



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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More women compete in sports currently than ever before. However, the historical tensions which relate to their participation—as athletes and as females—remain. Mixed martial arts (MMA) has proven to be the most visible introduction of females into sports that have traditionally been considered exclusively for men. Gina Carano and Cristiane Santos were the first women to headline a major MMA event. Through their participation they violate conventional standards of womanliness and highlight complexities associated with the social standards of femininity. This study examines how rhetoric produced by the male voice constructs the identity of the female in MMA. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s “The Rhetoric of Women’s Liberation: An Oxymoron” is applied as a method to the rhetoric employed. The purpose of this study is to determine how substantive and stylistic features operate within the rhetoric to construct the identities of Carano and Santos. This thesis indicates the important insights that can be yielded when rhetorical criticism is utilized.

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Beauty and the Beast: The Rhetorical Construction of the Female in Mixed Martial  
Arts

by  
Kori A. Thornburg

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Kori A. Thornburg, Author

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

On June 6, 2009, during the live Showtime telecast of “Strikeforce: Lawler vs. Shields,” Strikeforce announced one of the biggest fights in mixed martial arts (MMA) history. This long anticipated bout was confirmed by the organization and set for August 15, 2009 (Holden). When the fight aired on Showtime live from the HP-Pavilion in San Jose, California, it drew in an average of 576,000 viewers and peaked to 856,000 viewers for the main event. These ratings set a new record for MMA on Showtime, as nearly one million people tuned in to watch the fight (Meltzer). The event also recorded 13, 976 people in attendance for a live gate of \$736,000 (Todd). This fight was groundbreaking for MMA, but why?

This fight marked the first time that two women headlined a major MMA event. Strikeforce CEO Scott Coker revealed the winner of the fight would become the promotion’s first ever female champion (Holden). The main event featured undefeated Gina “Conviction” Carano taking on Cristiane “Cyborg” Santos for the inaugural Strikeforce Women’s Championship, fighting at 145 pounds. Carano entered the fight with an undefeated record of 7-0 and Santos with a record of 7-1 (Holden). Santos defeated Carano in the final minute of the first round by a technical knockout, to become the first Strikeforce Women’s Featherweight Champion (Stupp).

The artifact I will examine in this thesis will be the rhetoric surrounding the Carano vs. Santos fight. The timeframe I will use to frame my artifact will be from June 6, 2009 to August 15, 2009. Included in my artifact is: (1) the promotional video which announces the fight, with commentary from Mauro Ranallo, Frank Shamrock a

promotional voiceover, Gina Carano and Cristiane Santos; (2) the pre-fight weigh-ins, with commentary from ring announcer Jimmy Lennon, Jr.; and (3) the actual fight itself, with commentary from Gus Johnson and the previously mentioned Mauro Ranallo and Frank Shamrock. I will analyze the rhetoric employed at each of these events included in the timeframe for my artifact to examine how each are depicting the identities of the two women. Johnson, Ranallo and Shamrock are the Strikeforce announcers who provide commentary for the fights and accompanying events, while Lennon, Jr. is a ring announcer who provided additional commentary at these events. This leads me to my research question for this study: How are the identities of Carano and Santos rhetorically constructed within the context of MMA? Then, as now, MMA is an overwhelmingly male dominated sport. This first major introduction of females into the narrative of MMA carried with it challenges and opportunities. This thesis will uncover the extent to which both are present in the rhetoric used to frame this historic event.

A study of female MMA fighters is justified on several counts. First, the passing of Title IX in 1972 set the stage for increased female participation in sports. Although Title IX was an equal education amendment, I would suggest its reforms led to increased female participation in collegiate sports, which factored into increased participation in professional female sports. Lauren Bonds, an equal rights advocate, highlights this in her article, "London Olympics and Title IX: More than a Convenient Storyline". She states that female participation in all levels of sports, specifically in the Olympics, has increased since the passing of Title IX (Bonds). In 1972 only 96

American women competed in the Olympic Games, and in 2012 that number rose to 268 American women competing (Bonds).

Increased participation however, did not lead to public acceptance. A Penn State research study found that women's sports are not getting adequate media coverage, in part, because women are perceived to be less athletic and less interested in sports than men ("Penn State Researchers Finds Lack of Coverage"). The research reveals that these views are influencing the coverage of women's sports, even as participation increases ("Penn State Researchers Finds Lack of Coverage"). Even when women's sports are covered, Margaret Carlisle Duncan argues in her article "Gender Bias in Televised Sports", it is still not presented in a way that is equal to men's sports (Duncan). She states, "The presentation of women's games as a derivative of a male standard signaled a constant presentation of female athletics as inferior" (Duncan). Female participation in sports has never achieved parity with male participation in sports due, in part, to the continued existence of stereotypes that frame females as "less than" their male counterparts.

Additionally, a study of female MMA fighters is also justified because after the initial promise of the rise of female boxing as well as women's involvement in the blatantly stereotyped sport of "lingerie football", MMA has proven to be the most visible introduction of females into sports that have traditionally been considered exclusively for men. As a result, this artifact provides a unique test case for the application of feminist criticism to the rhetorical dimension of MMA.

The question remains: what method best helps to examine the rhetorical phenomena operating within this framework? The method should, at a minimum, focus on feminist issues relative to rhetoric. It should also be applicable to a range of said artifacts. I have chosen Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron" (1973) because it accomplishes both tasks. Campbell's work treats feminist rhetoric as a unique and important form of the same. Her work goes further by asserting that feminist rhetoric "is associated with major topics of concern and controversy" (74). Campbell posits that two key features make the rhetoric of women's liberation distinctive. These key features are a fusion of substance and style (Campbell 74). The first is the substantive feature. Campbell states this feature "Unearths tensions woven deep into the fabric of our society and provokes an unusually intense and profound rhetoric of moral controversy" (75). This becomes a contradiction to the dominant values of American culture. This feature will be appropriate for my artifact, as the rhetors entail non-feminine qualities that are a violation of the female role, which in turn, attack our entire psychosocial reality. The rhetoric will be examined to determine if it produces a fundamental conflict in values with the culture, making it substantively unique.

The second feature relates to the style employed by the rhetor. This feature appears as a strategic adaptation to a difficult rhetorical situation; the patriarchal society in which we live (Campbell 78). There are two stylistic features discussed by Campbell that will be useful for the analysis of my artifact. The first is consciousness-raising, which is a way to bring about awareness. The rhetoric is used to reveal that

what was thought to be deficiencies and problems are actually common (Campbell 78). The second is risking the self, which occurs when women expose themselves on certain issues which challenge patriarchal norms.

Campbell also discusses the linguistic technique of symbolic reversals, which will also prove to be useful for my analysis. Symbolic reversals “transform devil terms into god terms” (Campbell 82). These reversals exploit power and fear that lie in terms as potential sources for strength. Examining the technique of symbolic reversals in the rhetoric surrounding my artifact is appropriate as Campbell explains, the concepts traditionally associated with women make symbolic reversals especially disturbing as they are attempts of affirmation of new identities for women (82). One important thing to note is that although Campbell applies these features to the rhetoric of women’s liberation, specifically in small group settings, she explains that “it is not confined to small groups; it is equally present in speeches and other discourses completely divorced from a small group setting” (81). This statement demonstrates that Campbell’s work is applicable to a range of artifacts that extend beyond its initial application.

Campbell’s method provides a useful tool for examining my artifact. Carano and Santos’s participation in MMA violates the dominant reality structure. In doing so, they become open to attack as they destroy the typical standards of a male-dominated sport. The question then becomes a rhetorical one. Do commentaries on these fighters betray a belief that they violate the norms of MMA? Are these fighters depicted in ways that play into the stereotyping necessitated by those norms? Or do

the commentaries resist stereotyping so as to introduce changes into what is considered—in terms of *both* masculine and feminine—the norm?

