments got deleted,” bewildered why the site's moderators curtailed his usage of VMA Traits 1 through 3 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>434</sup> TAPTOMYARMBAR surmised: “This thing is going to tank surely. Paying for chick fights seems fucked to me, quality is not even close to being there for PPV.”<sup>435</sup> WOLFMAN13 retorted: “Have you watched them? In my opinion the events have been really solid, better than a couple of the UFC events this year.”<sup>436</sup> Brian Hemminger again contributed to the male gaze, stating: “Pay-per-view is next. starts with Paige VanZant, hottest girl in MMA.”<sup>437</sup> CORY BRAITERMAN asserted: “As long as women keep getting into MMA it can only get better.”<sup>438</sup> Shortly after the Namajunas fight, people complained about purchasing the PPV because they could not watch the stream. Knapp received some praise for refunding money to people who bought the card, but she also got sexualized by others,<sup>439</sup> with DMERITORIOUS calling her a MILF, a minor indulgence of VMA Trait 2.<sup>440</sup> OTHERDARKMEAT complained: “I worry about the future of invicta When there's only a 7 person circle jerk of a conversation here about

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<sup>433</sup> AngryTwinkie, January 5, 2013 (7:04pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>434</sup> Death Kick Subjection, January 5, 2013 (5:29pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>435</sup> Taptomyarmbar, January 5, 2013 (6:35pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>436</sup> Wolfman13, January 5, 2013 (6:37pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>437</sup> Brian Hemminger, January 5, 2013 (7:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>438</sup> Cory Braiterman, January 5, 2013 (8:24pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>439</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>440</sup> Demeritorious, January 5, 2013 (9:40pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

their big event.....and the hot chick lost. Where's the ray of hope?" reflecting VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4.<sup>441</sup> At this point in the card, posters on the *MMA Mania* thread participated in emphasized feminine promotion but acknowledged technical competence in fighters like Torres, Namajunas, and Calderwood.<sup>442</sup>

However, the conversation dismissed the technical competence aspect when Ediane Gomes entered the cage for the eighth bout of the night.



Figure 19 Ediane Gomes promotional photo for Invicta FC 4<sup>443</sup>

<sup>441</sup> Otherdarkmeat, January 5, 2013 (9:54pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

<sup>442</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>443</sup> Esther Lin, "Ediane Gomes signs new deal, expects to meet Hiroko Yamanaka at Invicta FC 4," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today Sports, October 27, 2012. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2012/10/ediane-gomes-signs-new-deal-expects-to-meet-hiroko-yamanaka-at-invicta-fc-4>.

Over thirty comments referred to the Brazilian fighter as masculine in appearance, many outright accusing her of being a man.<sup>444</sup> DEMERITORIOUS expressed: “That (Gomes) has to have at least Balls. Maybe no cock but that has balls I am sure of it.”<sup>445</sup> BIGGERLEBOWSKI noted: “I wanna see what the post fight gender test says about gomes.”<sup>446</sup> BROKEN0RBITAL exclaimed: “I see what they did Put all the cuties on the prelims and suck us in. Now we get the ex-junkies and post-ops.”<sup>447</sup> All three readers expressed VMA Trait 4 along with Toxic Traits 1 and 2. When Leslie Smith had her wardrobe malfunction, CORY BRAITERMAN commented: “4 events and we finally have slippage,” reinforcing VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>448</sup> BROKEN0RBITAL expressed: “they (Leslie Smith and Raquel Pennington) both looked pretty good before the fight i find these girls always get a bit uglier when they start swinging. I mean that in the nicest, most respectful way possible.”<sup>449</sup> This remark and over thirty other comments comprised a discussion about what the readership found attractive about women’s breasts and buttocks, featuring a variety of usages of the last three VMA Traits, including Toxic Trait 1, to an extent. DARKSIDE3774 declared: “I rooting for Davis for no other reason than she looks like a hot mom you might see at a community function,” utilizing VMA Traits 2.<sup>450</sup> Visually

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<sup>444</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5),” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>445</sup> Demeritorious, January 5, 2013 (10:13pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).” Parentheses mine.

<sup>446</sup> BiggerLebowski, January 5, 2013 (10:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>447</sup> Broken0ribital, January 5, 2013 (10:36pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>448</sup> Cory Braiterman, January 5, 2013 (11:19) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>449</sup> Broken0ribital, January 5, 2013 (11:25pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).” Parentheses mine. Post-op refers to trans women who have gone through bottom surgery.

<sup>450</sup> Darkside3744, January 5, 2013 (11:41pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

denigrating Gomes's physical appearance dominated the latter half of the thread conversation.<sup>451</sup> THE PRIDE complimented Davis's technical competence, espousing: "Damn fine leg locks by Davis, excellent calf slice to heel hook transition."<sup>452</sup> JOBEN disagreed, writing: "Chicks 69ing isn't going to go well in the UFC I still can't believe Lorenzo made this decision,"<sup>453</sup> He further elaborated: "I'm not buying the Rousy PPV which will be the first event I don't purchase in the past 8 years."<sup>454</sup> Almost twenty comments during the bout praised one or both fighters' submission prowess.<sup>455</sup> Despite this, many of the same readers also exhibited emphasized femininity and toxic masculinity admiration. During the Baszler bout, this mainly consisted of discussing Davis's thong<sup>456</sup> and arguing, as JONBON JOEY explained: "Chicks 69ing in the UFC will be AWESOME for all the dudes that watch & make them wanna watch again."<sup>457</sup> In this respect, JOBEN and JONBONJOEY were two sides of the same coin, reflecting Toxic Trait 1 in tandem with VMA Traits 1, 2, and 4. The comment sections from *MMA Mania*'s livestream threads for all four **Invicta** cards predominantly featured VMAS and heavily contributed to toxic masculinity.

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<sup>451</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>452</sup> The Pride, January 5, 2013 (11:46pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

<sup>453</sup> Joben, January 5, 2013 (11:50pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

<sup>454</sup> Joben, January 5, 2013 (11:59pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

<sup>455</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> JonBon Joey, January 5, 2013 (11:51pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

Viewers posted over 960 comments to the *Bloody Elbow* live stream thread.<sup>458</sup> VICTOR RODRIGUEZ stated: “I got a soft spot for underdogs, and this organization definitely is one. they deliver great action and give these ladies a chance to earn a paycheck . . . all hail Shannon Knapp.”<sup>459</sup> THETRAPEZOIDCONSPIRACY remarked: “Cassie Robb is another openly gay fighter. It seems it’s becoming more common in WMMA for fighters to come out.”<sup>460</sup> D.E.O. responded: “Socially It’s seems less taboo for women.”<sup>461</sup> VICTOR RODRIGUEZ added: “a lot of people already perceive female athletes to be less feminine or lesbians, especially when it comes to combat sports. the surprise factor isn’t there, and it’s not really considered that big a deal.”<sup>462</sup> LUCAS BOURDON applauded technical competence, asserting: “By WMMA's standards Torres' striking is pretty damn good.”<sup>463</sup> Almost thirty posts heaped praise on Rose Namajunas’s fighting acumen.<sup>464</sup> NIFTUCAL\_AKA\_BETTY admitted: “When I heard they would be charging for this card, I was a little bummed . . . I’m really, really happy I went for it.”<sup>465</sup> When Knapp announced that everyone who bought the PPV would receive refunds due to the streaming issues, the *Bloody Elbow* readership expressed they wanted **Invicta** to keep their

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<sup>458</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>459</sup> Victor Rodriguez, January 5, 2013 (7:03pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>460</sup> TheTrapezoidConspiracy, January 5, 2013 (7:09pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>461</sup> D.E.O., January 5, 2013 (7:10pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>462</sup> Victor Rodriguez, January 5, 2013 (7:11pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>463</sup> Lucas Bourdon, January 5, 2013 (7:40pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>464</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>465</sup> NiftuCal\_aka\_betty, January 5, 2013 (8:16pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”



money. THETRAPEZOIDCONSPIRACY agreed, stating: “I’d honestly prefer they kept my money, so I’m heading to their store.”<sup>466</sup>

After the prelims, a promo package aired, hyping the six main card fights. Responding, VICTOR RODRIGUEZ praised Baszler’s unsociable demeanor, stating: “bonus points for Shayna and the Queen of Spades trick.”<sup>467</sup> Two other commenters agreed the trick was cool. During the Ediane Gomes contest, not a single post mocked her physical appearance.<sup>468</sup> Some postings did reference Leslie Smith’s wardrobe malfunction, but not in the crude manner shown on *MMA Mania*. An excellent example of this was VICTOR RODRIGUEZ noting: “she needs to keep that covered,”<sup>469</sup> to which DUCK sarcastically responded: “But where oh where could we ever find such material otherwise?”<sup>470</sup> DUCK poked fun at fans who treated WMMA as a place to have their male gaze appeased, forgetting *Playboy* magazine and online porn exist. ALEJANDRO CASTELLANOS-JARAMILLO admired Baszler and Davis’s fighting acumens, saying: “Baszler is awesome, but Davis WARS. I’m torn for who to root for. Baszler is cuter, but Davis WARS...what a conundrum.”<sup>471</sup> Post-fight THETRAPEZOIDCONSPIRACY complimented both fighters’ technical competence, espousing: “Davis is the 2nd best submission grappler in the division She just submitted a fighter (Baszler) who has only been submitted

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<sup>466</sup> TheTrapezoidConspiracy, January 5, 2013 (8:45pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>467</sup> Victor Rodriguez, January 5, 2013 (9:39pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>468</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>469</sup> Victor Rodriguez, January 5, 2013 (11:20pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>470</sup> Duck, January 5, 2013 (11:21pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>471</sup> Alejandro Castellanos-Jaramillo, January 5, 2013 (11:39pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

once...seven years ago.”<sup>472</sup> HEAD-SPLITTER woke up for the main event and asked what good fights he missed,<sup>473</sup> to which CHRISTOPHER MULDONG replied: “Davis vs Baszler and Leslie Smith vs Pennington.”<sup>474</sup> *Bloody Elbow* thread moderator SHINSPLITS added: “Also known as, Thong and Boobs,” sending a message by participating in VMA Traits 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>475</sup> There are two important messages to take from *Bloody Elbow’s* live thread for **Invicta FC 4**. First, as usual, the comments were much more respectful towards WMMA and rarely delved into emphasized feminine promotion compared to the *MMA Mania* and *MMA Fighting* readerships. Second, most comments came from a core group of readers, meaning that while hegemonic masculinity was largely absent, the sample size of individual readers was relatively small.<sup>476</sup>

On *MMA Fighting’s* live stream, there were thirty-two comments. Ten were about the streaming issues and the resultant refunds, again applauding Shannon Knapp for giving fans their money back.<sup>477</sup> Most of the other posters praised **Invicta FC 4**. RUGERK91 opined: “Too bad they finished the card with Esparza and not Baszler/Davis who came to fight. Win or lose i will always respect the fighters that come to fight and not (FITCH) and bore everyone half to death.”<sup>478</sup> AKIZZLE stated: “There were some talented woman fighters whom i never saw

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<sup>472</sup> TheTrapezoidConspiracy, January 6, 2013 (12:01pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>473</sup> Head-splitter, January 6, 2013 (12:05pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>474</sup> Christopher Muldong, January 6, 2013 (12:06pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>475</sup> ShinSplints, January 6, 2013 (12:06pm) Comment on Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play.”

<sup>476</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>477</sup> Mike Chiappetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt,” *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/5/3838038/invicta-fc-4-results-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>478</sup> Rugerk91, January 6, 2013 (5:25pm) Comment on Chiappetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

before. Man hopely they refine their payment system . . . cuz i want to support wmma.”<sup>479</sup>

ENRIKK praised Joanne Calderwood and Tecia Torres’ respective fighting prowess.<sup>480</sup> The prominent toxic masculinity came from DANAISMYDAD, who complained: “Why bother with this. Dana is wasting his time, again as appealing as WNBA or Womens softball. What a waste of time . . . leave the fighting to the men.”<sup>481</sup> ARGO responded: “What insecure little dick guys like you think. Women’s MMA is legit and they bring it.”<sup>482</sup> DANAISMYDAD, channeling Toxic Trait 1 in addition to VMA Traits 1 and 4, retorted:

I take it your a chick with that response . . . A lot of Fighters feel the way I do they just remain silent or politically correct. Name one Woman’s sport that is even remotely successful outside of Tennis and PGA . . . I have been involved with this sport 25 years and I really don’t like what I see anymore . . . I even predict that it will fall off here shortly because of all it’s exposure done in large part by UFC — too much too soon, then the clown organizations(regional promotions) that are all over, now the Woman’s Circus comes to town like this. Everyone and their grandmother/mother/sister/ 10 year old cousin etc thinks they can “Bang Bro” it’s starting to be a joke but maybe I am old school. I will just sit and watch it fail.<sup>483</sup>

This comment contains emphasized feminine promotion. First, DANAISMYDAD insinuated that for someone to enjoy WMMA, the fan in question must be a woman. Two, he undercut female fighters’ technical competence by referring to their sport as “the Woman’s Circus.” Finally, he criticized women for wanting access to what he viewed as a male-only preserve. ENRIKK countered: “You can lament the fact that the times are a-changin’, but that, too, is the nature of life . . . MMA isn’t going to end just because people don’t fight like idiots anymore.”<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Akizzle, January 5, 2013 (9:16pm) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

<sup>480</sup> Enrikk, January 6, 2013 (1:06pm) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

<sup>481</sup> Danaismydad, January 6, 2013 (12:52am) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

<sup>482</sup> Argo, January 6, 2013 (1:06apm) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

<sup>483</sup> DanaismyDad, January 6, 2013 (1:04pm) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”  
Parentheses mine.

<sup>484</sup> Enrikk, January 6, 2013 (1:35pm) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

Fans wrote over a thousand comments on the *Underground* live reaction thread, a fair amount complaining about streaming issues.<sup>485</sup> MMAVIXEN noted: “A lot of people on here haven't even seen the last 3 events. Some people made up their mind about this promotion without giving it a chance.”<sup>486</sup> As if to prove her point, OCEAN6 announced: “I am sort of feeling horny watching these beautiful women fight and then hug it out. Whoodathunkit?”<sup>487</sup> Similarly, AUTHORITY\_FIGURE exclaimed: “I wish to have babies with Katalina (Malungahu).”<sup>488</sup> These last two comments contained VMA Traits 2 through 4 and Toxic Trait 1. Many praised Rose Namajunas, with ASIMPLEFAN declaring: “Rose is a legit badass.”<sup>489</sup> GRAVYFRIES concurred: “F#\$@ That was Awesome!”<sup>490</sup> Respect for WMMA technical competence was prevalent during the first eight fights on the card, outweighing a present male gaze atmosphere.<sup>491</sup> However, that changed when Ediane Gomes came out for her bout. RYANN VON DOOM joked: “Lol my gf just said this 'girl' needs to drop trau and prove its a chick.”<sup>492</sup> IGOTCMSPUKED quoted the movie *Austin Powers*, remarking: “That's a man baby!”<sup>493</sup> Over twenty comments inferred Gomes was too masculine to be a woman.<sup>494</sup> Most featured at least one, if not both, of VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 2.

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<sup>485</sup> Underground\_Feed “Invicta FC 4 official discussion,” Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, January 2013. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-4-official-discussion/2111137>.

<sup>486</sup> Mmavixen, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>487</sup> Ocean6, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>488</sup> Authority\_Figure, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>489</sup> Asimplefan, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>490</sup> GravyFries, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>491</sup> Underground\_Feed “Invicta FC 4 official discussion,” Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, January 2013. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-4-official-discussion/2111137>.

<sup>492</sup> Ryann Von Doom, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>493</sup> IGotCMSpuked, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>494</sup> Underground\_Feed “Invicta FC 4 official discussion,” Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, January 2013. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-4-official-discussion/2111137>.

Sexualizing women reappeared on the thread when Leslie Smith's nipple briefly fell out of her sports bra during her fight with Raquel Pennington. CDALE 27 cheered: "Great MMA action and Boobies!"<sup>495</sup> A BAG OF RICIN complained: "Stream lagged when tits were exposed. I am disappoint."<sup>496</sup> Both readers participated in Toxic Trait 1 along with VMA Traits 2 and 4. However, because the wardrobe malfunction occurred in the first round, the rest of the comments focused on technical competence.<sup>497</sup> Baszler had some fans in the thread, with MMAVIXEN stating: "This girl Shayna is adorable. Me likes her a lot."<sup>498</sup> When Davis's underwear got exposed, the male gaze returned, with SIMONPE exclaiming: "Thooooong!"<sup>499</sup> SUBBEDZERO wrote: "Heel Hook....Thong out...like a BOSS!"<sup>500</sup> Both expressed Toxic Trait 1 in addition to VMA Traits 2 and 4. And yet, over twelve comments praised Baszler-Davis,<sup>501</sup> with CHOASOVERKILL saying: "Way to beat your opponent at her game great fight."<sup>502</sup> SHOUDAWHOUDA noted: "Invicta has me convinced that a women's division in the UFC is going to do just fine."<sup>503</sup>

To conclude the live stream thread, two contrasting notions are present, one advocating emphasized feminine norms, the other defying them. HANDYDARSH asked: "I heard there was a NIP SLIP . . . anyone hear about the fights? all i got is there was a Nip slip Worth Checking OUT!"<sup>504</sup> THE\_MAMMOTH sarcastically retorted: "Yeah nice one dude, WMMA needs more

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<sup>495</sup> Cdale27, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>496</sup> A bag of ricin, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>497</sup> Underground\_Feed "Invicta FC 4 official discussion," Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, January 2013. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-4-official-discussion/2111137>.

<sup>498</sup> Mmavixen, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>499</sup> Simonpe, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>500</sup> SubbedZERO, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>501</sup> Underground\_Feed "Invicta FC 4 official discussion," Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, January 2013. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-4-official-discussion/2111137>.

<sup>502</sup> ChaosOverkill, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>503</sup> Shoudawouda, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

<sup>504</sup> HandyDarsh, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 4 official discussion."

people like you supporting it.”<sup>505</sup> GRAEMEO criticized THE\_MAMMOTH, stating: “Well if they are going to whip their tits out during the fight then what do u expect?”<sup>506</sup> HANDYDARSH argued: “Just because I love tits doesn't mean I'm a bad person.”<sup>507</sup> GRAMEO and HANDYDARSH reflected VMA Traits 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1 in defense of the latter’s words. Here, HANDYDARSH was either unaware or did not care that reducing WMMA fighters to objects designed to titillate him would reduce acceptance of their technical competence. Conversely, VICTORCHENSKY noted: “One thing ive noticed with women . . . they do not hold grudges . . . we could all learn a lot from these girls and there would be a lot less drama . . . so lets all just look foward to another great night of fights cut the shit talking.”<sup>508</sup> While there is slight promotion of the sociable aspect of emphasized femininity, overall, VICTORCHENSKY uses WMMA sportsmanship to call for reduced arguing amongst *Underground*’s commenters. However, it did nothing to reduce the contribution to toxic masculinity in statements directed toward Ediane Gomes and Leslie Smith.

*Sherdog* conducted two post-fight recaps. The first utilized descriptive detail for each of the fights. For Baszler-Davis, Brian Knapp wrote: “Davis (13-5, 2-0 Invicta) was relentless, threatening . . . with one submission after another: a rear-naked choke and heel hook in the first round and an omoplata and inverted triangle choke in the second. The 28-year-old finally sealed the deal in round three. There, Davis capitalized on a Baszler slip, transitioned to her back and finished the Josh Barnett protégé with the rear-naked choke.”<sup>509</sup> The summary treated the fight as

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<sup>505</sup> The\_Mammoth, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>506</sup> Graemeo, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>507</sup> HandyDarsh, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>508</sup> Victorchensky, January 2013, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 4 official discussion.”

<sup>509</sup> Brian Knapp, “CARLA ESPARZA OUTPOINTS BEC HYATT, SEIZES VACANT INVICTA STRAWWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, January 5, 2013. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/news/Carla-Esparza-Outpoints-Bec-Hyatt-Seizes-Vacant-Invicta-Strawweight-Championship-48809>.

equal to male bouts. The second featured in-depth looks at each of the card's strawweight victors (Tecia Torres, Joanne Calderwood, Rose Namajunas, and Carla Esparza). Writer Yael Grauer noted: "With Invicta providing space for promising up-and-comers to gain some experience and showcase their skills, the depth of the strawweight division will likely continue to grow."<sup>510</sup> With these technical looks at **Invicta's** 115-pound division, Grauer countered the hegemonic masculine notion that WMMA had shallow depth talent-wise.

Mike Bohn presented an article regarding the streaming issues during Invicta FC 4 for MMA Mania. "After dealing with streaming and payment processing issues that prevented a number of viewers from ordering . . . Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' pay-per-view . . . Shannon Knapp made the admirable decision to broadcast the show free of charge and refund each person."<sup>511</sup> As happened following each of the three prior **Invicta** broadcasts, Brian Hemminger focused squarely on technical competence, declaring: "The night's co-main event saw bantamweights Alexis Davis and Shayna Baszler put on a tremendous showing for the fans . . . After a series of heavy ground and pound shots, the Canadian pounced on a rear naked choke opportunity and squeezed until Baszler went unconscious."<sup>512</sup>

In his recap for *Bloody Elbow*, T.P. Grant summarized Baszler-Davis as: "A splendid fight between two excellent and tough grapplers. Davis got a take-down in the first and . . . was then able to switch to a leg lock attack and finished the round working on a heel hook that

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<sup>510</sup> Yael Grauer, "INVICTA 4 SHOWCASES BRIGHT FUTURE FOR WOMEN'S STRAWWEIGHT DIVISION," Sherdog.com, Mandatory, January 8, 2013. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Invicta-4-Showcases-Bright-Future-for-Womens-Strawweight-Division-48861>. Main event loser Bec Hyatt was also covered in the article.

<sup>511</sup> Mike Bohn, "Invicta FC provides refund and free live stream for Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' after payment processing and streaming issues," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3841062/invicta-fc-provides-refund-and-free-live-stream-for-invicta-fc-4>.

<sup>512</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/6/3841992/invicta-fc-3-results-recap-esparza-wrestles-home-115-pound-title>.

appeared to cause some damage . . . In the second round Baszler . . . spent much of the round fighting off Davis' aggressive guard. Then in third a slip cost Baszler dearly as Davis was able to take the back and sink in a deep choke. Baszler refused to tap and was quickly choked out.”<sup>513</sup> There was no emphasized feminine language present. Five other fights received this in-depth treatment from Grant.<sup>514</sup>

Mike Chiapetta wrote both recap articles for *MMA Fighting*, one written immediately following the main event, the other published early the following day. The first was a list of the winning fighters and their method of victory. He gave no analysis during the fights or afterward.<sup>515</sup> Chiapetta's second article was much different, reserving space to analyze fighters' martial arts skills while also applauding defiance of emphasized femininity. Regarding the main event, Chiapetta opined: “Hyatt lived up to her "Rowdy" moniker by refusing to wilt, finding her way back to her feet repeatedly and taking the standing action to Esparza. But Esparza . . . wouldn't be denied.”<sup>516</sup> As for Baszler-Davis, Chiapetta explained: “The co-main event featured . . . Davis getting her revenge, scoring a third-round finish with a rear naked choke submission . . . Just seconds earlier, Baszler had drawn Davis' blood with a standing strike, and Davis' nose was leaking on the mat as she finished the choke.”<sup>517</sup> His openness about the drawing of blood and his admiring Baszler's refusal to tap expressed appreciation for moments that contradicted the notion of “female fragility.”

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<sup>513</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta 4 Results and Video Highlights: Carla Esparza defeats Bec Hyatt for Title,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/6/3841040/invicta-4-results-highlights-gifs-Leslie-Smith-video>.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> Mike Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/5/3838038/invicta-fc-4-results-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>516</sup> Mike Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/6/3841474/invicta-fc-4-results-carla-esparza-beats-bec-hyatt-to-capture>.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.



There were five post-**Invicta FC 4** articles from *MMA Rising*'s Rob Sargent. Four were examined for this study. The first was a full-on recap of every fight on the PPV.<sup>518</sup> Sargent wrote a paragraph on each contest, with his familiar assessments of various fighters' technical competence and complete absence of emphasized feminine narratives. In describing the third round of Baszler-Davis, Sargent summarized: "Davis took advantage of a slip by hopping on Baszler's back and locking on the fight-ending rear-naked choke. Baszler was rendered unconscious, giving Davis the technical submission victory."<sup>519</sup> The next three were interviews, with the winners of the card's final three fights, Leslie Smith, Alexis Davis, and Carla Esparza.<sup>520</sup> Each interview was in-depth, exploring beyond their **Invicta FC 4** fights, probing the possibility that they might join the **UFC** following news about Rousey and Carmouche headlining **UFC 157** in February, and lastly, who they wanted to face next.<sup>521</sup>

Readers contributed fourteen comments on Mike Bohn's *MMA Mania* article concerning the online streaming debacle and how **Invicta** refunded everyone.<sup>522</sup> Some, like XJAYROOX, praised Knapp, exclaiming: "Classy all the way."<sup>523</sup> However, many ignored the refunds and focused on fighters Katalina Malungahu and Veronica Rothenhausler, pictured below with Shannon Knapp.

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<sup>518</sup> Rob Sargent, "Invicta FC 4 Results: Carla Esparza Wins Strawweight Title," MMArising.com, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2013/01/05/invicta-fc-4-results-carla-esparza-wins-strawweight-title/>.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> "Search for invicta," MMArising.com, Accessed October 8, 2021. <https://www.mmarising.com/page/33/?s=invicta>.

<sup>521</sup> Rob Sargent, "Alexis Davis Talks Invicta FC 4 Win, Challenging For UFC Title," MMArising.com, January 8, 2013. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2013/01/08/alexis-davis-talks-invicta-fc-4-win-challenging-for-ufc-title/>.

<sup>522</sup> Mike Bohn, "Invicta FC provides refund and free live stream for Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' after payment processing and streaming issues," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3841062/invicta-fc-provides-refund-and-free-live-stream-for-invicta-fc-4>.

<sup>523</sup> xJayRoox, January 5, 2013 (10:56pm) Comment on Bohn, "Invicta FC provides refund and free live stream for Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' after payment processing and streaming issues."



Figure 20 Katalina Malungahu and Veronica Rothenhausler pose at the weigh-ins for Invicta FC 4, January 4, 2013<sup>524</sup>

JOBEN remarked: “I bet both these chicks don’t bleed from their pussys anymore. And I bet they are both under 30. Weird!” This comment featured an inverse of VMA Trait 2, VMA Trait 4, and Toxic Trait 2.<sup>525</sup> JOBEN likely implied that the two fighters were on steroids because he considers too much female musculature unnatural. DAFTSHADOW replied: “Even better you can now bust in them w/o concerns of knocking them up,” showcasing VMA Traits 2 through 4 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>526</sup> These two readers focused on the women’s failure to titillate them, celebrating toxic masculinity.

The readership posted eleven comments to Hemminger’s recap piece.<sup>527</sup> TBRANSON focused on technical competence, writing: “Calderwood is amazing. Very skilled and

<sup>524</sup> Esther Lin, “Invicta FC provides refund and free live stream for Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' after payment processing and streaming issues,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013.

<sup>525</sup> Joben, January 6, 2013 (2:35am) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC provides refund and free live stream for Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' after payment processing and streaming issues.”

<sup>526</sup> Daftshadow, January 6, 2013 (3:49am) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC provides refund and free live stream for Invicta FC 4: 'Esparza vs Hyatt' after payment processing and streaming issues.”