Now that I have explained the method I will use to analyze my artifact, I will cover the structure of this thesis. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature pertaining to female athletes as well as literature, although limited, specific to female MMA athletes. Chapter Three will be a more extensive review of my method. I will discuss Campbell's "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron" (1973), detail extensions to the method, and review both applications and criticisms of the same. In Chapter Four I will apply the method to my artifact so as to arrive at an answer to my research question. Chapter Five will provide a review my research findings as well as the implications for future research.

Carano and Santos are athletes. They are females. The second point complicates the perception of the first. It has been four decades since the passage of Title IX. While more women compete in sports, the tensions that relate to their participation remain. Carano and Santos, by participating in MMA, violate conventional standards of womanliness and highlight issues with the social standards of femininity. This study will provide an examination of the ways in which rhetoric operates within MMA. But I hope it also helps to explain why we still emphasize the *female* in the phrase "female athlete."

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Attitudes and perceptions about women's participation in sports are not static. These views change over time as female involvement continues to grow alongside wider social and political changes. We have gone from a time when women's sports were largely marginalized, to a time where women have increasing access and opportunity to participate in sports. Despite this access and opportunity, discrimination against female athletes still exists.

In this chapter I will begin with an examination of literature as it relates to second-wave feminist critiques of women in sports. This will provide the reader with an understanding of the views about female athletes as they began to emerge in the public sphere. I will then turn my attention to feminist critiques of women in sports from a third-wave feminist perspective. This will allow the reader to see changes in attitudes that have transpired as women's involvement in sports increases and continues to grow to this day. Finally, I will look specifically to literature that addresses feminist critiques of women's participation in mixed martial arts (MMA).

Before we turn to the literature review proper, it is important to provide an understanding of first-wave feminism. First-wave feminism took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. This wave was inspired by early feminist work like that of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), an 18<sup>th</sup>-Century British feminist. In 1792 Wollstonecraft wrote "A Vindication of the Rights on Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects." In this work she argues women should have access to certain rights, education most importantly. Wollstonecraft notes, "Let woman share

the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man, for she must grow more perfect when emancipated” (451). Working off of beliefs such as this, ground-breaking feminists like Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), focused on ways to open up opportunities for women, especially on achieving suffrage. “Discussions about the vote and women’s participation in politics led to an examination of the differences between men and women as they were viewed” (Rampton). First-wave feminist goals were general and broad and were not concerned with women’s participation in sport; rather, the goal was to expand women’s general participation in the social sphere. While first-wave feminism does little to address women in sports, it is important to note as it laid the foundation for social and political changes that would transpire during the second and third waves of feminism.

Even with the foundation-laying work done in the early years of feminism, the connections between women and sports remain under-theorized to this day. As Ann Hall notes, “There is a noticeable absence of sports studies within feminist academic literature and scholarship” (56). That said, the literature that does exist helps to frame perceptions inside and outside of MMA. Moreover, it extends Hall’s observation by positing a continued need to examine constructions of the female in male-dominated sports.

### **Second-Wave Feminist Critiques of Women in Sports**

The beginning of the second-wave of feminism started in the 1960s, and it lasted until the early- to mid- 90s. “This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-war

and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world” (Rampton). Advocates focused on guaranteeing social equality in the law regardless of gender, on decreasing the subjugation of women, and creating a society free of sexism (Rampton). In their 2004 article “Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong,” feminists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards note that “Second-wave feminists based their ideals on what it was like to be a woman in the 40s, 50s, and 60s” (60). In his 2007 book, *Out of Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport*, Michael Messner helps to illustrate perceptions of the time; he explains, “When I was a boy in the 1950’s and early 1960’s, sports seemed to be a world that belonged unambiguously to boys and men . . . the few girls who were athletically inclined were often stigmatized for their interest in sport: maybe, it was whispered, they weren’t real girls?” (1). Baumgardner and Richards explain,

The world in which the women who grew up in this time period, were protected rather than challenged and restricted rather than encouraged. This world deprived them of access to things that were considered to be male and enforced their participation in things that were considered to be female (60).

Second-wave feminism sought to not only challenge and change, but also to equalize, the social relations within which women were oppressed and disadvantaged (Scruton and Flintoff 30). Susan Greendorfer, in her 1990 article, “From ‘Fair Sex’ to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras,” argues that the beliefs imbedded in our patriarchal society have influenced socialization and stereotypes. As a consequence, there were (and still are) limited

acceptable roles for females (108). These women needed to fight and resist the male dominant system that was maintaining itself through the continued oppression of them. They had to work to challenge the politics of the time to address the need of incorporating women into the system (Baumgardner and Richards 62).

Several works from this wave help to contextualize the societal changes being promoted. In her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan argues that by placing women in the role of the housewife, it consequently limits their possibilities and potential (77-78). Placing women in the home and in the role of the housewife was a consequence of the male dominant society and power structure in which these women lived (and in which women today continue to live). Feminist Kate Millett understood the role of the patriarchy. In her book "Sexual Politics" (1969), she argues the patriarchy is an organizing principle and its power affects all of culture and society. Millett states, "When a system of power is thoroughly in command, it has scarcely need to speak itself aloud;" she continues, "When its workings are exposed and questioned, it becomes not only subject to discussion, but even to change" (58). Millett urges women to question the system that continues to oppress and marginalize them for change to occur. Feminist Valerie Solanas takes this notion one step further. Instead of simply questioning the system to bring about change, Solanas argues for the complete removal of male for female emancipation. In Solanas's 1967 book "SCUM Manifesto," she argues,

'Life' in this 'society' being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of 'society' being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females

only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and eliminate the male sex (1).

Her belief is that because men are incapable of relating to women and their needs, they should be removed. These feminists and their work helped to motivate the second-wave in their efforts to bring about change.

These calls for social change also begat legal advances. In 1972, Title IX emerged as one of the largest advancements for women. Title IX mandated that institutions receiving federal funding must not discriminate on the basis of sex. In “Title IX as Pragmatic Feminism” (2007), Deborah Brake states “Title IX achieved remarkable success in encouraging and facilitating creative opportunities for resisting traditional gender norms that constrained female athletes” (Brake). The result, though seemingly simple in retrospect, was ground-breaking: Title IX provided opportunity and access for women to participate in sports; as a consequence, female involvement increased in collegiate, amateur, and professional sports contexts.

Feminist reactions to Title IX were varied. In her 2012 book “Getting in the Game: Title IX and the Women’s Sports Revolution” feminist Deborah Brake argues, “Title IX is a ‘feminist’ law in the sense that it is animated by a desire to enable women to live more full and meaningful lives, without the stifling constraints of gender roles and discrimination” (2). Many feminist reactions to this law were likewise positive. Dr. Bernice (Bunny) Sandler, considered “The Godmother of Title IX,” notes the importance of the law: “Title IX did more than encourage women. It acted like a shock-wave in changing social values in the United States” (“The Real

Story Behind the Passage of Title IX”). Additionally, Billie Jean King, the former world’s number one professional women’s tennis player, feminist advocate, and founder of the Women’s Sports Foundation illustrates the benefits of Title IX. In her article “Billie Jean King: Keep Successful Title IX Strong” she states, “The legislation was a tipping point for women’s equality in sports and society” (King). Title IX did more, however, than just provide equality in sports. King notes, “Not only did the law increase sports participation, it also shifted perceptions of what was socially and culturally acceptable for young women” (King).