<sup>527</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013.  
<https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/6/3841992/invicta-fc-3-results-recap-esparza-wrestles-home-115-pound-title>.

technical.”<sup>528</sup> The remaining reader opinions promoted emphasized feminine narratives. The photo attached to the article pictured referee “Big” John McCarthy holding the hand of strawweight champion Carla Esparza. ~PEREGRINE noted: “Big john is thinkin about how he could have a lot of fun tossing her around,” participating in VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>529</sup> Others refused to acknowledge WMMA’s legitimacy. UNAMBIG responded: “Oh yeah, this happened...and nobody cared,” inferring that the women’s game is not real MMA news.<sup>530</sup> POOTIS\_PENSER\_HERE brought up Ronda Rousey, exclaiming: “How about that, two women that had to fight (Esparza and Hyatt) for a belt #rouseyisadicksuckingspoiledbrat.”<sup>531</sup> JON ESTRADA SR. countered: “Dont forget Jose Aldo! #aldoisadicksuckingspoiledbrat.”<sup>532</sup> POOTIS\_PENSER\_HERE argued: “lets get one thing straight Aldo should have fought for it, but . . . it wasn’t because of sucking Dana and Fertitta dicks. That is precisely what happened with Rousey.”<sup>533</sup>

For context, when the **UFC** signed, Dana White decided to award her the inaugural **UFC Women’s Bantamweight Championship**, as she still held the defunct **Strikeforce** variant.<sup>534</sup> A similar incident happened in 2010 when **World Extreme Cagefighting** merged with the **UFC**. With Jose Aldo being the **WEC Featherweight Champion**, White awarded him the inaugural

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<sup>528</sup> TBranson, January 6, 2013 (12:19pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.”

<sup>529</sup> ~Peregrine, January 6, 2013 (2:57pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.”

<sup>530</sup> Unambig, January 6, 2013 (3:33pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.”

<sup>531</sup> Pootis\_Penser\_Here, January 6, 2013 (5:10pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>532</sup> Jon Estrada Sr., January 6, 2013 (6:58pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.”

<sup>533</sup> Pootis\_Penser\_Here, January 6, 2013 (7:50pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.”

<sup>534</sup> Jesse Holland, “Ronda Rousey vs. Liz Carmouche main event title fight booked for UFC 157 on Feb. 23 in Anaheim,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, December 6, 2012.

<https://www.mmamania.com/2012/12/6/2272359/ronda-rousey-vs-liz-carmouche-main-event-title-fight-ufc-157>.

UFC counterpart.<sup>535</sup> POOTIS\_PENSER\_HERE minimized the comparison, insisting that Rousey could only win a title by providing sexual favors, firmly promoting VMA Traits 1, 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1.

Only four readers provided opinions on an MMA Mania photo gallery of **Invicta FC** 4.<sup>536</sup> Specifically related to the Baszler-Davis fight, there were two.



*Figure 21 Alexis Davis celebrates after submitting Shayna Baszler at Invicta FC 4, January 5, 2013.<sup>537</sup>*

Regarding the above photo, JONNYBOY6969 opined: “Beautiful lady. lol I like the passed out broad right next to her,” reflecting VMA Traits 2 and 4.<sup>538</sup> LORGBB submitted another picture of Davis from a media day appearance, remarking: “I did not know Alexis davis looked like this,” positively commenting on her physical features.<sup>539</sup> Both posts embellished the writers’ respective “penis ratings,” but not to toxic masculine levels.

<sup>535</sup> Jesse Holland, “UFCs big announcement: WEC to merge into UFC by January of 2011,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 28, 2010. <https://www.mmamania.com/2010/10/28/1779524/ufcs-big-announcement-wec-to-merge-into-ufc-by-january-of-2011>.

<sup>536</sup> Thomas Myers, “Invicta FC 4 results: Fight night photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/6/3842638/invicta-fc-4-results-fight-night-photos-gallery-for-esparza-vs-hyatt>.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., Photo taken by Esther Lin.

<sup>538</sup> Jonnyboy6969, January 7, 2013 (1:34pm) Comment on Myers, “Invicta FC 4 results: Fight night photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.”

<sup>539</sup> Lorgbb, January 7, 2013 (1:04pm) Comment on Myers, “Invicta FC 4 results: Fight night photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.”

An article containing a video link to the entire **Invicta FC 4** main card received ten comments.<sup>540</sup> Three of the postings featured emphasized feminine promotion. SPONGEPAD declared: “woman MMA are so boring unless its the top tier.”<sup>541</sup> He quickly issued a retraction, stating: “Scratch what I just said . . . Im thoroughly entertained.”<sup>542</sup> SHMEGGLES criticized homosexuality, noting: “One thing thats gonna hurt womens MMA is that it appears as a total dyke-fest.”<sup>543</sup> ~PERENGRINE replied: “One thing thats gonna . . . FAP FAP FAP womens MMA is that it appears as a total dyke-fest.”<sup>544</sup> Both comments contained VMA Traits 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 2. The latter also featured VMA Traits 3 and Toxic Trait 1. He managed to sexualize the fighters of **Invicta** in two separate ways. First, by implying he was masturbating, ~PERENGRINE made clear he watched WMMA solely for titillation. Second, he tried forcing lesbianism into servicing toxic masculinity by championing how it aroused him. Conversely, JAMESGLORY expressed: “Well done those girls . . . This year will be a great year for female fighters and women’s MMA.”<sup>545</sup>

There were nine comments regarding Brian Hemminger’s post-show interview with Shannon Knapp. Six of them praised Knapp as a promoter and **Invicta** itself.<sup>546</sup> The lone

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<sup>540</sup> Jesse Holland, “Watch Invicta FC 4 full video replay of main card fights from last Saturday night (Jan. 5) in Kansas City,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 7, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/7/3846026/watch-invicta-fc-4-full-video-replay-online-esparza-hyatt-womens-mma>.

<sup>541</sup> SPONGEPAD, January 7, 2013 (9:45am) Comment on Holland, “Watch Invicta FC 4 full video replay of main card fights from last Saturday night (Jan. 5) in Kansas City.”

<sup>542</sup> SPONGEPAD, January 7, 2013 (10:10am) Comment on Holland, “Watch Invicta FC 4 full video replay of main card fights from last Saturday night (Jan. 5) in Kansas City.”

<sup>543</sup> Shmeggles, January 7, 2013 (10:35am) Comment on Holland, “Watch Invicta FC 4 full video replay of main card fights from last Saturday night (Jan. 5) in Kansas City.”

<sup>544</sup> ~Perengrine, January 7, 2013 (10:40am) Comment on Holland, “Watch Invicta FC 4 full video replay of main card fights from last Saturday night (Jan. 5) in Kansas City.”

<sup>545</sup> Jamesglory, January 7, 2013 (12:20pm) Comment on Holland, “Watch Invicta FC 4 full video replay of main card fights from last Saturday night (Jan. 5) in Kansas City.”

<sup>546</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Make it right: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 7, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/7/3848872/make-it-right-invicta-fc-president-shannon-knapp-interview-exclusive>.



emphasized feminine remark came from ELSTLKO, stating: “You had me at wardrobe malfunctions,” referencing Leslie Smith, celebrating VMA Trait 2,4, and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>547</sup> An article linked to a YouTube video showing former UFC fighter Pat Barry cornering his girlfriend, Rose Namajunas, featured twenty-four comments.<sup>548</sup> ALBINO GARCIA espoused: “Anyone who watched Sat's Invicta 4 card . . . It was a hell of a fight and hell of a card. All those girls are tough as shit . . . They still have some work to do . . . but the fights were awesome.”<sup>549</sup> ALBINO GARCIA focused more on technical competence, whereas others discussed the male gaze. ELSTLKO asked: “Who wouldn't be excited watching your girlfriend rolling around with other girls,” participating in VMA Traits 2 through 4 and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>550</sup> Finding out Namajunas was twelve years younger than Barry, THUNDER BISCUIT responded: “Barry might just be my hero. Chalk one up for dirty old guys!” supporting VMA Traits 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>551</sup>

On T.P. Grant's *Bloody Elbow* recap article, twenty-seven comments were posted.<sup>552</sup> ZOMBIE PROPHET began the conversation by stating that a GIF of Leslie Smith's wardrobe malfunction could be found on his Twitter account, reflecting VMA Traits 1, 2, 4, and Toxic Trait 1.<sup>553</sup> This remark was the lone comment contributing to toxic masculinity, with the

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<sup>547</sup> ElStkO, January 7, 2013 (9:54pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Make it right: Invicta FC President Shannon Knapp interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>548</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Video: Pat Barry goes crazy while cornering his girlfriend Rose Namajunas at Invicta FC 4,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/6/3842132/video-pat-barry-crazy-cornering-girlfriend-rose-namajunas-invicta-fc-4-mma>

<sup>549</sup> Albino Garcia, January 7, 2013 (9:46am) Comment on Hemminger, “Video: Pat Barry goes crazy while cornering his girlfriend Rose Namajunas at Invicta FC 4.”

<sup>550</sup> ElStkO, January 6, 2013 (2:10pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Video: Pat Barry goes crazy while cornering his girlfriend Rose Namajunas at Invicta FC 4.”

<sup>551</sup> Thunder Biscuit, January 6, 2013 (4:42pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Video: Pat Barry goes crazy while cornering his girlfriend Rose Namajunas at Invicta FC 4.”

<sup>552</sup> T.P. Grant, “Invicta 4 Results and Video Highlights: Carla Esparza defeats Bec Hyatt for Title,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/6/3841040/invicta-4-results-highlights-gifs-Leslie-Smith-video>.

<sup>553</sup> Zombie Prophet, January 6, 2013 (1:16 am) Comment on Grant, “Invicta 4 Results and Video Highlights: Carla Esparza defeats Bec Hyatt for Title.”

remainder discussing one of three topics. Eight posts praised Joanne Calderwood's striking ability. Five comments applauded Shannon Knap for refunding PPV buyers. Eight reader submissions debated whether Baszler or Davis would be good opponents to face Rousey.<sup>554</sup> ALEJANDRO CASTELLANOS-JARAMILLO remarked: "Alexis is a great grappler. Just b/c you (Baszler) lost to a great grappler it doesn't mean you are a scrub incapable of competing. Maybe Ronda beats her (Baszler) handily, maybe not, and so what? I still see it as a close fight."<sup>555</sup> Both Baszler and Davis were having their technical competence appreciated, with no objectifying dialogue.

Thirty-four comments were attached to ShinSplint's article mentioning **Invicta's** awarding of fight bonuses.<sup>556</sup> RATHEGOD offered: "If i was the baldfather (Dana White) i would throw a lil cash behind this thing . . . Let women talent develop the right way, get a little exposure, then funnel them to the big show. Cant help but feel like all these great fights are going to waste."<sup>557</sup> DEVYN RODRIGUEZ used the streaming issues as evidence that this was the weakest card **Invicta** had broadcast, despite him not having watched the card.<sup>558</sup> While a few other complaints reported streaming problems, no comments related to emphasized feminine promotion. DOVER noted: "Alexis Davis vs. Shaina Bazler. You can't ask for a better fight!"<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> T.P. Grant, "Invicta 4 Results and Video Highlights: Carla Esparza defeats Bec Hyatt for Title," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/6/3841040/invicta-4-results-highlights-gifs-Leslie-Smith-video>.

<sup>555</sup> Alejandro Castellanos-Jaramillo, January 6, 2013 (8:18am) Comment on Grant, "Invicta 4 Results and Video Highlights: Carla Esparza defeats Bec Hyatt for Title." Parentheses mine.

<sup>556</sup> ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt full fight video and bonuses," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/6/3841662/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-full-fight-video-and-bonuses>.

<sup>557</sup> RaTheGod, January 6, 2013 (5:53pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt full fight video and bonuses." Parentheses mine.

<sup>558</sup> Devyn Rodriguez, January 7, 2013 (6:38am) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt full fight video and bonuses."

<sup>559</sup> Dover, January 6, 2013 (7:15pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt full fight video and bonuses."

Stephie Haynes' interview with Shannon Knapp featured thirty-six readership responses. Most comments discussed **Invicta**'s future and what would be in their best interest for the promotion's continued growth and success.<sup>560</sup> CHROMIUM stated: "Damn near every female fighter right now wants to fight in Invicta if they're not someone who can compete at Bantamweight, the one division the UFC runs. The amount of talent has gotten a hell of a lot deeper over the last two years and Strawweight, Flyweight, and Bantamweight are all at the point of being self-sustaining divisions where you can crown a world champion."<sup>561</sup> BLUE\_STREAK echoed: "They are a great promotion that puts on enjoyable cards and are . . . giving a place for WMMA to shine."<sup>562</sup> GIBLERT stated: "I think Invicta is the best non-zuffa promotion."<sup>563</sup>

SHAKE ZULA predicted: "Invicta will do well, UFC Women's MMA will do well."<sup>564</sup> VICTOR RODRIGUEZ responded: "I approve so long as Shannon gets . . . control of the women's division and pay these ladies in thick stacks."<sup>565</sup> On the other hand, KNIGHT000 espoused: "I really don't want WMMA in UFC. Keeping them separate and both UFC and Invicta being successful would be win-win for me."<sup>566</sup> D.E.O. asked KNIGHT000 a question that went unanswered: "But why do they need to be separate?"<sup>567</sup> Outside of KRONIC stating that he

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<sup>560</sup> Stephie Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 10, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/10/3861350/shannon-knapp-invicta-ppv-refunds-dire-straits>.

<sup>561</sup> Chromium, January 11, 2013 (2:05am) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

<sup>562</sup> Blue\_Streak, January 10, 2013 (5:33pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

<sup>563</sup> Giblert, January 10, 2013 (7:46pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds." Parentheses mine.

<sup>564</sup> Shake Zula, January 10, 2013 (6:31pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

<sup>565</sup> Victor Rodriguez, January 10, 2013 (6:45pm) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

<sup>566</sup> Knight000, January 11, 2013 (1:26am) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

<sup>567</sup> D.E.O., January 11, 2013 (11:17am) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."



would masturbate to Shannon Knapp, which featured the last three traits of VMAS and Toxic Trait 1, the comments display *Bloody Elbow*'s progressive readership.<sup>568</sup>

Mike Chiappetta's recap article for *MMA Fighting* featured twelve comments; only four need examination.<sup>569</sup> ONVI briefly discussed his "penis's ratings," randomly calling Carla Esparza "ugly," perpetuating an inverse of VMA Trait 2.<sup>570</sup> TBEAST ranted about WMMA's alleged lack of fighter talent, arguing: "Bec Hyatt has only beat ONE opponent EVER that has EVER won an mma fight . . . there is 100 stories on this fight/event on every effing mma site . . . By this rationale there should be a million stories everyday on men's fights that take place in 2 bit bar/gym shows out in the country . . . I seriously do not understand the draw of wmma. Untechnical boring slopfests from top to bottom."<sup>571</sup> His words reverberated with VMA Trait 1 and Toxic Trait 1. There are several toxic masculine aspects of his diatribe. First, he compared WMMA to low-level male bouts. Second, he neglected to mention how Hyatt was a last-minute replacement.<sup>572</sup> Finally, he exaggerated the media coverage given to **Invicta**, let alone Esparza-Hyatt. *Bloody Elbow* wrote ten articles;<sup>573</sup> *MMA Mania* published seventeen;<sup>574</sup> *MMA Fighting*

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<sup>568</sup> Kronic, January 12, 2013 (2:51am) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

<sup>569</sup> Mike Chiappetta, "Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 6, 2013. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2013/1/6/3841474/invicta-fc-4-results-carla-esparza-beats-bec-hyatt-to-capture>.

<sup>570</sup> Onvi, January 7, 2013 (5:02am) Comment on Chiappetta, "Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship."

<sup>571</sup> Tbeast, January 7, 2013 (8:08am) Comment on Chiappetta, "Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship."

<sup>572</sup> Enrikk, January 7, 2013 (12:05pm) Comment on Chiappetta, "Comment on Chiappetta, "Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship."

<sup>573</sup> "Search for invicta," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 8, 2021.

<https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=145&q=invicta> through <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/search?order=date&page=144&q=invicta>.

<sup>574</sup> "Search for invicta" MMAmania.com, Vox Media, Accessed October 8, 2021.

<https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=124&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=121&q=invicta>.

hosted ten;<sup>575</sup> and *Sherdog* featured ten.<sup>576</sup> That is less than fifty articles combined, nowhere near one hundred articles per media outlet. ENRIKK retorted: “She (Hyatt) was also a double replacement for two other fighters who got injured on short notice. I guess you think they should have just UFC-151’d (canceled) it . . . Untechnical slopfest? You must have missed at least two fights . . . If you really can’t figure out why MMA websites are covering it, maybe you shouldn’t follow MMA.”<sup>577</sup> ENRIKK further espoused: “I mean if you don’t like to see women fighting because they all put their hair up in corn rows and leave their makeup at home, that’s cool, I get it. I do. But don’t hide behind excuses that don’t hold up on the men’s side. how many times . . . MMA fans boo technically-sound fights in the UFC due to lay-and-pray tactics? . . . and you want to criticize the girls for not being technical? C’mon.”<sup>578</sup> ENRIKK accused TBEAST of letting emphasized feminine norms dictate how he viewed WMMA. He remarked about the male gaze’s disdain for cornrows and no makeup while pointing out that TBEAST seemed to hold female bouts to a stricter technical standard than male fights. Regardless, despite the progressive nature of ENRIKK’s comments, and the general pro-WMMA atmosphere at *Bloody Elbow*, media coverage and fan reaction to **Invicta** and Ronda Rousey were heavily impacted by emphasized femininity and toxic masculinity.

Regarding how the various online MMA media outlets covered **Invicta FC** 3 and 4, the primary narratives either expressed support for or apathy toward the product. While not engaging

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<sup>575</sup> “Search for invicta” MMAfighting.com, Accessed October 8, 2021.

<https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=202&q=invicta> through <https://www.mmfighting.com/search?order=date&page=200&q=invicta>.

<sup>576</sup> “Invicta FC 4- Esparza vs Hyatt,” *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, Accessed October 6, 2021.

<https://www.sherdog.com/events/Invicta-FC-4-Esparza-vs-Hyatt-26535>.

<sup>577</sup> Enrikk, January 7, 2013 (12:05pm) Comment on Chiappetta, “Comment on Chiappetta, “Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship.” Parentheses mine. UFC 151 was a PPV event scheduled for September 1, 2012, which was cancelled because the promotion could not find a suitable replacement when main eventer Dan Henderson suffered a partial MCL rupture.

<sup>578</sup> Enrikk, January 7, 2013 (12:36pm) Comment on Chiappetta, “Comment on Chiappetta, “Invicta FC 4 results: Carla Esparza beats Bec Hyatt to capture strawweight championship.”

in emphasized feminine promotion, *Sherdog* gave limited coverage to both **Invicta** shows, which could suggest that its readership was not interested, hence the drop in stories compared to the promotion's first two events. *Bloody Elbow* and *MMA Fighting* mirrored this coverage style with one crucial distinction. The latter two websites occasionally saw sportswriters engage with emphasized feminine norms, defying toxic masculinity instead of participating. The most prominent examples were Ben Thapa and Luke Thomas, the former with his piece on the technique involved in WMMA grappling and the latter repeatedly expressing his understanding of the ideal and mission statement behind **Invicta**. Thomas occasionally questioned the talent level present in WMMA, but this remained firmly in the hegemonic masculine sphere, never shifting into toxic masculinity. *MMA Rising* again featured extensive technical analysis from Rob Sargent, treating WMMA as a legitimate sport across both **Invicta** shows.

*MMA Mania* was the most expansive coverage on Vox Media's MMA outlets. With double the articles of the other two Vox sites combined, *MMA Mania* definitively invested in publishing **Invicta** content. However, the spearhead of this effort, Brian Hemminger, simultaneously participated in emphasized feminine adherence and defiance. Although he respected the technical competence of WMMA competitors, he frequently indulged his male gaze, along with that of his readers. In some cases, "Hemmi" even encouraged fans to participate, sharing pictures with them. Two aspects of this compromise his admitted respect and enjoyment for WMMA technical competence. The first is because Hemminger engaged in the male gaze, to begin with. The second is because he and other *MMA Mania* moderators saw no problem with commenters objectifying WMMA fighters. A critical perspective is that if the moderators disapproved of the readers' words, many comments would have been removed, and users subsequently banned. One poster on *Bloody Elbow* implied that the toxic masculine

comments he got away with on *MMA Mania* would likely see him barred from the former site. Hemminger never rationalized any of the toxic masculine and VMA traits found attached to his articles. This combination of gently approving fans contributing to hegemonic masculinity amongst the fans and then not restraining them when their comment shifted into toxic behavior makes one question “Hemmi’s” actual level of respect for WMMA.

The previous chapter also showed that the gap between the three Vox entities’ fandoms was large regarding how they treated gender discourse and examples of toxic traits and VMAs on display. With rare exceptions, *Bloody Elbow* readers refused to provide to the male gaze, openly condemning sexualizing women in many cases. Technical competence and female durability were more fluid regarding recognition versus dismissal, but WMMA supporters outnumbered its detractors. Most comments surrounding **Invicta FC** 3 and 4 avoided toxic masculinity outright, at most expressing the hegemonic variety. *MMA Fighting* featured a mixture of promotion and defiance. Some subscribers complained: “Please don’t bring women into the UFC . . . They want to earn a man’s pay in the UFC, but women have never worked to build the UFC to that point.”<sup>579</sup> Others engaged in the discussion, with one viewer expressing toxic masculinity towards fighter Claudia Gadelha: “Why am I suddenly very horny? My wife is going to feel my wrath tonight!”<sup>580</sup> Yet a few fans countered that disregarding WMMA fighting prowess was sexist, along with male desire for sexual arousal. One expressed: “You can lament the fact that the times are a-changin’, but . . . MMA isn’t going to end just because people don’t fight like idiots anymore.”<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> Poo\_Ghost, October 11, 2012 (5:18pm) Comment on Al-Shatti, “Morning Report: Cormier’s trainer wants Werdum; Bonnar preparing post-UFC 153 exodus from Brazil.”

<sup>580</sup> Superfknmario\_, November 23, 2012 (10:56pm) Comment on Meltzer, “Invicta will crown 115-pound champion to headline Jan. 5 date in Kansas.”

<sup>581</sup> Enrikk, January 6, 2013 (1:35pm) Comment on Chiapetta, “Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt.”

*MMA Mania*'s comment sections and the *Underground* were full of pro-emphasized feminine and toxic masculine narratives. Both online forums featured readers discussing at length their various levels of titillation toward **Invicta** fighters, containing numerous examples of VMA Traits 2 and 3. Claiming virtual male bodies, the definition of VMA Trait 3, was rampant. One user bragged how he masturbated all morning to a porn star who resembled WMMA fighter Jessica Penne, while another complained how he was not allowed to announce he wanted to: "ram half of the women from behind."<sup>582</sup> *MMA Mania* and *Underground* participants were also not silent in criticizing those they deemed too masculine in physical appearance, such as Sarah D'Alelio and Ediane Gomes. Fans referred to the former as a "diesel dyke,"<sup>583</sup> the latter a "Man Beast."<sup>584</sup> Gomes received an exceptionally high level of toxic masculine vitriol, with fans constantly questioning her womanhood for not conforming to feminine beauty ideals. As noted earlier when discussing Brian Hemminger, *MMA Mania* and *Underground* community members were somewhat more reserved in conversing about the alleged lack of talent depth in **Invicta** and WMMA. Both sets of fans often applauded the technical abilities of fighters, such as Baszler at **Invicta FC 3** or Namajunas at **Invicta FC 4**. However, if Hemminger should not receive a pass for his virtual ogling of WMMA talent, then neither should the fans. First, they engaged in "penis rating" discussions much more frequently than the sportswriters and often to a more toxic extent. Second, there was next to no policing from fans when it concerned contributions to toxic masculinity. Either they would echo the misogynistic sentiments expressed or change the subject, pretending that crass sexualization had not occurred. The number of times *MMA Mania*'s

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<sup>582</sup> Death Kick Subjection, January 5, 2013 (5:29pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

<sup>583</sup> Dragonassault, August 22, 2012 (2:17pm) Comment on Holland, "Invicta FC 3 poster pic for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' on Oct. 6 in Kansas City."

<sup>584</sup> Gsp'sNutts, January 4, 2013 (10:45pm) Comment on Bohn, "Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City."

fanbase spoke against objectifying WMMA competitors surrounding **Invicta FC** 3 and 4 is minuscule, and they saw little to no help from the site's moderators. In any event, especially in the case of *MMA Mania*, the two readerships largely dismissed the technical competence of WMMA participants. This dismissiveness only increased when the topic turned from **Invicta** to the "sole face of WMMA," Ronda Rousey, both from online MMA news sites and their respective readerships.

The MMA media's discussion about Ronda Rousey's **UFC** signing largely avoided emphasized feminine promotion outside of *MMA Mania*. That publication asserted Rousey's first **UFC** fight was liable to be a catfight, expressing toxic masculinity, admittedly after listing a slew of potential quality first Octagon opponents. However, while online sportswriters were content to report the story, Vox Media readers overwhelmingly voiced their opinions towards "Rowdy" joining the MMA major leagues.

All three site fanbases denigrated Rousey's technical competence and, by extension, the entire WMMA community. The difference between them was a matter of degrees. Those defending Rousey were the clear minority, measuring in the single digits on *MMA Mania*. Most "Maniacs" repeatedly talked about Rousey being a "one trick pony" with no talent, and the rest of WMMA were less skilled. On *MMA Fighting*, the discussion was much more on an equal footing. While there were *Bloody Elbow* comments which questioned WMMA's depth and whether now/ever was the right time for the **UFC** to add women, they debated it respectfully. When it came to feminine beauty standards, the trends were again similar. Comments on *MMA Mania* either implied Rousey was sleeping with Dana White or discussed her ability to titillate men's desires. Only two posts criticized the discussions' crass tone towards Rousey. *MMA Fighting* featured an even mix of fans fuelling the male gaze and those critiquing such behavior.

*Bloody Elbow* barely featured any pro-titillation discourse on its Rousey signing editorial.

Nevertheless, it was obvious which of the two, Rousey and **Invicta**, toxic masculine fans saw as the greatest threat to the “heterosexual, homosocial” male preserve of MMA.

As mentioned, Rousey is a window into the mainstream opinion on WMMA in the **UFC**. In contrast, Baszler and **Invicta** show how fans view WMMA’s existence. While the discussion featured in several **Invicta** comment sections about WMMA’s future and growth, only a handful of posts broached the women’s game joining the **UFC**. Many were adamant about it being inferior to the male product. Still, fans essentially treated **Invicta**’s presence in the sport as a niche, with plenty of other MMA options available for fans. There would be little outcry if women “stayed in their place” in **Invicta**. However, Rousey’s **UFC** signing in November 2012 signaled that toxic masculine fans no longer had their “male preserve,” they lashed out accordingly. In particular, the male gaze vitriol, while also common regarding **Invicta**, seemingly turned personal towards Rousey. Remarks like “#rouseyisadicksuckingspoiledbrat”<sup>585</sup> and “women are supposed to be making sammiches and giving head” revealed toxic masculine and VMA traits as rampant heading into 2013, not because Rousey either succeeded or failed in titillating the **UFC** audience, but because a woman was entering the same spotlight as the men.<sup>586</sup>

Over the past four chapters, hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, and toxic masculinity and VMA comments have been established as firmly entrenched in pre-2013 online culture when discussing WMMA’s emergence. Four significant observations about this trend are clear from examining the “topics of conversation” of Shayna Baszler’s pre-**UFC** pro career, the

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<sup>585</sup> Pootis\_Penser\_Here, January 6, 2013 (5:10pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results recap: Esparza wrestles home 115 pound title, Davis avenges prior Baszler loss.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>586</sup> Drain, November 9, 2012 (9:45am) Comment on Myers, “Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC.”

first year of **Invicta FC**, and Ronda Rousey's becoming the "sole face" of WMMA. First, it does not matter whether it was hegemonic or toxic; contributing to the male gaze atmosphere was omnipresent in nearly every aspect of the pre-UFC WMMA online discussion. Second, online sportswriters generally remained silent or absent from toxic masculine discussions. Hegemonic masculine participation did occur occasionally, and few MMA scribes directly confronted the toxic discourse fans presented, but they primarily did not promote it. Third, although not examined in-depth, content moderators were vital in determining the level of hegemonic/toxic masculinity from a particular MMA website's readership. Lastly, online fans treated Shayna Baszler and **Invicta FC** much differently than Ronda Rousey regarding the male gaze atmosphere and their respective growths in WMMA. In this study's conclusion, those observations are analyzed while also answering to what extent the male gaze, via expected compliance with men's desire for titillation, sociability over technical competence, and "female fragility" feature in the online media and fan discourses during WMMA's emergence? Most importantly, the prominence of and contribution to toxic masculinity within these discourses is summarized. Specifically, how toxic masculinity helped create online havens for "homosocial, heterosexual" fans, despite its influence across MMA media and its fanbase slightly waning.