While many feminist reactions reflect those of Brake, Sandler and King, some still note its limitations. The Feminist Majority Foundation which advocates for equality around the world highlights limitations of Title IX. They state that Title IX was very successful in eliminating some of the discrimination women face, however, “Despite progress on some indicators, many inequities remain” (“Education Equity”). This reaction illustrates that, Title IX was not able to solve for all of women’s concerns, and the need for progress is still evident. Linda Flanagan and Susan Greenberg agree with this and point to the harms Title IX has created for women. In their article “How Title IX Hurts Female Athletes” they argue that there are serious costs for female athletes. “Title IX has inflicted significant collateral damage, including increased health risks for the players, a drop in the number of women coaches, and increased exposure to sexual abuse” (Flanagan and Greenberg). This is due to women starting to specialize in a specific sport at a young age in hopes of becoming a professional, and sustaining preventable overuse injuries. Additionally,

with the increased prestige of women's college athletics, male coaches were (and still are) viewed to be more qualified, and as a consequence, female coaches suffer. These varied reactions to Title IX reveal the complex perceptions and attitudes about women in sports.

It is at this point, where social and legal mechanisms began to give way to calls for equality, that feminists began grappling with conceptions of women in sports. At times, this theorizing was complicated by the long-standing realities of sports in general. As Greendorfer notes,

Sport and leisure have served as a vehicle for male empowerment and by the perpetuation of gender ideology in the daily conduct of social life helped to exert social control over women and their bodies, on one hand, and yet, paradoxically, was used as a vehicle for women's emancipation (108).

This suggests that, while sport has traditionally been reserved for men, it also could be seen as a tool used by women for advancement. Using sport as a tool for advancement was key to overcoming oppression. For that to happen, women needed access to sports. Sheila Scraton and Anne Flintoff, in their 2002 article, "Sport Feminism: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Our Understanding of Gender and Sport" argue that it was because girls and women were not able to have the same opportunity and access as men that they were disadvantaged and denied rights (32). They continue to state the lack of opportunity women face is due, in part, to different socialization practices, as well as through gender stereotyping and discrimination (32). Women and men are socialized into different sports that are viewed as "acceptable"

for their gender. As a consequence, if they step outside of what is “acceptable” they are discriminated against and stereotyped for it.

Others have noted this issue of socialization as well. Archer and McDonald state “Most sports are viewed either as ‘masculine’ or as suitable for both sexes. These perceptions of sport, together with structural constraints on sports opportunities for women, militate against their equal participation with men in the sports arena” (1). In an attempt to change these notions, a second-wave feminist approach to women in sports posits that sport is fundamentally good and represents a positive experience to which women of all ages need access. “Prizing work, sports, and strength are good and essential messages for women. We need to have access to what is characterized as boy stuff” (Baumgardner and Richards 60). When women are able to have access to all sports, through their experiences, socialization practices and gender stereotyping may begin to fade.

In Scraton and Flintoff’s previously mentioned article they explain, “How we understand and explain gender and sport is influenced by social, political, and economic change, and by developments both within and outside of sports” (30). The social, political, and economic changes that occurred during second-wave feminism resulted in increased opportunity for women, and issues of equality became part of the mainstream sports agenda (Scraton and Flintoff 33). Second-wave feminists like the previously mentioned Kate Millett were respected because they worked to reject biological notions that were used to discriminate against females in sports; instead they were able to establish that gender is a political and social construct. Millett

asserted, “Sex is a status category with political implications” (24). She also concluded that “What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalized none the less) in our social order, is the birthright whereby males rule females” (Millett 21). Feminist work like Millett’s was able to fight against discrimination and continue to open the door for progress for women. When biological notions about gender were rejected, men could no longer use it as an argument against women and their potential.

As women emerged in the world of sports and fought for equal opportunity, new perspectives about their involvement also emerged. Once taboo, second-wave feminists believed female involvement in sports was important. They believed women had the right to equal access to sport. While it challenged traditional gender norms, they argued gender was a social construct and beliefs about gender and sport, specifically women in sports, could change. With a better understanding of second-wave feminist objectives and how those goals related to sports, I will now turn my attention to focus on third-wave feminist critiques of women in sports.

### **Third-Wave Feminist Critiques of Women in Sports**

Third-wave feminism began in the mid-90s and continues to this day. “During this phase many constructs have been destabilized, including the notions of body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity” (Rampton). Broadly speaking, third-wave feminists are able to present themselves as strong and powerful women. They avoid claims of victimization and work to define femininity for themselves (Rampton). It is

important to note that, “Although third-wave feminism is promising and potentially important, it is not a major break from second-wave feminism” (Hall 56). Rather than being a distinct separation from second-wave feminism, third-wave is an “Evolution of femininity, building on previous generations” (Baumgardner and Richards 63).

In the book, *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon* (2003), Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin note, “Third-wave feminism is a product of the contradiction between the continuation of sexism and an increasingly realizable feminist dream that today many women do have more opportunity” (41). These women acknowledge that while they have come a long way, progress still needs to be made. In terms of sport, third-wave feminists view athleticism as a tool for progress that can have important social consequences (Scraton and Flintoff 45). In continuing to work for progress for women, this movement is associated with cultural activism. It challenges identity boundaries and celebrates the power that lies in being a woman (Hall 55). In doing so, they are able to “Recognize the power of individual women to resist and transgress these boundaries in sport” (Scraton and Flintoff 36). The boundaries that exist both within and outside of sports, however, are not easy to transgress.

From a third-wave perspective, Ann Hall notes in her 2005 article, “From Pre- to Postfeminism: A Four- Decade Journey,” “Binaries like male/female, active/passive, violent/peaceful, competitive/cooperative and so forth belong to long contested essentialists constructions of masculine and feminine nature” (56). Despite the binaries that exist as a result of traditional social constructions of gender, women’s

participation in sport as a tool for progress works to create a new image of the female athlete. “The new image of the female athlete challenged some of the old codes of male subject/female object” (Heywood and Dworkin 28); however some of these codes still exist. That being said, some women, and many who specifically identify as third-wave feminists, “Are at ease with contradiction and accept pluralism as a given” (Hall 56). They understand that images of strong female athletes perform both positive and negative cultural work at the same time (Hall 56). They work to highlight the positive cultural work being done to advance women’s opportunities, while resisting the negative.

Second-wave feminists advocated that, through sport, females are encouraged to develop a female identity that is acceptable and heterosexually attractive; third-wave feminists resist this ideal. They “suggest the need to reconstruct or recreate sport into forms that celebrate women’s values rather than those more traditionally associated with masculine aggression and competition” (Scruton and Flintoff 35). What needs to occur here is another shift. Baumgardner and Richards believe we “shouldn’t have to make something masculine to be valued by society. In fact, we should bring feminine things into masculine spaces” (Baumgardner and Richards 63). Throughout this wave there is a focus on allowing the “girl,” and what it means to be a “girl,” to be a strong and distinct feminine identity. Females are able to play into the power that lies in being a woman and reclaim that identity for themselves. They work to prove that you can be a woman and you can be powerful, simultaneously, through participation in sport (Baumgardner and Richards 61). These women demand that

they can play sports while being whoever they want to be (Baumgardner and Richards 66).

When women are able to create a plurality of voices that empower them and express who they are as female athletes, it affirms the beliefs they hold about themselves. This dialogue, in turn, allows women and society at large to feel more comfortable with their identity as a female athlete. It gives women the opportunity to “Gain the confidence and centrality to eventually change what society values” (Baumgardner and Richards 65). A feminist perspective helps to illustrate this. Scraton and Flintoff note, “Today women nationwide are participating in classes like kickboxing, spinning, rock-climbing, and boxing relegating to the cultural dustbin mythologies of the ‘weaker sex’ and assumptions of female incompetence” (45).

During the early years of third-wave feminism, one of the largest and most notable achievements for women in sports was seen during the 1996 Olympic Games. 1996 was deemed the ‘Year of the Female Athlete’ as more women than ever before not only participated in the Olympics, but were acknowledged for their achievements and success (Heywood and Dworkin 25). This year there was a shift that occurred. It was a shift to focus on female athletes. “This focus on female athletes was part of a much larger national focus on women in sports”, Heywood and Dworkin state “For the first time the female athlete was seen as the rule, not the exception” (26). The shift to focus on the female athlete, in turn led to the shift in attitudes and perceptions that were beginning to take place. Instead of women being condemned or judged for their participation in sport, they were praised.