## Chapter 7

### “The End of the Long and Winding Road”: Conclusion

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.”- Writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr<sup>1</sup>

In an article for *MMA Fighting* shortly before Shayna Baszler’s UFC debut, Dave Meltzer summarized her decade-plus career: “Her long journey to a pay-per-view slot saw her and the women's side of the sport go from the equivalent of hunters trying to kill prey with spears to a world filled with the most sophisticated hunting equipment in the world, except the evolution only took a dozen or so years and she lived through every stage of it.”<sup>2</sup> While this is accurate, this evolution primarily involved WMMA fighters and most MMA journalists. MMA fans, while indeed reacting to the growth of the women’s side of the sport, largely kept intact their emphasized feminine and hegemonic/toxic masculine ideals for the “gentler” sex. By sharing evidence gathered from prior chapters, how the three major components of Connell’s emphasized femininity theorem, titillating male desires, sociability over technical competence, and female fragility, were reflected throughout the timeline of Shayna Baszler’s pre-UFC MMA career, is shown. More importantly, the four major historical narratives (male gaze being omnipresent, the unseen input of website moderators, sportswriters’ general absence from toxic masculine discussions, and how differently fans conversed about Baszler/**Invicta FC** compared to Ronda Rousey) are further elaborated upon. This chapter concludes with a summary of toxic

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<sup>1</sup> “Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,” Merriam-Webster.com, Accessed November 30, 2011. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plus%20%C3%A7a%20change%2C%20plus%20c%27est%20la%20m%C3%Aame%20ch%20ose>.

<sup>2</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Shayna Baszler's long-winding road of a fight career leads to the door on Saturday,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, August 30, 2014. <https://www.mmfighting.com/2014/8/30/6080213/ufc-shayna-baszlers-long-winding-road-of-a-fight-career-leads-to-the-door>.

masculinity's impact on MMA fandom during the Emergence of WMMA, possible future academic research avenues, and a postscript.

### **Major Historical Narratives**

Arguably the most important conclusion from this entire study is how pervasive sexualizing women was amongst online MMA fans and even a handful of sportswriters throughout the analyzed period. "Penis ratings" of various WMMA fighters were commonplace and became more descriptive and vulgar as years passed, whether concerning Shayna Baszler, Ronda Rousey, or **Invicta** fighters.<sup>3</sup> These "penis ratings" came primarily in one of three varieties. The first was the most commonplace, simple statements from online fans about which competitors they found physically attractive. From Brian Hemminger expressing his desire to date Tecia Torres<sup>4</sup> to BOARDRIDER wishing for Gina Carano to show "cameltoe," they ran the gamut of benign forms of hegemonic masculinity to highly toxic variants.<sup>5</sup>

The second focuses on online posts which, as Moloney and Love described, "signaled possession of a heterosexual, male body."<sup>6</sup> In layman's terms, such comments expressed what physical and sexual acts readers wanted to perform on a female fighter. Claiming the ability to perform such acts implied they possessed a "heterosexual male body."<sup>7</sup> These comments frequently referenced male masturbation, with readers mentioning the likes of Michelle

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<sup>3</sup> Mollcutpurse, April 29, 2012 (2:33pm) Comment on Thapa, "Invicta: Coenen Vs. Ruysen Live Stream Blog And Play By Play."

<sup>4</sup> Brian Hemminger, October 6, 2012 (7:41pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)."

<sup>5</sup> Kostello, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET."

<sup>6</sup> Maloney and Love, "#TheFappening," 603. Parentheses mine.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Waterson,<sup>8</sup> Jessamyn Duke,<sup>9</sup> Tecia Torres,<sup>10</sup> and Marloes Coenen.<sup>11</sup> Other posts declared specific sex acts, such as JON ESTRADA SR. enthusiastic about impregnating Jessica Penne,<sup>12</sup> DON willing to pay 10,000 dollars to “wrestle” Gina Carano,<sup>13</sup> and TFK\_OTHREE wanting to taste “(Barb) Honchak’s swamp ass.”<sup>14</sup> Less crass examples were also expressed, such as THEPEOPLE’SCHAMP simply stating that Coenen should “bear at least 2 of my children.”<sup>15</sup>

The final type of male gaze posts occurred when a particular fighter’s appearance failed to titillate the viewing audience, deemed too “masculine” by online commenters. Since being homosexual is seen as an outright rejection of heterosexual ideals, real or perceived lesbianism was openly mocked by fans. For example, DECIMATED550 joked that due to their **Invicta FC 2** post-fight hug, Shayna Baszler and Sara McMann would be eloping to the island of Lesbos.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the same card, MR. PIBB lamented there were no hot women, only a “bunch of butch lesbos,” so he would watch porn instead.<sup>17</sup> Liz Carmouche even had her status as a lesbian fetishized against her will, with FAT DADDY DOOBS considering her sexual orientation a “challenge” for his masculinity to overcome.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> HolyAvengerP5, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>9</sup> Ocean6, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.”

<sup>10</sup> Rooseveltdunn, October 4, 2012 (11:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>11</sup> 10thDegreeWhiteBelt, April 29, 2012 (12:08am) Comment on Hemminger, “Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 1 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2' TONIGHT (April 28).”

<sup>12</sup> Jon Estrada Sr., October 7, 2012 (11:37am), Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 3 results recap: Penne crowned inaugural Invicta champion, Baszler shines.”

<sup>13</sup> Don, October 21, 2008 (1:21 pm) Comment on Iannotti, "Report: Pro Elite and Elite XC 'shutting its doors effective immediately.”

<sup>14</sup> TFK\_othree, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>15</sup> ThePeople’sChamp, April 23, 2012, (8:18am) Comment on Hemminger, “Golden girl: Invicta headliner Marloes Coenen interview exclusive with MMAmania.com.”

<sup>16</sup> Decimated550, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>17</sup> Mr.\_Pibb, July 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Invicta FC 2 streaming FREE Sat 7 PM ET.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>18</sup> Fat Daddy Doobs, April 28, 2012 (11:04am) Comment on Mrosko, “Marloes Coenen vs Romy Ruysen staredown pic and photo gallery from Invicta FC 1 weigh-ins.”

By far, the most common form of attacking “masculine”-presenting fighters was to focus on either “unnatural” muscle mass causing them to lose their femininity or jokingly accusing them of being men. In the study’s first half, Cris Cyborg, described as having “man muscles,”<sup>19</sup> faced fans demanding that her gender be tested<sup>20</sup> and was thought to no longer have menstrual periods due to alleged steroid abuse.<sup>21</sup> During early **Invicta FC** shows, viewers singled out Sarah D’Alelio and Ediane Gomes for not embracing emphasized feminine appearance norms and accused them of being cis men or trans women. *MMA Mania* readers and *Underground* members were particularly hostile to Gomes, frequently questioning her gender and criticizing her physical appearance.<sup>22</sup> BROKENORBITAL complained when Gomes made her entrance during **Invicta FC 4**: “I see what they did Put all the cuties on the prelims and suck us in. Now we get the ex-junkies and post-ops.”<sup>23</sup> D’Alelio was targeted by male gaze contributors across the first four **Invicta** cards for her defiance of gender norms, both for being lesbian and having a “masculine” coded body. She got accused of “blur(ing) the lines” between men and women with how she looked<sup>24</sup> and often faced both homophobic and transphobic slurs from *MMA Mania* readers.<sup>25</sup>

One final thing to note about the overwhelming contribution to the male gaze featured in this study: Readers and sportswriters decrying the other two tenets of emphasized femininity did

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<sup>19</sup> Re: Local Ultimate Fighter Loses Match,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), July 28, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Steph05050, “\*\*\*OFFICIAL\*\*\* - Shayna Baszler vs. Cristiane Santos DISCUSSION THREAD (pre/post).” MMAforum.com, July 26, 2008. <https://www.mmaforum.com/threads/official-shayna-baszler-vs-cristiane-santos-discussion-thread-pre-post.40879/#post-621682>. Parentheses mine.

<sup>21</sup> Fuzzy wuzzy, Jun 18, 2009 (9:17pm) Comment on Thomas, “Quote of the Day: Shayna Baszler Talks Cris Cyborg’s Female Problems.”

<sup>22</sup> Demeritorious, January 5, 2013 (10:13pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).” Parentheses mine.

<sup>23</sup> BrokenOribital, January 5, 2013 (10:36pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

<sup>24</sup> Komplexx904, January 5, 2013 (3:25am) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.” Parentheses mine.

<sup>25</sup> Wisetoad, July 28, 2012, (2:13pm) Comment on Mrosko, “Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'.”

not diminish their participation in such online misogyny. On later **Invicta** cards, where *MMA Mania* and *Underground* readers consistently praised the fighting prowess and technical competence on display in WMMA, many still openly announced which fighters aroused them. This was brought to the forefront by Brian Hemminger. Despite his numerous articles delving deep into fighter backgrounds and his consistent praising of **Invicta**'s talent quality at the expense of the **UFC**, his referring to Paige VanZant as the "hottest girl in MMA"<sup>26</sup> or his applauding the possibility of Sara McMann posing nude for *ESPN Magazine* in comments sections, are not any less problematic.<sup>27</sup>

Another important finding from this study is how much moderators attached to the three Vox Media MMA news websites likely impacted how each respective site's fanbase came across in the analysis. Noted throughout the document, *Bloody Elbow* clearly, had the most progressive readership. Most comments featured little to no toxic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity steadily decreased from the beginning of the exam period to the end. **Invicta** articles rarely reflected male gaze participation. During Baszler's **EliteXC** career, toxic masculinity was as commonplace as on other MMA media sites, but by the time she reached **Invicta**, the readership was much more reserved. Conversely, *MMA Mania* was the polar opposite. Why was this the case? All one needs to do is look at the following two posts. Responding to a *Bloody Elbow* comment where the reader expressed how he usually avoided discussing the physical appearance of female fighters,<sup>28</sup> HORSELOVER FAT replied: "If I was on (MMA) Mania I would say

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<sup>26</sup> Brian Hemminger, January 5, 2013 (7:28pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

<sup>27</sup> Brian Hemminger, July 26, 2012, (8:36am) Comment on Hemminger, "No backing out now: Invicta FC 2 headliner Sara McMann interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>28</sup> DankNabbot, October 6, 2012 (7:07pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion."

things, but I'm afraid to here."<sup>29</sup> HORSELOVER FAT acknowledged an apparent discrepancy between what was allowed to be posted to *MMA Mania* articles and what appeared on their *Bloody Elbow* counterparts. In their mind, *MMA Mania* was less restrictive regarding what their readers were allowed to say concerning the male gaze and claiming a "heterosexual, male body" in particular. Both users were discussing how attracted they were to certain female fighters. However, they recognized that since they were on *Bloody Elbow*, they could not use vulgar remarks, fearing reprisal from chat moderators either by removing their comments or being banned from posting on the website entirely.

DEATH KICK SUBJECTION echoed this line of thought. On the *MMA Mania* live stream thread for **Invicta FC 3**, he complained: "I was watching the weigh in . . . commenting about how i would ram half of the women from behind and comments got deleted."<sup>30</sup> DEATH KICK SUBJECTION expressed surprise that *MMA Mania* moderators deemed his online misogyny offensive. One only needs to scroll through this study to find left-intact quotes, which could explain his confusion. However, the most substantial proof of *MMA Mania*'s moderating leniency is the continued existence of DEATH KICK SUBJECTION's post. While his likely graphically detailed comments of the sex acts he wished to perform on **Invicta**'s fighters were removed, his wish to "ram half of the women from behind" remained for all readers to see. Putting these two quotes side by side, it is clear that *Bloody Elbow* moderators were far more likely to remove hegemonic/toxic masculine content than their *MMA Mania* counterparts. Because of this, it helped foster two very different posting environments: *MMA Mania* largely contributed to the male gaze and allowed a toxic masculine environment to fester within its

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<sup>29</sup> Horselover Fat, October 6, 2012 (7:08pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "Invicta FC 3: Penne vs. Sugiyama live thread and discussion." Parentheses mine.

<sup>30</sup> Death Kick Subjection, January 5, 2013 (5:29pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)."

readership. *Bloody Elbow* cultivated a much more progressive fanbase, albeit still slightly hegemonic.

As noted throughout this study, some sportswriters did not shy away from toxic masculine traits. *Bloody Elbow*'s Jon Snowden expressed his disdain for Sarah Kaufman, who he viewed as “an ugly broad in corn rows,”<sup>31</sup> all the while praising the more conventionally attractive Miesha Tate for making a near-verbatim statement to Kaufman's, calling for more female presence on **Strikeforce** PPVs.<sup>32</sup> Before their **Strikeforce** Championship fight, *MMA Mania*'s Geno Mrosko penned an article titled “Miesha Tate vs Ronda Rousey ... who wins the Strikeforce sexiness battle?”<sup>33</sup> His colleague, Mike Fagan, openly chastised women for getting mad when men, during arguments, would accuse them of being on their periods.<sup>34</sup> However, such published sentiments were rare throughout the study. Most MMA online scribes addressed toxic masculinity in the sport in one of three ways.