This world was a whole new reality for female athletes. It also aligns with the ideals of third-wave feminism which work to emphasize women's skill and achievement in sport, "Setting the stage, perhaps, for an assault on the largely male preserve of professional sports" (Heywood and Dworkin 26). This suggests that by acknowledging women's success in sport, progress and advancement for female athletes will continue. However, progress for all women will also continue. Heywood and Dworkin note, "The stage was set like never before for women's sports to be implemented as a vehicle for women's advancement and a vehicle for a feminist agenda" (29). Third-wave feminists must continue to urge women to be comfortable in expressing themselves both as a woman and as an athlete. They must be aware of the power that lies in the term female athlete (Baumgardner and Richards 63).

Third-wave feminists build on the groundwork laid by earlier feminists. Moreover, considerations of the female in sports moved to the forefront of their discussions. One of the newest areas of activity, and the focus of this thesis, is MMA. This presents several challenges and opportunities. Women's emergence into the world of MMA is relatively new, occurring during the last decade. As a result, women's participation therein is under-theorized. The dearth of information affirms the importance and uniqueness of my study. At the same time, it complicates my research. Absent the usual historical markers, I am forced to develop many of my conceptions independently or rely on popular, as opposed to scholarly, sources of information.

Even without significant commentaries, two things become clear: as MMA's popularity has grown, so too have concerns about women's involvement in 'cage-fighting'. In Sean Gregory's *Time* article "It's Ladies' Fight" (2007), these two issues are front and center. "Over the past few years the popularity of mixed martial arts, the full-combat sport that combined elements of boxing, kickboxing, wrestling, jujitsu, and other disciplines, has exploded" (Gregory). But he goes on to assert that people don't want to see two women beating each other up because, based on traditional gender norms, society remains uncomfortable with such acts of aggression.

Melanie McNaughton, a female MMA fighter and author of "Insurrectionary Womanliness: Gender and the (Boxing) Ring" (2012), helps to provide a first person explanation for these reactions. She explains, "Women aren't supposed to want to hit somebody until they bleed. In the rare case when women do want to, it is assumed they don't want to participate in traditional female activities...as they challenge traditional gender norms and social standards of femininity" (1). McNaughton highlights the contradiction for the female identity that occurs through women's participation in MMA. "Even for some feminists, it seems, to be a woman is not to be physically aggressive or competitive" (McNaughton 4). Other women, however, "believed they were doing everything else, so why not this" (Gregory). These conflicting feelings guarantee that female participation in "violent sport remains contentious both within feminism and broader social structures" (McNaughton 4).

American sociologist Michael Messner, whose main area of research involves

gender and the sociology of sport, provides an explanation for society's discontent with female participation in combat sports.

While women athletes' bodies are increasingly treated instrumentally, as machines that are constructed for high levels of performance...what we see less of thus far in women's sports is the construction of athletic bodies as violent weapons to be used against other bodies (Messner 5).

McNaughton reveals the perspective of an MMA observer, "Seeing a woman drive her elbow into the nose of another girl or smash another girl in the eye with her fist can be a bit shocking" (4). She continues to explain the problem for society "lies exclusively in the gender of the participants" (5). She argues that society must work to bring together gender and combat, which can be "attributed to longstanding cultural traditions which set sport apart as a space for the reification on masculinity" (McNaughton 5). This suggests that women must continue to work to affirm their identity as a female and as a fighter.

From this review of literature it can be seen that during the second-wave of feminism, women worked to make both social and political changes for women in sports. As women were traditionally excluded from sports, second-wave feminism challenged those ideals to achieve equal access and opportunity for women in sport. Additionally, it can be seen that women operating in the third-wave of feminism work to show the power of being a female athlete. They also work to define for themselves the true female athlete. Finally, as women enter into sports, specifically into MMA, a combat sport that defies traditional gender roles for women, they challenge those historical notions of masculinity. These women also face the many challenges that

involve the construction and representation of their own female identities; as women and as fighters. It is now appropriate to turn to a method that will help to bring these issues into more focus.

### **CHAPTER III: REVIEW OF METHOD**

The recognition of women's importance has been a relatively recent occurrence in the history of rhetoric. For far too long what held for the male voice was thought to either hold for, limit, or dismiss the female voice. With the rise of feminism, these old notions began to break. In 1973, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell published "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron" in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. In 1999, she published "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron 'Revisited'" in *Communication Studies* as a response to criticisms her original theory received. In order to best understand Campbell's theory, I will begin by looking to her original article as it provides a basis for future clarifications and extensions. I will then explore the criticisms of Campbell's theory to better understand its weaknesses and limitations. I will examine Campbell's theory as she revisits it and explains what she would have done differently. Finally, I will demonstrate how it remains a useful critical method for my project, in light of the observations made.

Campbell's work treats feminist rhetoric as a unique and important form of the same. Her work goes further by asserting its relevance, that feminist rhetoric "is associated with major topics of concern and controversy" (Campbell 74). Campbell posits that two key features make the rhetoric of women's liberation (or any other body of discourse) distinctive. She states, "Rather than employing any codified critical scheme, I propose to treat two general categories – substance and style" (Campbell 74). When substantive and stylistic features are used in rhetoric, they

operate interdependently. “Stylistic choices are deeply influenced by subject matter and context, and issues are formulated and shaped by stylistic strategies” (Campbell 75). In essence, the rhetoric becomes distinctive and unique when a fusion of substance and style are employed. Campbell provides a detailed explanation of how substance and style operate within rhetoric. Best that we now focus on each of these individually.

### **Substantive Features**

The substantive feature operates to “Unearth tensions woven deep into the fabric of our society and provokes an unusually intense and profound ‘rhetoric of moral conflict’” (Campbell 75). This is because the rhetoric acts as a contradiction to the dominant values of American culture. Campbell explains, “If the rhetor entails qualities of self-reliance, self-confidence and independence, its very assumption is a violation of the female role” (75). In prescribing non-feminine qualities to women, it challenges societal values. But it also does much more than simply challenge societal values. Campbell explains that for rhetoric to be substantively unique, it must “Attack the entire psychosocial reality the most fundamental values of the cultural context in which it occurs” (75). She illustrates this through the example of women’s demand for legal equality in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries which developed from a conflict in values. Women were meant to stay in the home, raise the children, and be the property of their husbands. However, women wanted autonomy and to be independent individuals. Through their demand for legal equality, we saw that what society valued and what women valued were in conflict with one another. In

expressing their demands, women's rhetoric attacked the reality of the time in an attempt to bring about social change.

Campbell also addresses the role of the audience when dealing with substantive features. As we have seen this feature works to challenge the current system and, in turn, leaves the audience confronting a moral dilemma (Campbell 76). The audience must acknowledge if they are a society with values that need to be changed, or assert that their values, no matter how dysfunctional, are appropriate. This is because substantive features are an overt challenge to subvert existing cultural values. The fundamental conflict in values that arise "attack the fundamental values underlying this culture" (Campbell 78). In turn, this makes the rhetoric substantively unique.

### **Stylistic Features**

Stylistic features appear "as strategic adaptations to a difficult rhetorical situation" (Campbell 78). Campbell explains this difficult rhetorical situation arises through women's lack of experience in a male dominated society. To address this problem, Campbell asserts that "consciousness raising" can be employed. She explains, "'Consciousness raising' involves meetings of small, leaderless groups where women are encouraged to express their feelings and experiences" (Campbell 79). This is due to the fact that women have remained under the control of men and, by sharing their experiences, they can "create awareness" (79). Through this process women come to understand that "what was thought to be personal deficiencies and individual problems are common and shared" (Campbell 79). Here, rhetoric is stylistically unique when it creates awareness on issues that become overlooked or are

deemed unimportant.

When a rhetor engages in consciousness raising, however, there is the potential for damage to a female's self-identity. Campbell describes this as "risking the self." This occurs when women expose themselves on certain issues that challenge a male dominated society or participate in behavior that violates their role as a female. In risking the self, the rhetor becomes open to judgment, scrutiny, or possibly acceptance. In essence, it is a risk the rhetor must take in creating awareness. Additionally, in an attempt to create awareness Campbell asserts that the "rhetoric is characterized by the use of confrontive, non-adjustive strategies designed to 'violate the reality structure'" (81). Campbell describes these strategies further explaining they "are able to attack the psychosocial reality of the culture and also violate the norms of decorum, morality, and 'femininity'" (81).

Campbell highlights the linguistic technique of symbolic reversals which are used as a strategy. She explains, "Symbolic reversals transform devil terms society has applied to women into god terms and always exploit the power and fear lurking in these terms as potential sources of strength" (Campbell 82). Campbell turns to "The Bitch Manifesto" as an example, as it "argues liberated women are bitches – aggressive, confident and strong" (82). Here we see the term *bitch*, which traditionally has a negative connotation, used to empower the women it addresses. Systematic reversals of traditional female roles can be disturbing; however, they function as "attempts at the radical affirmation of new identities for women" (Campbell 82). In other words, we can look to the use of symbolic reversals in

determining possible new identities. One important thing to note here is that, although Campbell applies these features to the rhetoric of women's liberation, specifically in small group settings, she explains that "it is not confined to small groups; it is equally present in speeches and other discourses completely divorced from a small group setting" (81). This statement demonstrates that Campbell's work is applicable to a range of artifacts that extend beyond its initial application. With a better understanding of Campbell's original theory on substance and style, it will now be useful to explore criticisms raised by critics to highlight its strengths and weaknesses.

### **Critical Responses**

While Campbell's theory of women's liberation rhetoric was viewed as groundbreaking, it did receive criticism. The criticisms explored here will inform the reader of the limitations of Campbell's theory and provide insight into why Campbell chose to revisit her theory. In 1993 Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn grant that "Campbell's conclusions are a major theoretical contribution to the study of public address" (286). At the same time, however, they question the range of applications that can extend from Campbell's insights. They state that there are two ways in which this theory has limited itself. The first way is that the theory does not expand beyond the context of feminist social reform, as it is applicable to other efforts for social reform (Dow and Tonn 286). While I agree that Campbell's theory could be applicable to other areas of reform, her initial goal was to focus specifically on women's liberation and in turn kept her focus on feminist social reform. As the reader shall see in the next section, even Campbell rethought this issue in later years. The

second criticism of Dow and Tonn lies with issues concerning style. They believe that while this feminist style is unique, it is still just another “Strategy that serves to empower audiences for the traditional purpose of gaining access to the existing political system” (Dow and Tonn 286). While it is true that the feminist style operates within the traditional realm of gaining access, I would argue that was her point: to infuse the status quo with a new dynamic that could, with time and given its uniqueness, transform the system from within. Operating within the dominant paradigm does not necessarily mean selling out or giving in to it.

In 1992 Barbara Biesecker also notes some issues with Campbell’s theory, issues which seem to contradict some of Dow and Tonn’s concerns. Biesecker states, “I must admit I find less than satisfactory the conceptualization of history and social change implied in Campbell’s reformulation of female subjectivity” (146). She believes that because women involved in liberation form leaderless groups where they share their experiences only with one another, they consequently avoid sharing those experiences in the public sphere which is necessary for social change. Being a woman during this period of history gave little to no opportunity to have a public voice. As a result, Biesecker posits, these women are playing into the old patriarchal tradition by keeping their experiences in the private sphere (146). For change, you need to take action. Biesecker argues that, “In Campbell’s formulation, positivity lines up with activity, while passivity and with it femininity are identified as negative” (146). I understand the argument being made by Biesecker; women need to have some sense of leadership to advance their experiences into the public sphere and create awareness.

But I would argue, as Campbell does, that women during this time faced “a lack of a sense of agency” (140). They were unable to view themselves as individuals capable of change. As a consequence, the majority of their experiences were shared only among women, instead of among all people. And Biesecker misreads the importance of private sharing and group forming. Due to the lack of individual agency for women, operating as a leaderless group was able to empower them to act. This group, in turn, became the force that could infuse itself into the public sphere. This suggests that they were capable of changing the status quo. They were also capable of negotiating between an individual sense of powerlessness and a unified sense of injustice and purpose. This is a point Campbell would return to in her follow-up essay.

In 2005, Ashli Quesinberry Stokes also provides criticism to Campbell’s theory. She notes one significant limitation to Campbell’s work. Stokes asserts, “Campbell (1973) pointed out women’s shared structural inequity. In doing so, however, she necessarily occluded the differences between and among women” (91). Campbell’s work was directed toward the experiences of white women, and neglected to acknowledge other ethnicities and cultures. Additionally, the result of her work was a focus on commonalities rather than their differences (Stokes 92). Stokes argues that it is important to note the experiences of all women during this time and highlight their differences. Instead, these “Differences faded in the face of a project that sought to locate the common feminist identity for political action” (Stokes 92). While I believe Campbell could have addressed women of other cultures and ethnicities in her work,

the focus on commonalities—in light of and potentially in conflict with differences—would nonetheless remain. In addressing women from other cultures and ethnicities, a greater variety of women’s experiences can be shared. While it is important to understand the differences among women, focusing on what they share in common is what ultimately brings them together. Through commonalities women are able to identify with one another in their desire to reach a common goal. After exploring the criticisms to Campbell’s work, we can now turn to an examination of when she revisits her essay in 1999.

### **Campbell’s Essay Revisited**

In 1999 Campbell revisited her original essay to describe the changes she would make if she were to re-write it. The first change Campbell addresses deals with her use of the term *genre*. She explains when she was writing her 1973 essay, she had a limited understanding of the term *genre*. She would no longer call the rhetoric of women’s liberation a *genre* (“Revisited” 139). Campbell explains the term *genre* was intended to convey, “That the discourse of any effort for social change or any movement (however defined) differs from that of any other and cannot usefully be analyzed by some general template” (“Revisited” 139). If Campbell were to re-write her original essay she would broaden her focus. In a nod to the criticisms of Dow and Tonn, she admits she would extend her work to other efforts for social change (“Revisited” 139).

Campbell also addresses issues with style. The way in which she understood style was as a strategic adaptation made to deal with challenging rhetorical problems

(“Revisited” 140). These problems arise from women’s “lack of a sense of agency” (“Revisited” 140). Addressing Biesecker’s criticism concerning leadership as well as problems concerning agency, Campbell explains, “The usual rhetorical style of leadership could only reinforce the passivity and powerlessness that were the enemies of women’s rights advocates” (“Revisited” 140). Because women did not view themselves as being capable of change, they worked to find an alternative strategy in dealing with this problem. Looking back, Campbell believes she should have explained more clearly that it was more than just style at work; it was the ability to adapt. Campbell states, “If I were writing today, I would talk about strategic adaptation, which would encompass more than is usually thought of as style” (“Revisited” 140).

In Campbell’s original essay she argues that symbolic reversals hold the power to create new identities for women. However, when she revisits this idea she no longer believes this to be true. Campbell explains that she would now also consider “the limitations of role reversals” (“Revisited” 141). Symbolic reversals remain important as a tool for consciousness raising and bringing about awareness. But, Campbell explains, “These are not new roles, just versions of the old ones. They do not provide new identities” (“Revisited” 141). It would now be inappropriate to turn to the use of symbolic reversals in determining new identities for women.