First, they treated hegemonic and toxic masculinity as problems that did not exist. This was common in the early years of WMMA's emergence as little media was dedicated to covering the women's game, so most article space was limited to fight results. When **Invicta** arrived on the scene, struggles fighters faced in the “masculine preserve” of MMA via hegemonic and toxic masculinity were rarely discussed.

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<sup>31</sup> IHateMMA, July 24, 2010 (8:49pm) Comment on Snowden, “Sarah Kaufman's Dramatic Knockout Not Enough for Strikeforce Diva.”

<sup>32</sup> Doc ransom, August 19, 2010 (4:35pm) Comment on Snowden, “Ring Psychology Exclusive: Miesha Tate Explains Why She'd Rather Be a Small Fish on a Big Card With Strikeforce.”

<sup>33</sup> Geno Mrosko, “Miesha Tate vs Ronda Rousey ... who wins the Strikeforce sexiness battle?,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 3, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/3/2840585/miesha-tate-vs-ronda-rousey-who-wins-the-sexiness-battle>.

<sup>34</sup> Mike Fagan, “The Week in Quotes: June 14th - 20th,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, June 21, 2009. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2009/6/21/920274/the-week-in-quotes-june-14th-20th>.

Second, a handful of sportswriters did engage in hegemonic masculinity while not shifting into toxic masculinity. These include the likes of Brian Hemminger, Brent Brookhouse, David Castillo, T.P. Grant, and Dave Meltzer. Hemminger and Grant both participated within the male gaze, the former extensively discussed in this study and the latter admitting he had a crush on **Invicta** fighter Jessica Penne.<sup>35</sup> And yet, Hemminger countered fans who criticized him for saying that **Invicta FC 3** was a better show than **UFC on FX 5** the same weekend.<sup>36</sup> He apparently saw no correlation between their failure to see the technical competence displayed and his constant acknowledgment of *MMA Mania* readers' sexual arousal. While praising **Invicta FC 2**, David Castillo undersold the technical competence present in **WMMA**.<sup>37</sup> Meltzer expressed a small belief in female fragility when he criticized **Strikeforce** for increasing the round time limit from three to five minutes, a common talking point for sportswriters surrounding the Baszler-Kaufman and Carano-Cyborg fights.<sup>38</sup> Brookhouse frequently doubted **WMMA** technical competence, such as labeling the entire sport "very mediocre,"<sup>39</sup> as well as harshly criticizing the entirety of **Invicta** for the handful of fighters who missed weight before their first show.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> T.P. Grant, October 7, 2012 (12:58pm) Comment on Grant, "UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective." Parentheses mine.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Women of **Invicta** lead by example after both **UFC** and **Bellator** drop the ball this weekend," *MMAMania.com*, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/8/3471446/women-of-invicta-lead-by-example-after-ufc-and-bellator-drop-the-ball>

<sup>37</sup> David Castillo, "Why **Invicta FC** And Female Mixed Martial Arts Will Endure," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, July 31, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/7/31/3207259/invicta-fc-female-mixed-martial-arts-endure>.

<sup>38</sup> Dave Meltzer "MISAWA TRAGIC DEATH, **UFC 99**, **TRUMP ANGLE**, **TRIPLEMANIA**, **SYLVIA**," *f4wonline.com*, June 22, 2009. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/june-22-2009-observer-newsletter-misawa-tragic-death-ufc-99-trump>.

<sup>39</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body'," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, September 17, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/9/17/3347658/dana-white-ronda-rousey-in-ufc-strikeforce>.

<sup>40</sup> Brent Brookhouse, "**Invicta FC**: Four Of Twenty-Two Fighters Miss Weight For Women's **MMA** Event," *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, April 28, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/4/28/2983384/invicta-fc-four-of-twenty-two-fighters-miss-weight-for-womens-mma>



Finally, some MMA writers directly pushed back against hegemonic narratives, such as Ben Thapa's praise of the submission ability on display in **Invicta**<sup>41</sup> and Loretta Hunt for publishing an extensively detailed article on why the 3-minute versus 5-minute round debate was sexist, both in history and in practice.<sup>42</sup> However, only Ben Fowlkes actively discussed, engaged, and debated toxic masculine aspects of the sport. In his **Invicta FC 3** writeup, he "called out" fans who sexually harassed female fighters, which he noted were too common. He also openly praised Baszler for not providing to the male gaze in her pre-fight entrance and for not being demure with her aggressive foot stomps during the fight itself.<sup>43</sup> These examples give us three important facts about the media members whose articles were examined in this study. First, while hegemonic masculinity was indeed present in many MMA writers' work, the toxic variety was a rarity. Second, there was next to no effort on the part of the writers to combat toxic masculinity, either in the sport of MMA itself or within the fanbase that read their articles. Most importantly, the lack of acknowledging toxic masculinity's existence in their respective readerships only helped that existence grow.

Before I discuss the answers to the study's research questions, we have one more narrative to consider: the differences in coverage and fan reactions concerning Shayna Baszler, **Invicta FC**, and Ronda Rousey. The first main difference was the sheer amount of coverage. Despite only examining eleven Rousey-centric articles, a simple skim through the Vox Media

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<sup>41</sup> Ben Thapa, "Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/5/3458854/invicta-judo-chop-jessica-penne-showcases-difference-women-grappling-carmouche>.

<sup>42</sup> Loretta Hunt, "Separate but Not Equals?" Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 24, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Separate-But-Not-Equals-18160>

<sup>43</sup> Ben Fowlkes, "Behind the scenes at Invicta FC 3," MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today Sports, October 8, 2012. <https://mmajunkie.usatoday.com/2012/10/ben-fowlkes-behind-the-scenes-at-invicta-fc-3>.

archives was enough to determine “Rowdy” was a WMMA media phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> During her first two years of pro-MMA activity, Rousey received more press coverage from Vox Media than Baszler received during her first nine years as a professional and substantially more than **Invicta** did during its first year of existence. This suggests that the online media almost considered Ronda Rousey and the sport of WMMA separate topics from one another. As Dave Meltzer pointed out, success for Rousey likely only increased media publicity for her, with the rest of the women’s division experiencing only slightly increased fan and media attention.<sup>45</sup> In addition, in positive and negative aspects, what Rousey accomplished was considered by fans as a verdict on WMMA overall. When she defeated Miesha Tate to win the **Strikeforce** bantamweight championship, a few *MMA Mania* readers noted that Rousey only had four pro fights, whereas Tate had fourteen. They took this to mean the women’s division must be severely lacking in technical competence if a relative rookie, Rousey, could trounce a veteran like Tate.<sup>46</sup>

The second difference is that while all three “topics of conversation” featured fans and some MMA media members participating in the male gaze, attention towards Rousey contained far more detail and vitriol than those concerning Baszler or **Invicta**. For example, although Baszler was implied to be a lesbian<sup>47</sup> or a transgender woman on several occasions,<sup>48</sup> she was never accused of sleeping with MMA higher-ups, a frequent charge levied towards Rousey.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Search results for Rousey,” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, accessed May 23, 2021.

<https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=431&q=rousey> through <https://www.mmamania.com/search?order=date&page=422&q=rousey>.

<sup>45</sup> Dave Meltzer, “Uncharted waters for a Ronda Rousey headlined pay-per-view,” MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 25, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Superfknmario\_, March 4, 2012 (12:58am) Comment on Mrosko, “Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title.”

<sup>47</sup> Brad Smith, 2009, comment on melanogaster01, “Shayna Baszler vs Jennifer Tate,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulNHrth4tAQ&t=88s>.

<sup>48</sup> Jamie Felix, Comment on Baszler vs McMann Video, YouTube.com, Accessed January 1, 2021. Video has been deleted.

<sup>49</sup> EyebrowsMulligan, November 8, 2012 (10:34pm) Comment on Helwani, “Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January.” Parentheses mine.

Aside from Baszler's criticism of Gina Carano in the *E:60* documentary, fan comments criticizing/praising her physical appearance were often in the minority of reader postings compared to "Rowdy."<sup>50</sup> Rousey and Miesha Tate were the only fighters examined in this study, where a writer's objectification of them was the entire focus of an article.<sup>51</sup> **Invicta** fighters generally faced one or the other sides of the fanbase's "penis ratings." The likes of D'Alelio, Porto,<sup>52</sup> and Gomes saw their perceived masculinity repeatedly vocalized against them. Vox Media readers repeatedly sexualized more conventionally feminine fighters such as Coenen,<sup>53</sup> Torres,<sup>54</sup> and Paige VanZant.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, Rousey received attention from both sides of the fanbase, simultaneously both lusted and disgusted after.<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, Baszler and **Invicta** featured extensive praise from the Vox Media fanbase, especially towards the end of the studied timeframe. The applause did not overtake hegemonic and toxic masculine comments, but its presence was still notable. Even on *MMA Mania* and the *Underground*, the same commenters who often engaged in emphasized feminine talking points tended to celebrate the technical competence put on display in **Invicta**. For Baszler's three fights in the all-women's promotion, her submission expertise and aggression were regarded primarily

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<sup>50</sup> Chris Johnson, 2010, comment on sstorm10, "Gina Carano on E:60 (2nd time aired),"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgvJD05ERel>

<sup>51</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Miesha Tate vs Ronda Rousey ... who wins the Strikeforce sexiness battle?," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 3, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/3/2840585/miesha-tate-vs-ronda-rousey-who-wins-the-sexiness-battle>.

<sup>52</sup> Wisetoad, July 28, 2012, (2:13pm) Comment on Mrosko, "Invicta FC 2 weigh in photos gallery for 'Baszler vs McMann'."

<sup>53</sup> Starr778, April 27, 2012 (8:45pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Invicta FC 1 weigh in results from Missouri for 'Coenen vs Ruysen 2'."

<sup>54</sup> Jonnyboy6969, October 4, 2012 (10:34pm) Comment on Hemminger, "Tiny Tornado: Invicta FC 3 pro debuter Tecia Torres interview exclusive with MMAmania.com."

<sup>55</sup> QuickJab, December 25, 2012 (3:13pm) Comment on Hemminger, "MMAmania.com would like to wish you a Merry Christmas via Invicta FC 4's Paige VanZant."

<sup>56</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843435/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-breaks-miesha-tates-arm-to-win>.

positively.<sup>57</sup> Even the way Shannon Knapp ran **Invicta** was lauded by *MMA Mania* fans following its fourth fight card.<sup>58</sup> Ronda Rousey, by contrast, from the various readerships received overwhelmingly negative critiques, ranging from her physical appearance<sup>59</sup> to how she fought<sup>60</sup> and even her simply fighting on otherwise all-male events.<sup>61</sup> Even on *Bloody Elbow*, she was suggested not to be enough to warrant WMMA's inclusion in the **UFC**.<sup>62</sup>

A likely reason for these three significant differences in coverage and fan response has been discussed earlier in this study, and the data supports the hypothesis. Outside of Baszler's fights with Cyborg<sup>63</sup> and Kaufman, she never fought on the big stages of MMA.<sup>64</sup> Before Cyborg, she competed on regional shows with little marketing reach or on online prelims.<sup>65</sup> After Kaufman, she again returned to the regional circuit, a period where only *MMA Rising* paid attention to her exploits.<sup>66</sup> While **Invicta** received substantial coverage, particularly on *MMA Mania*, Baszler and the rest of the promotion's roster (primarily) focused solely on **Invicta**, with little discussion of joining the **UFC**. Ronda Rousey was the exact opposite in all respects. She had six fights during the study period, four on **Strikeforce**, the second-most regarded fighting

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<sup>57</sup> Sadisticsolider, October 2012, Comment on Underground\_Feed, "Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET."

<sup>58</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5)," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmamania.com/2013/1/5/3839096/invicta-fc-4-results-online-live-fight-coverage-esparza-vs-hyatt-ippv-female-mma>.

<sup>59</sup> Banago, March 4, 2012 (12:24am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>60</sup> Superfknmario\_, March 4, 2012 (12:58am) Comment on Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title."

<sup>61</sup> BNF, November 8, 2012 (9:55pm) Comment on Myers, "Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC."

<sup>62</sup> Punisher Bass, November 8, 2012 (9:01pm) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter."

<sup>63</sup> "Shayna Baszler." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed December 2, 2019. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Shayna-Baszler-12116>.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Rob Sargent, "Weekend Recap: Baszler, Pene Win At The Cage Inc.," MMArising.com, November 22, 2010. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2010/11/22/weekend-recap-baszler-pene-win-at-the-cage-inc/>.

promotion in the U.S., closely behind the **UFC**.<sup>67</sup> Towards the end of the study period, not only was Rousey signed by the **UFC**,<sup>68</sup> but she was handed their inaugural Women's Bantamweight Championship.<sup>69</sup> Simply put, the hardcore fans did not view Shayna Baszler or **Invicta** as a threat to their all-male preserve of the **UFC**. It was highly improbable that fighters like Baszler stood any chance of being signed by Dana White. That is until Ronda took the MMA media by storm. By **Invicta**'s very nature as an all-women's promotion, it did what many *MMA Mania* readers and their ilk desired. Since Shannon Knapp gave WMMA its platform, many fans argued there was no need to bring the women's game to the **UFC**. As a *Bloody Elbow* reader opined: "I don't want WMMA in UFC. Keeping them separate and both UFC and Invicta being successful would be win-win for me."<sup>70</sup>

However, with Ronda Rousey catching the eye of Dana White early in her **Strikeforce** career, along with the amount of media coverage devoted solely to her, it sent the message to MMA fans that "Rowdy" was likely headed to the **UFC** sooner rather than later. And this was something many online readers refused to tolerate. If Dana White opened the door to WMMA, there was nowhere these fans could go to avoid it. Since Rousey was the "sole face" of WMMA and the most significant reason women could find themselves in the Octagon, she became the prime target for fan backlash. She was the one female fighter that every Vox Media reader knew. Because of this, Rousey naturally received more media attention than Baszler or the rest of

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<sup>67</sup> "Ronda Rousey." Sherdog.com, Mandatory, accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.sherdog.com/fighter/Ronda-Rousey-73073>.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Myers, "Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/11/8/3620578/report-strikeforce-folding-jan-2013-showtime-ronda-rousey-ufc>.