The criticisms from Stokes in 2005, although written after Campbell revisited her essay, provide insight into another important revision. Campbell was aware of the flaw noted by Stokes and admits that, “As a white feminist, I focused attention on the

rhetoric and the activists that spoke to my condition, ignoring those whose ethnicities and concerns were different” (“Revisited” 142). She acknowledges her lack of consideration of all women whose experiences, although different, were equally important. Campbell contends that “This is a significant omission in this essay” (“Revisited” 142). She regrets that she didn’t “incorporate issues about diversity and the rhetoric of more diverse voices” into her essay (“Revisited” 142). Doing so would allow for a deeper understanding of the diversity of issues to which women relate and respond.

### **The Rhetoric of Liberation as Method**

At this point, it should be clear that Campbell’s theory still proves to be a useful critical method for my project, even in light of criticisms and omissions. In my analysis I will hold to substance and style while also adjusting the method to reflect Campbell’s revisions and her critics concerns. By examining the two key features Campbell posits – substance and style – we can determine whether a body of discourse is unique and distinctive enough to challenge the current system and bring social change. I will use Campbell’s notion of substance to determine if the rhetoric acts as a contradiction to the dominant values of American culture, or if it operates to maintain existing values. Although Campbell’s original essay deals with substance concerning women’s liberation, when she revisits her essay she notes that she would extend her work to other efforts for social change that go beyond its initial application. This important qualification provides further justification for applying Campbell’s method to the world of MMA generally, and female athlete’s role therein specifically.

Beyond substance, I will also examine the style of the rhetoric employed. I will examine how rhetoric functions and adjusts to women's relative lack of experience in a male-dominated society and sport. While Campbell originally thought that style was used as a new strategy, in her revision she notes that style is used more as an adaptive strategy. Instead of determining if the rhetorical style of the commentators is a new strategy (a fact that requires little to no analysis to prove on its face), I will seek to determine what, if any, adjustments are made to mediate between the masculine world of MMA and the inclusion of female competitors. In examining style, I will be looking for the inclusion of consciousness-raising. Does the rhetoric create awareness about women's new role in MMA, or does it play into traditional stereotypes about women in sports? Additionally, does the rhetoric create a risk that poses challenges for the commentators and fighters if they choose to contradict current societal values? Finally, I will examine if symbolic reversals are used. Campbell originally thought symbolic reversals could be used to create and affirm new identities for women, however, in her revision she states that is not the case. Rather, I will determine if they are used as a way to empower women through a reversal of the female role.

In using Campbell's theory as a critical method, it is important to note that I will be using it in a non-traditional way. The first clue should be my use of the term *commentators* in the aforementioned overview. Campbell's theory explains that it is the voice of the female that is important in understanding experiences for awareness and change. But what voice do we turn to when women have no voice? In MMA, the

female voice is largely absent. The fighters, outside of interviews and press conferences provide little to no substance. Instead, they enter the cage to fight and their actions speak for them. So who speaks for the women when their art is about action and not oratory?

Predominately, the all-male commentators for these events provide a rhetorical voice for the women. The rhetoric employed by these commentators constructs the feminine by framing the actions taken by the fighters for an overwhelmingly male audience. The new world of MMA can be viewed as an extension of, rather than a contradiction to, Campbell's theory. While Campbell could not have imagined this world of MMA, especially the inclusion of women fighters, she did imagine a similar world where women could enter a larger public in a non-traditional manner. The challenges that arise out of this new, overwhelmingly male-centered, sport can be addressed—indeed, critiqued—through Campbell's theory. I will be able to determine if the rhetoric surrounding women's MMA is a case of substance that is invalidated by style. Do the female fighters' actions challenge traditional roles, while the male voice constrains the advancement of these women? Or do we see a shift occur in the male voice that reflects the actions of the fighters? When we look to the actions of these women we can see if they play into, or challenge, traditional stereotypes of women in sports. Specifically, do Carano and Santos enter a larger public where their athleticism speaks louder than the words used to describe them?

My new and novel approach to Campbell's method is meant to take the best of

what she offers, while at the same time addressing criticisms to her method. The concept of voice no longer holds to just the spoken and written word. As communication theories have expanded, so too have aspects of voice. Richard Schechner's performance theory helps to support my alteration to Campbell's method. He contends that performances, or actions, are also able to communicate meaning (Schechner 1). "Performance studies does not 'read' an action or ask what 'text' is being enacted" (Schechner 2). Rather, one examines the behavior of the action and how it interacts with those who view it (Schechner 2). This action, in turn, creates meaning. By examining the behaviors and actions of Carano and Santos, the meaning of those actions can be analyzed and the rhetoric used to frame those actions can be assessed to determine if it reflects or contradicts those actions.

This thesis will challenge what is commonly thought of as *voice*, and who provides this voice in examining the construction of the feminine. Campbell's theory will be used as a method to examine the actions taken by Carano and Santos leading up to the fight as well as the fight itself. Additionally, it will be used to examine how the rhetoric of the commentators framed those actions. It will now be appropriate to turn to an analysis of my artifact through the application of Campbell's method.

## **CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS**

The mixed martial arts (MMA) fight between Gina Carano and Cristiane Santos, on August 15, 2009, was a historical moment for the sport. It marked the first time two women had headlined a major MMA event. It was also the first major introduction of females into the narrative of MMA. This introduction brought both challenges and opportunities, one of which concerned the identities of Carano and Santos. This chapter will analyze how the identities of Carano and Santos are rhetorically constructed in this male-dominated sport. To do this, I will apply a modified version of Campbell's theory, with an emphasis on substance and style, to my artifact. Included in my artifact is: (1) the promotional video which announces the fight, with commentary from Mauro Ranallo, Frank Shamrock, a promotional voiceover, Gina Carano and Cristiane Santos; (2) the pre-fight weigh-ins, with commentary from ring announcer Jimmy Lennon, Jr.; and (3) the actual fight itself, with commentary from Gus Johnson and the previously mentioned Mauro Ranallo and Frank Shamrock.

As noted above, I am applying Campbell's theory in a new and unique way. Rather than looking at how the female voice constructs their own identity, I will be looking at how the male voice constructs the female. This novel approach to Campbell's theory is appropriate as it ranges beyond its initial application. This approach can be viewed as a compliment, rather than a contradiction, to Campbell's theory. Her theory addresses women entering the larger public in a non-traditional way, similar to how Carano and Santos are entering the world of MMA. The female

voice within MMA is very limited, and there is a priority placed on the actions they take in the cage. However, as the reader shall see, what little voice they do provide also reveals how females are rhetorically constructed in MMA. As a result of the limited female voice in MMA, I will look to the actions taken by Carano and Santos to determine how those actions are framed by the all-male commentators in constructing their identities. I will begin by analyzing the substantive features in the rhetoric of my artifact, before turning to an analysis of the stylistic features as well. Finally, I will determine how the identities of Carano and Santos have been rhetorically constructed.

### **Substance**

To begin, I will apply Campbell's notion of substance to analyze the substantive features employed in the rhetoric of my artifact. In analyzing substance, I will first examine the promotional video. While the initial announcement of the fight occurred at the Robbie Lawler vs. Jake Shields event, it provides little to no commentary. It simply states that the fight will occur between Carano and Santos without providing any substance on the event. As a consequence, I will turn to the promotional video released directly after the announcement to help advertise the event. Campbell asserts that rhetoric is substantively unique when it "unearths tensions woven deep into the fabric of our society and provokes an unusually intense and profound 'rhetoric of moral conflict'" (75). The rhetoric must be a contradiction to dominant values in American culture. Additionally, if the rhetor attributes qualities that are traditionally considered unfeminine to the female, it becomes a violation of the female role and, in turn, creates a contradiction to challenge traditional values

(Campbell 75). Given my novel approach to Campbell's theory, it will be reframed. Instead of looking only to the rhetoric to determine if it is a contradiction and challenge to traditional values, I will be examining the actions taken by the women in the cage to determine if those actions contradict and challenge existing values. I will then examine if the rhetoric produced by the commentators reflects, or invalidates their actions.

The first contradiction to dominant values seen in the promotional video is when Ranallo states, "You're talking about groundbreaking, that's never happened before where a female mixed martial arts fight headlines a card featuring the guys" (*Carano*). This suggests that, traditionally, to headline a major MMA fight you had to be male. However, having these two women do it for the first time is a contradiction and challenge to tradition. Shamrock notes the women's fighting styles and argues the fight will come down to a competition between Santos's skill of strength and power, versus Carano's skill with technique and form (*Carano*). Shamrock prescribes qualities to these women which are a violation to the female role. Specifically, with Santos, strength and power are not traditional qualities of a female. At the same time, revealing that Carano has strong technique and form in this sport is the imposition of another non-feminine quality.

Stating that these women are strong, powerful and talented at this male-dominated sport, allows for the rhetoric employed to contradict dominant values and the traditional notion that women cannot be powerful in sports, especially a sport that is overwhelmingly male. The women are not referred to as "female athletes" here, but

rather “superstars” (*Carano*). Claiming these women are “superstars” in this sport implies they have “super-human” qualities. It is necessary for the commentators to do so, because they are male attributes applied to the females. So while we begin to see the female constructed as powerful and skillful in MMA, it also gets restricted by the notion that these attributes are unnatural and not normal.

In addition to the male commentary in the promotional video, there is also a very limited discussion from Carano and Santos. As was noted previously, the male voice is largely left to construct the female in MMA. This is also true for most other sports that are typically defined as masculine, and even in those where there has been progress in introducing female athletes and leagues. So this one opportunity to see a female voice frame itself (literally) deserves attention as it is rare and more closely aligns with the original and traditional articulations of Campbell’s theory.

Carano states, “This is just going to be a battle I think, it’s going to be a war” (*Carano*). When Carano compares this fight to a battle and a war, it initially seems like a challenge to traditional values and assumptions about female fighters. However, with a closer look this statement suggests Carano is buying into the dominant metaphors in MMA. The dominant metaphors in MMA highlight masculinity. When Carano buys into the metaphor of war, it reveals the necessity of taking on the masculine attributes in MMA to demonstrate the legitimacy of the two women in the sport. Additionally, Santos comments, “I’ve been waiting a long time for this opportunity, and Gina (Carano) doesn’t have what it takes to stop me” (*Carano*). In Santos’s comment she is claiming her strength and power. Similar to Carano, she

takes on masculine attributes to justify her role in MMA. This statement also shows her confidence. She knows that she is ready for this fight, and she has the ability to beat Carano. Both women buy into the dominant, masculine metaphors in MMA. In doing so, they are able to demonstrate their legitimacy in MMA. These statements construct these women as capable, competitive fighters through their adoption of the masculine, rather than a challenge to traditional values about women in sports.

After the promotion of the fight, the pre-fight weigh-in was the next event to provide commentary. While the weigh-in provides little commentary, the rhetoric employed at this event is important and can be substantively analyzed. When the women are announced, Lennon, Jr., states, “And ladies and gentlemen, here they are, a moment in history, the main event of the evening” (*The Weigh-In*). By revealing that this is a moment in history, it reveals its importance, as well as the promotional necessity of selling this fight as unique to gain more interest and create more of a draw, in terms of ratings and financial yield. In the dominant values of American culture, women’s participation in sport is commonly deemed irrelevant and unimportant. However, by noting the historical importance and uniqueness of this fight, Lennon Jr.’s comment challenges those dominant viewpoints. This also corresponds to Campbell belief that the rhetoric must “Attack the entire psychosocial reality the most fundamental values of the cultural context in which it occurs” (75). Women’s participation in sports is traditionally viewed as insignificant in American culture; as a consequence, they receive very little attention. When Lennon Jr. explains the significance of this fight, the reality of viewing women in sports in the opposite

light falls under attack. With this, the viewer begins to see Carano and Santos as important athletes in MMA.

Finally, I will turn to the actual fight itself to analyze the substantive features. Before the fight begins, both women are given a brief introduction as they approach the cage. The cage is an octagon shaped platform surrounded by both exposed and padded wire fencing that the women enter and fight in. When Santos (referred to as “Cyborg,” her nickname) is introduced, Shamrock states, “Cyborg is a physical specimen. She is a natural athlete, she’s played every sport. Basically, the toughest chick in Brazil” (*Part One*). Here again, non-feminine qualities are prescribed to Santos which violate the traditional female role. This operates to challenge cultural norms as a way to bring change in how the identities of these female fighters are viewed.

When Carano is introduced it is similar to Santos’s introduction, but slightly different. Johnson states “Underneath her beautiful exterior is a vicious and calculated destroyer” (*Part One*). While the beginning of this statement can be viewed as playing into traditional stereotypes about women and their beauty, the second part reveals a contradiction. Describing Carano as a vicious destroyer attacks dominant cultural assumptions about women. Traditionally women are not viewed in this way, and when they are, those cultural assumptions begin to shift. But because the commentators note her beauty, a complete shift does not occur. While her athletic power is mentioned, it is mentioned alongside her feminine features and as a consequence we see her as a *female* athlete.

When the women do eventually enter the cage to fight, the viewer is able to see the actions they take; and these actions challenge traditional female roles. From the beginning these women throw punches and kicks, tackle each other for takedowns and aggressively attempt to corner and attack their opponent. Carano's primary training background is in Muay Thai and Santos's is in Chute Boxe. Santos is known as the powerhouse. When she fights, she fights hard and the rhetoric employed by the commentators reflects that. Shamrock states, "Cyborg is incredibly strong and incredibly athletic" (*Part One*). When Santos throws Carano to the ground, holds a strong position on top and continues to punch Carano in the face, Johnson notes, "This is where Cyborg is strong" (*Part Two*). The actions of Santos challenge traditional stereotypes of women in sports, and in turn the rhetoric of the commentators reflects that. As a result, these statements also challenge those traditional stereotypes.

Carano, while known as an extremely talented fighter, is also known for her beauty. She takes fighting very seriously and when she enters the cage, she fights to win. Although she is known for her beauty, Carano does not play into it in the cage. However, the commentators who operate as her "voice" at times do. Shamrock notes, "Carano is a big time puncher" (*Part Two*). After Carano is able to escape a hold from Santos, she throws a powerful punch that lands in the middle of Santos's face. Johnson states, "Cyborg is tentative going in, she's felt Carano's power" (*Part Two*). Again, the actions taken by Carano in the cage challenge traditional female roles, and the commentators reflect that challenge to reveal her athleticism.

As the fight continues, Santos begins to take charge of the fight. She continues

to kick Carano in the thigh, and powerfully throws her to the ground. Carano remains on the ground for most of the fight, and Ranallo states, “This is where I worry about Gina (Carano) getting overpowered in the early rounds and getting beat up” (*Part Two*). Santos proves to be a much more powerful fighter than Carano, who does in fact get beat up. While both of these women’s actions have proven their intense athletic ability, the actions taken by Santos are more powerful. The actions taken by the women allow them to construct themselves, but it is equally important to look to the rhetoric produced by the commentators to see how those actions are framed. Santos is described as a more powerful and masculine fighter, while Carano, who is not as powerful as Santos is described as a more feminine fighter.