<sup>69</sup> Jesse Holland, "Ronda Rousey vs. Liz Carmouche main event title fight booked for UFC 157 on Feb. 23 in Anaheim," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, December 6, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Knight000, January 11, 2013 (1:26am) Comment on Haynes, "Shannon Knapp says Invicta not in dire straits following PPV refunds."

**Invicta.** Due to this attention, Rousey articles attracted more audience feedback than other WMMA topics. Her enormous exposure, combined with what fans viewed as an attempt for women to earn a place in the Octagon, saw her receive far more toxic masculine vitriol and far less positive reception for her fighting accolades than her fellow WMMA participants.

### **Research Questions: Findings**

As for answering the research questions, various findings support similar conclusions. Since I devoted much attention to the male gaze atmosphere when discussing its omnipresence in media coverage and amongst online fan conversations, there is no need to cover this again here. The first question regarded “sociability over technical competence” and to what degree it featured in MMA media and online readership discourse during WMMA’s Emergence. Concerning this study, “to what degree” represents two separate functions. Primarily, it determines if instances of the press and their readers discussing this emphasized feminine trait were commonplace or rare. Secondly, it determines whether the masculinity utilized in related conversations was hegemonic, toxic, or neither. The sociability aspect was not discussed often by the media or the fans. The issue was raised on only a handful of occasions. It featured much more prominently in the match broadcasts or fighter interviews, where WMMA participants either adhered to or defied feminine sociability. The technical competence portion is another matter.

Directly comparing WMMA to its male counterpart in terms of fighting prowess and athletic talent, often in a negative fashion, was a constant conversation by media members and online fans throughout the studied timeframe. However, it was primarily fans having this discussion. Sportswriters for the various websites ignored the alleged talent discrepancy or outright disputed this narrative in their articles. Percy Crawford referenced her technical skills in

his interviews with Shayna Baszler during her **EliteXC** tenure<sup>71</sup> and gave her a platform to assert: “I can do an armbar that looks just like his. I can kick her in the head just like that guy can kick him in the head. So, we can do exactly the same thing as the guys.”<sup>72</sup> Four to five years later, when **Invicta FC** began, *MMA Mania*’s Brian Hemminger,<sup>73</sup> *Bloody Elbow*’s Ben Thapa,<sup>74</sup> and *MMA Rising*’s Rob Sargent provided detailed analyses of WMMA fighters’ techniques and abilities.<sup>75</sup> In the case of Hemminger, he openly stated that **Invicta**’s roster put on a better show than their male **UFC** competition.<sup>76</sup> Other media sources were not positive regarding WMMA talent, with the likes of Brent Brookhouse and Luke Thomas referring to **Invicta** as “mediocre”<sup>77</sup> or “regional”<sup>78</sup> or T.P. Grant questioning the alleged shallow talent depth of the promotion.<sup>79</sup> Such comments were largely hegemonic and reflected a minority opinion. The fans, however,

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<sup>71</sup> Percy Crawford, “SHAYNA BASZLER: ‘EVERYBODY IS TALKING ABOUT A FIGHT BETWEEN ME AND GINA CARANO EXCEPT FOR ELITE XC!’,” *Fighthype.com*, December 4, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/news/article1454.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Percy Crawford, “FH EXCLUSIVE: SHAYNA BASZLER,” *Fighthype.com*, August 3, 2007. <http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content588.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Invicta FC 2 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Baszler vs McMann' TONIGHT (July 28),” *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/7/28/3198093/invicta-fc-2-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-baszler-vs-mcmann>.

<sup>74</sup> Ben Thapa, “Invicta Judo Chop: Jessica Penne and other Invicta Fighters Show the Variants of Women's Grappling,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, October 5, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/5/3458854/invicta-judo-chop-jessica-penne-showcases-difference-women-grappling-carmouche>.

<sup>75</sup> Rob Sargent, “Invicta Fighting Championships 2 Live Play-By-Play & Results,” *MMArising.com*, July 28, 2012. <https://www.mmarising.com/articles/2012/07/28/invicta-fighting-championships-2-live-play-by-play-results/>.

<sup>76</sup> Brian Hemminger, “Women of Invicta lead by example after both UFC and Bellator drop the ball this weekend,” *MMAmania.com*, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/8/3471446/women-of-invicta-lead-by-example-after-ufc-and-bellator-drop-the-ball>

<sup>77</sup> Brent Brookhouse, “Dana White Talks Ronda Rousey's Appeal: 'She's Like A Dude Trapped In This Beautiful Body',” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, September 17, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/9/17/3347658/dana-white-ronda-rousey-in-ufc-strikeforce>.

<sup>78</sup> Luke Thomas, “MMA Roundtable: 2013 predictions, Invicta's future, UFC in Mexico and more,” *MMAfighting.com*, Vox Media, January 3, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/3/3826446/mma-roundtable-2013-predictions-invictas-future-ufc-in-mexico-bellator-more>.

<sup>79</sup> T.P. Grant, “UFC on FX 5 Results: Sunday Perspective,” *Bloodyelbow.com*, Vox Media, October 8, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/10/7/3467162/ufc-Bellator-Invicta-one-fc-results-sunday-perspective-winners-losers>.

were primarily hostile at the beginning of WMMA's Emergence, with quite a few holdouts remaining by the end of **Invicta FC 4**.

When Shayna Baszler competed in **EliteXC**, most fans commenting on forums usually discussed WMMA technical competence in negative and toxic masculine terms. On the YouTube video which showed the Baszler-Cyborg fight, one poster declared the women's game "retarded"<sup>80</sup> while another called the fighters "weaklings."<sup>81</sup> During Baszler's brief stint in **Strikeforce**, some readers praised WMMA technical competence,<sup>82</sup> while others made toxic sexual jokes.<sup>83</sup> The most important trends regarding this emphasized feminine trait occurred during the period which analyzed Ronda Rousey and **Invicta**. The three Rousey incidents examined (beating Tate, impressing Dana White, and signing with the **UFC**) featured the same patterns. When she defeated Tate, *MMA Mania*, readers toxically attacked the idea of women being quality cage fighters.<sup>84</sup> In the latter two instances, the same readers ignored the technical competence concept and focused entirely on contributing to the male gaze.<sup>85</sup> In contrast, *Bloody Elbow* enthusiasts discussed WMMA fighting skill across all three instances in, at best neutral and, at worst, hegemonically masculine ways, primarily around the hypothesis that because women are "physically inferior" to male athletes, female sports will be "less entertaining."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Terra Bass, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>81</sup> Lozza95, Comment on Shayna Baszler vs. Cris Cyborg Video, YouTube.com, Accessed April 20, 2020. Video has been deleted.

<sup>82</sup> NameNotRequired, June 20, 2009 (5:52pm) Comment on Holland, "Strikeforce Challengers: 'Villasenor vs Cyborg' results and quick recap."

<sup>83</sup> Patrick79x, June 19, 2009 (11:27pm), Comment on Brookhouse, "Strikeforce Challengers: Villasenor vs. Santos - Live Results and Commentary."

<sup>84</sup> Geno Mrosko, "Strikeforce results: Ronda Rousey breaks Miesha Tate's arm to win bantamweight title," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, March 4, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/3/4/2843435/strikeforce-results-ronda-rousey-breaks-miesha-tates-arm-to-win>

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Myers, "Report: Strikeforce 'folding up shop' after Jan. 2013 event, Ronda Rousey signs with UFC," MMAmania.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/11/8/3620578/report-strikeforce-folding-jan-2013-showtime-ronda-rousey-ufc>.

<sup>86</sup> Lebron's hairline, November 9, 2012 (12:31am) Comment on ShinSplints, "UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter."



*MMA Fighting* subscribers split between expressing hegemonic and toxic portrayals of the subject.<sup>87</sup> Regarding the four **Invicta** events, the three websites generally mimicked the patterns their readers followed with Rousey, but with a few key differences.

For example, with each passing **Invicta** card, more and more fans of *MMA Mania* and the *Underground* began acknowledging WMMA fighting skill and technique.<sup>88</sup> While they by no means lost focus on their usual male gaze narratives, the two user ships were much more willing to admit that there was talent depth in the women's game. This, of course, came with a mixture of hegemonic and toxic masculine language.<sup>89</sup> Aside from some toxic dialogue concerning weight-cutting at **Invicta FC 1**,<sup>90</sup> the debate surrounding technical competence on *Bloody Elbow* turned into more of a consensus that WMMA was strengthening its weight classes around the time of **Invicta FC 4**.<sup>91</sup> *MMA Fighting* discourse, the little that appeared, was evenly split between neutral/hegemonic and toxic masculine views.<sup>92</sup> However, while the trend from 2007 through 2013 saw more and more fans acknowledge the skill and talent present in WMMA, a sizable number of naysayers, usually toxic, existed throughout.

By a wide margin, female fragility was the least discussed out of any emphasized feminine trait. There were two major talking points involving female fragility. The first

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<sup>87</sup> Ariel Helwani, "Ronda Rousey set to join UFC; Strikeforce to hold last event in January," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, November 8, 2012. <https://www.mmafighting.com/ufc/2012/11/8/3620614/report-ronday-rousey-set-to-join-ufc-strikeforce-to-hold-last-event>.

<sup>88</sup> Underground\_Feed "Invicta FC 3 discussion thread: Sat 7 PM ET," Forums.mixedmartialarts.com, October 2012. <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/invicta-fc-3-discussion-thread-sat-7-pm-et/2069372>.

<sup>89</sup> Brian Hemminger, "Invicta FC 3 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Penne vs Sugiyama' TONIGHT (Oct. 6)," MMAmania.com, Mandatory, October 6, 2012. <https://www.mmamania.com/2012/10/6/3464304/invicta-fc-3-results-and-live-fight-coverage-for-penne-vs-sugiyama>.

<sup>90</sup> Stephanie Haynes, "Invicta's Shannon Knapp Says UFC Very Supportive," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, May 1, 2012. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2012/5/1/2990735/invicta-interview-ufc-shannon-knapp-dana-white>.

<sup>91</sup> T.P. Grant, "Invicta FC 4: Esparza vs. Hyatt Live Streaming Results and Play-by-Play," Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2013/1/5/3840036/invicta-fc-4-esparza-vs-hyatt-live-stream-streaming-results-play-by-play>.

<sup>92</sup> Mike Chiappetta, "Invicta FC 4 Results: Esparza vs. Hyatt," MMAfighting.com, Vox Media, January 5, 2013. <https://www.mmafighting.com/2013/1/5/3838038/invicta-fc-4-results-esparza-vs-hyatt>

concerned alleged similarities between WMMA and domestic violence. It was a narrative almost entirely the creation of online fans, and most examples were displays of hegemonic rather than toxic masculinities.<sup>93</sup> The second primarily revolved around the Baszler-Kaufman and Carano-Cyborg fights and the change from three-minute rounds to five. The idea was that female competitors do not have the same stamina and endurance levels as men, so extending the round time was unsafe.<sup>94</sup> This narrative almost solely existed within the media, and most discussions about the round time extension praised the change.<sup>95</sup> The lone toxic example was Dr. Johnny Benjamin, who argued that five-minute rounds not only risked the health of WMMA athletes but threatened to cost MMA the lucrative New York sporting market.<sup>96</sup> But fans resoundingly criticized both his conclusion and his method of reaching it.<sup>97</sup>

To answer the final research question: how prevalent were toxic masculine statements throughout the data, and how did they transform from their hegemonic counterparts? For an answer, we must look at the statistical findings. I counted roughly how many occurrences of the different VMA and Toxic Traits I discovered:

VMA Trait 1-66, VMA Trait 2-188, VMA Trait 3-52, VMA Trait 4-166

Toxic Trait 1-155, Toxic Trait 2-52, Toxic Trait 3-8

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<sup>93</sup> Thetakeover, August 14, 2009 (5:12pm) Comment on Rome, “Regardless of the Result of Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos, Women’s MMA Will Be Okay.”

<sup>94</sup> Dave Meltzer “MISAWA TRAGIC DEATH, UFC 99, TRUMP ANGLE, TRIPLEMANIA, SYLVIA,” f4wonline.com, June 22, 2009. <https://members.f4wonline.com/wrestling-observer-newsletter/june-22-2009-observer-newsletter-misawa-tragic-death-ufc-99-trump>.

<sup>95</sup> Loretta Hunt, “Separate but Not Equals?” Sherdog.com, Mandatory, June 24, 2009. <https://www.sherdog.com/news/articles/Separate-But-Not-Equals-18160>.

<sup>96</sup> Dr. Johnny Benjamin, “Ask the Doc: Why is Dr. Benjamin against five-minute rounds in women’s MMA?,” MMAjunkie.usatoday.com, USA Today, June 22, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Kirik, June 2009, Comment on Underground\_Feed, “Dr. Benjamin against 5-min rounds for women,” <https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/t/dr-benjamin-against-5-min-rounds-for-women/1478544>.

What the data overwhelmingly shows is threefold. First, as stated throughout the conclusion, the male gaze atmosphere is omnipresent. VMA Trait 2 and Toxic Trait 1 were the first and third most common traits utilized, each referring to sexualizing women. Second, at least 166 instances of readers and some sportswriters using humor “as a tool of oppression,” i.e., VMA Trait 4 surfaced in the analysis.<sup>98</sup> Comments featuring VMA Trait 4 often contained VMA Trait 2, Toxic Trait 1, Toxic Trait 2, or a mixture of those three. This suggests that humor was a common factor in helping transform hegemonic masculine statements into toxic ones. Finally, and most importantly, the high number of usages for six out of seven traits indicates that no matter how much positive press the MMA media gave WMMA, most online fans were uninterested. Outside of *Bloody Elbow*, most Vox Media subscribers only cared about WMMA enough to insult those competing and to loudly announce their “penis ratings” of the various fighters.

### Conclusions

One central question remains: what do the study’s findings suggest about WMMA during its emergence, and what do they hypothesize about the sport’s future in 2023 and beyond? The conclusions center around the MMA fanbase, the largest data source. Outside of *Bloody Elbow*, many fans eagerly participated in the creation of homosocial, heterosexist spaces. The atmosphere surrounding the likes of *MMA Mania*, *the Underground*, and *MMA Fighting* was quite tribal, with members castigating those they felt either did not belong in the sport or on online fora discussing it. Their frequent mocking of women alongside members of the LGBTQ community was visceral and vitriolic. Less than ten fans whose posts were analyzed between

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<sup>98</sup> Mairead Moloney and Tony P. Love, “#TheFapping: Virtual Manhood Acts in (Homo)Social Media,” *Men and Masculinities*, 21, no. 5 (March 9, 2017), 603-623.

2008 and 2013 openly claimed an online female or homosexual male body. Therefore, it would be no surprise if MMA fans who were members of either minority were too intimidated to join these online spaces. It also could be assumed some women considering picking up the sport wondered: “Are the gyms also this misogynistic?”

As a result, by the present day, many of these message boards have increasingly become social and political echo chambers, whose memberships primarily consist of the “old guard” and those who idolize them. They still reduce female fighters to sexualized objects, bemoaning women’s presence in the sport with little to no pushback. While *MMA Mania* commenters seem to appreciate some female fighters, like retired bantamweight champion Amanda Nunes,<sup>99</sup> most WMMA articles on the site feature the readership engaging in talent and sexual-related degradation of women.<sup>100</sup> Admittedly, the atmosphere is somewhat tamer than during the study period, but still quite misogynistic. Conversely, *Bloody Elbow*, the most left-leaning of the three Vox Media sites regarding its writers, moderators, and fanbase, was unceremoniously axed in April 2023, showing the media company’s priorities.<sup>101</sup>

An extreme example is the *Underground*. During WMMA’s emergence, it served as a way for fans to discuss MMA and network within the industry. Today, it is unrecognizable, operating as a far-right-wing echo chamber. Despite its domain name remaining as

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<sup>99</sup> Ryan Harkness, “Too much ass kicking — Amanda Nunes cites nerve damage in legs as reason for UFC retirement,” Mmamania.com, Vox Media, August 4, 2023. <https://www.mmamania.com/2023/8/4/23819848/amanda-nunes-cites-nerve-damage-in-legs-as-reason-for-ufc-retirement-too-much-ass-kicking>.

<sup>100</sup> Drake Riggs, “Denied! Julianna Pena shuts down ‘Amanda Nunes’ tampon holder’ Mayra Bueno Silva’s calls for title fight,” Mmamania.com, Vox Media, July 19, 2023. <https://www.mmamania.com/2023/7/19/23801062/julianna-pena-shuts-down-amanda-nunes-tampon-holder-mayra-bueno-silvas-calls-for-title-fight>.

<sup>101</sup> Tim Bissell, “Important information regarding the Bloody Elbow newsletter,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, March 1, 2023. <https://bloodyelbow.com/2023/03/01/important-information-regarding-the-bloody-elbow-newsletter/>. The website is still active, it is just no longer affiliated with Vox Media and some of its features have been moved behind a paywall.

forums.mixedmartialarts.com, MMA is a distant second to praising former president Donald Trump, claiming the Covid pandemic was a hoax, and complaining about the “wokeness” of the U.S. national women’s soccer team.<sup>102</sup> Both MMA Mania and the Underground signaled during pre-UFC WMMA that they were welcoming spaces for those with sexist views. By 2023, the former had become a haven for “locker room talk,” and the latter was now a prominent platformer of “hate speech.” Again, not exactly a warm welcome for female and queer MMA fans.

What does this suggest for the future of WMMA? Looking at present-day MMA, the women’s game might be doing well at first glance. The **UFC** now has four women’s weight classes<sup>103</sup>, and **Invicta** has been in business for a decade.<sup>104</sup> However, one weight class might soon be scrapped,<sup>105</sup> and **Invicta** is now forced to stream for free on YouTube with only a fraction of the media exposure it once had.<sup>106</sup> These and the study’s findings show that while WMMA fan appreciation has grown, the dominant online male audience could not care less and is still not welcoming women into their ranks. Until MMA news sites and fan forums coordinate with each other and start actively cracking down on the online misogyny they currently incubate, making the environment more female-friendly, WMMA will continue to be treated as an inferior product by consumers and producers alike.

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<sup>102</sup> “Otherground,” Mixedmartialartist.com, The Arena Group, Accessed August 6, 2023.

<https://forums.mixedmartialarts.com/c/otherground/6>.

<sup>103</sup> “Athlete Rankings,” UFC.com, Accessed August 6, 2023. <https://www.ufc.com/rankings/>.

<sup>104</sup> “INVICTA FC 53 | DeCoursey vs. Dos Santos | Wed, May 3rd, 2023 9p ET/7p MT,” Invicta Fighting Championships, May 3, 2023, video, 3:25:27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAuz4dYTRlo&t=11738s>.

<sup>105</sup> “Yeah so.... Women’s Featherweight Is Done Right?,” MMA On Point, June 11, 2023, video, 8:39.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Sbm6MA4sgw>.

<sup>106</sup> “INVICTA FC 53 | DeCoursey vs. Dos Santos | Wed, May 3rd, 2023 9p ET/7p MT,” Invicta Fighting Championships, May 3, 2023, video, 3:25:27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAuz4dYTRlo&t=11738s>.

## Future Studies

As for where this subject could be added to the literature regarding future studies, sadly, a large portion has now been blocked off. As stated throughout this dissertation, various sources became permanently unavailable during research and writing. For example, readership comments can no longer be examined pre-2021 from the following websites: *Sherdog*, *MMA Mania*, *MMA Fighting*, and *Bloody Elbow*. Days after Chapter 6 was completed, the latter three sites, sharing the same server, deleted all comments simultaneously. Several YouTube videos and their comment sections examined for this study no longer exist. Because of this, future examinations of online MMA fan culture will have to rely on forums (which also experience deletions) and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Of note was the loss of the archived **Invicta** livestream threads from the three Vox sites. On January 12, 2022, **Invicta** hosted its fiftieth PPV event, resulting in an average of 5.6 fight cards per year.<sup>107</sup> If the live stream threads alone had been left untouched by the mass Vox Media comment deletions, it could have provided much information and data on how this portion of the online fanbase reacted to the decade-long existence of the WMMA promotion.

As for studies that are still achievable, tracking the promotion of emphasized femininity and hegemonic/toxic masculinity in the **UFC** from 2013 onwards, or how this promotion was covered amongst sportswriters, even though the comment sections are purged, the articles still exist themselves. Also, examinations of any of the thirty-one seasons of *TUF*, utilizing data from *Sherdog*'s forums alone, could be a gold mine for various studies concerning MMA fan perspectives on the near two-decade TV program. Of particular interest are the six seasons which

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<sup>107</sup> "Invicta Fighting Championships" *Sherdog.com*, Mandatory, Accessed March 10, 2022. <https://www.sherdog.com/organizations/Invicta-Fighting-Championships-4469>.

featured female fighters. Shayna Baszler herself could be further examined, whether it be media reaction to her **UFC** stint or fan/media coverage of her ongoing professional wrestling career. Regarding this career change, Baszler could be analyzed in terms of not being as “emphasized feminine” as most modern **WWE** female talent and being “legitimate” in terms of coming into the squared circle with an actual combat sports pedigree. Political and ideological differences between the readership of the different Vox Media sites are another potential academic avenue. However, they would have to focus attention on articles written since 2021. Sociological examinations of **Invicta** broadcasts, whether focused on a singular fight card or multiple events, would also be intriguing to explore.

### **Postscript**

In the end, the most crucial realization from this study is that throughout the entirety of Shayna Baszler’s pre-**UFC** MMA career, emphasized femininity and toxic masculinity dominated the comments sections of examined online MMA news articles. MMA media outlets and the fight broadcasts broadly either spoke out against emphasized femininity or ignored discussing these narratives altogether. And yet, the media still participated to an extent in promoting the gender hierarchy’s ideals. The study has examined how Baszler and other **WMMA** professionals were expected to titillate male desires, be sociable, soft-spoken, and assumed to be inferior biologically in MMA terms compared to male fighters. However, those who refused to adhere to appearance standards, such as Cris Cyborg<sup>108</sup> and Sarah D’Alelio, were not the only ones criticized.<sup>109</sup> Unsociable trash talkers like Baszler<sup>110</sup> and Ronda Rousey were

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<sup>108</sup> Jirri, July 41, 2008 (10:47 am) Comment on Nelson, “‘EliteXC: Unfinished Business’ Payroll Released.”

<sup>109</sup> Komplexx904, January 5, 2013 (3:25am) Comment on Bohn, “Invicta FC 4 weigh in photos gallery for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' in Kansas City.”

<sup>110</sup> Demeritorious, January 5, 2013 (11:35pm) Comment on Hemminger, “Invicta FC 4 results and LIVE fight coverage for 'Esparza vs Hyatt' TONIGHT (Jan 5).”

not alone either.<sup>111</sup> Conventionally attractive women such as Gina Carano and Michelle Waterson had many fans wishing them to pose for *Playboy*<sup>112</sup> or act in pornography rather than discussing their actual fights.<sup>113</sup> More demure fighters such as Sarah Kaufman were still criticized on the rare occasions they spoke out against treatment that deemed them less valuable or less marketable than their male counterparts.<sup>114</sup> To many online MMA fans, women participating in the sport defied “the natural order” and broke into their male preserve. “Hot girls” and “freak shows” were exceptions allowed to compete but were only tolerated if they did not intrude on the highest levels of the sport,<sup>115</sup> where their “physical inferiority” would make a mockery of the “elite athleticism” displayed by male fighters.<sup>116</sup>

Initially, this study set out to see what reactions arose from the media, the fans, and fellow participants when a professional WMMA fighter such as Shayna Baszler consistently did not abide by emphasized feminine norms. As the findings make abundantly clear, while the news media and other competitors were overall ambivalent to WMMA adhering to emphasized femininity, there was a sizable and vocal segment of the online fanbase to whom simply competing in MMA was enough to deem a woman noncompliant with emphasized femininity and would respond in a toxic masculine fashion.

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<sup>111</sup> JG87, March 4, 2012 (12:20am) Comment on Roth, “Strikeforce Tate Vs. Rousey Results: Ronda Rousey By Armbar.”

<sup>112</sup> James Iannotti, “Report: Pro Elite and Elite XC 'shutting its doors effective immediately',” MMAmania.com, Vox Media, October 20, 2008. <https://www.mmamania.com/2008/10/20/report-pro-elite-and-elite-xc-shutting-its-doors-effective-immediately>.

<sup>113</sup> Jonnyboy6969, November 23, 2012 (8:37pm) Comment on Press Release, “Invicta FC 4: 'Gadelha vs. Esparza' fight card set for Jan. 5 in Kansas City.”

<sup>114</sup> Jonathan Snowden, “Sarah Kaufman's Dramatic Knockout Not Enough for Strikeforce Diva,” Bloodyelbow.com, Vox Media, July 24, 2010. <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/7/24/1585937/sarah-kaufmans-dramatic-knockout#42827324>.

<sup>115</sup> Rainmaker6, April 14, 2009 (10:36 pm) Comment on Rome, “There's Plenty Left for Women's MMA After Gina Carano vs. Cyborg Santos.”

<sup>116</sup> Lebron’s hairline, November 9, 2012 (12:31am) Comment on ShinSplints, “UPDATED - Report: Ronda Rousey to become first female UFC fighter.”



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University of Alberta, Augustana Campus, Camrose, AB  
Major: History  
Minor: Political Science

### PRESENTATIONS

- January 2019    **FROM MULTIPLE ANGLES: KURT ANGLE, FAN POPULARITY,  
AND THE REINTRODUCTION OF LEGITIMACY TO NORTH AMERICAN  
PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING**  
  
Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL- American Historical Association 133<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting
- March 2014     **THE PHIL WHO CRIED WOLF: MANON RHEAUME  
REINFORCES THE GENDER BARRIER IN HOCKEY**  
  
Western University- Tri-University Conference for the  
Trans/Disciplinary Study of Sports w/ Dunja Antunovic
- March 2013     **CALGARY OLYMPIANS VS EDMONTON OILERS: A TALE  
OF SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT SPORTS SECTIONS IN 1979-80  
ALBERTA**  
  
Penn State University- Tri-University Conference for the  
Trans/Disciplinary Study of Sports

### PUBLICATIONS

- 2018    **LOWLAND GORILLA BALLERINA ACROBAT: BROCK  
LESNAR, SHERDOG.COM, AND THE PERCEPTION OF PROFESSIONAL  
WRESTLERS COMPETING IN COMBAT SPORTS**

In "Identity in Professional Wrestling: Essays on Nationality, Race, and Gender," ed.  
by Aaron D. Horton. McFarland & Company, Inc.

**MORE THAN A MIRACLE: THE KOREAN WAR, COLD WAR  
POLITICS, AND THE 1960 OLYMPIC HOCKEY TOURNAMENT**

Primary Author MacIntosh Ross, Secondary Author E.K. Nagel in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, ed. by Stephan Wassong and Michael Heine, 35(9).

2013-2018 **MAKING THE LEAGUE MINIMUM: SPORTS RAMBLINGS AND  
THOUGHTS FROM THE KID PICKED LAST IN GYM**

Self-Published Sports Blog, Deleted Website in 2021.