In addition to providing commentary on these women as individuals, the commentators also comment on them as a pair. The male voice continues to challenge dominant cultural values as the women continue to take actions that challenge those values. Ranallo comments, “Both have been in big time trouble, but showing their resiliency” (*Part Two*). This comment reveals that, although both of these women continue to get hit, punched and thrown around, they don’t give up. They are true athletes in this sport and work to overcome the challenges it brings. They are defying the stereotypes that assume women are unable to compete in such a masculine and male dominant sport. Additionally, Johnson states, “It has been aggressive from the opening bell” (*Part Two*). Traditional qualities of a woman don’t include aggressiveness and don’t include a fighting mentality, but the rhetoric that reveals the actions of these women, prescribe these qualities. It also suggests an assumption that

because aggressiveness is an un-feminine attribute, this fight wouldn't be very aggressive. Had two men been fighting we would assume it would be aggressive. However, when two women are fighting it becomes a necessity to note their unanticipated aggressiveness. So, while it does contradict cultural values and attack current reality, it also reveals that it is something we may not have been expecting from these women. The viewer can see their identities as aggressive fighters, but because they are female it comes as a surprise.

The commentators show their support for these women and acknowledge their skill and athleticism. Shamrock states, "Well this has been my dream, MMA being available for everybody and the women deserve it. They fought their way to the top and their headlining this big show" (*Part Two*). Traditionally women's athletic skill and ability are rarely mentioned, let alone praised. Shamrock's statement suggests that MMA is no longer reserved for only men. The women have proven themselves to be powerful competitors in this sport, and as such have what it takes to fight in the main event.

After analyzing the substantive features of my artifact, it becomes clear that the rhetoric is substantively distinctive and unique. The actions taken by the women in the cage reveals how they construct their identities in MMA, and in turn, how the commentator's male voice frames those actions to rhetorically construct their identities. They are seen, in act and deed, being rhetorically constructed as powerful, aggressive athletes and a contradiction to cultural assumptions about women in sports. However, the actions taken by Santos are more powerful and aggressive than those of

Carano. The rhetoric produced that frames those actions reflects that. While it does describe both as fierce competitors in MMA, they are treated differently. Santos is described more as a masculine athlete, while Carano is described as a more feminine athlete. When women are viewed as being capable competitors in MMA, a contradiction to cultural norms, perceptions of the female identity in MMA begin to shift. However, it's much more than just substance at work here. It is also imperative to look to the stylistic features employed. With that being said, I will now turn to an analysis of style in my artifact.

### **Style**

Next, I will apply Campbell's notion of style to analyze the stylistic features employed in the rhetoric of my artifact. In analyzing style, I will begin by returning to the promotional video. Campbell asserts that stylistic features are "Strategic adaptations to a difficult rhetorical situation" (78). This difficult rhetorical situation is due to women's lack of experience in a male-dominated society (and sport). Campbell highlights that these stylistic features include: consciousness raising, risking the self and symbolic reversals. Consciousness raising is used to create and bring about awareness on certain issues. Risking the self occurs when individuals expose themselves on issues that may challenge the male-dominant society. Finally, symbolic reversals are used to empower women through the reversal of the female role. Again, I will be reframing Campbell's theory given my novel approach. I will examine if the physical actions taken by the women play into traditional stereotypes of women in sports, or if they shift to challenge those stereotypes. I will also examine if those

actions are reflected in the rhetoric produced by the commentators in a manner that raises awareness of women and their identity in MMA. Additionally, I will determine if this poses a risk for the women and the commentators, and I will examine if the women's actions are a reversal of the female role, and if the rhetoric reveals that.

The first stylistic feature that can be identified in the promotional video addresses women's lack of experience in MMA. Describing Carano, Ranallo states, "Deep down she is a fighter first and foremost, and she wants to be the very best" (*Carano*). For Santos, he states, she is "Definitely someone who has to be taken seriously" (*Carano*). This reveals some adjustments made in the rhetoric. These statements suggest that while women do not appear to be fighters, and in turn are not taken seriously in this sport, these women do deserve to be fighting in the main event of the evening. Style here operates to mediate between the masculine world of MMA, where women cannot be powerful fighters, and the inclusion of female competitors who prove they can be. The actions taken by the women show their seriousness in this sport, and the voice of the male commentators operates to construct them as serious athletes. The promotional voiceover states, "Armed with both skill and beauty, Gina (*Carano*) has transcended the sport" (*Carano*). In this statement consciousness raising is present. Although Carano is a beautiful woman (and we see the commentators playing into that), she has the skill which has allowed her to excel in this sport. In addressing her talent, the rhetoric is able to bring awareness about women's athletic ability in MMA. On the other hand, by drawing attention to the female features of Carano traditional stereotypes about the sexualization of women in sports are seen.

While the identity of Carano can be viewed as an athlete, she is still a *female* athlete.

The promotional voiceover also states, “Cyborg has steamrolled everyone in her path” (*Carano*). While Santos’s appearance is not mentioned, her talent is. This statement also reveals consciousness raising to bring awareness to the concerns that women may not be talented fighters. It also reveals the more masculine features of Santos as a fighter. The commentators do not discuss her beauty or feminine features. Rather, they discuss her ability to overpower anyone in her path; a masculine feature. As a result, Santos’s identity can be viewed more as an athlete than a *female* athlete. So while the male voice does somewhat shift to reveal these women as skillful and talented fighters in light of their relative lack of experience in MMA, it also maintains some of the stereotypes about women in sports, specifically in continuing to draw attention to the feminine features of Carano.

I will now turn to the small amount of commentary provided by Carano and Santos in the promotional video. As previously noted this rare opportunity to see the female voice construct itself is important and deserves our attention. When Carano is discussing Santos she states, “She’s a brawler, just a bully type” (*Carano*). Her use of the term “bully” does not necessarily mean a bad thing, and can be viewed as a symbolic reversal. A bully commonly refers to someone in a negative way. However when Carano uses it to describe Santos, Santos is seen as someone who shows no mercy on her opponent and works hard to take them down. This works to construct Santos as a powerful fighter. It also reveals the fear Carano may have towards Santos. The fact Carano knows she is bully, means she is aware of the fact that Santos has

what it takes to beat her. This in turn, makes Carano seem weaker. Additionally, Santos claims, “I’m going to win by knockout, you’ll see” (*Carano*). This comment shows her confidence as a powerful fighter. In addition to her prediction being true, she also creates awareness about her ability and confidence as a fighter. By telling the viewer that she will win, she allows them to view her as a winner in this sport. These statements construct Santos as a more dominant fighter in MMA, while Carano is constructed as more fearful.

After analyzing the promotional video, I will now return to the pre-fight weigh-in to analyze style. As Santos approaches the stage to take the scale, Lennon, Jr. states, “Her record stands at seven wins and one loss, known as the baddest woman south of the equator” (*The Weigh-In*). The rhetorical style here operates to continue to bring awareness. By showing her success in the sport and her reputation that follows, the commentator’s rhetoric constructs her as a serious competitor in MMA. The use of the term “bad” can also be seen as a symbolic reversal. While the term “bad” typically holds negative meanings, it is used here as a positive. Stating she is “the baddest” does not mean she is a horrible, untalented fighter. Instead the meaning is transformed through a reversal of the female role to empower Santos. Women don’t want to be considered “bad,” but in this sense, Santos does. She has superior athletic ability and is a powerful force.

As Carano approaches the stage to take the scale, Lennon, Jr. states, “Undefeated at seven wins and no losses, known as the face of women’s MMA” (*The Weigh-In*). Again, by showing the success Carano has had as a fighter, as well as her

reputation alongside that success, Lennon, Jr. is able to raise awareness of the undeniable skill and talent of these women in this sport. Although revealing Carano is “the face” of MMA is a nod to her as a powerful, unbeatable competitor, it also continues to draw attention to her beauty and feminine features. As a consequence, Carano continues to be seen as a *female* athlete.

Finally, I will return to the actual fight itself to analyze the stylistic features employed in the rhetoric. As Santos approaches the cage she appears energetic; she is jumping and punching her fists together. When she is introduced, Ranallo comments on Santos’s influence, her former husband. At the time of this fight Santos was married to famous MMA fighter Evanelista “Cyborg” Santos; however, they are now divorced. It is interesting to note that Santos took the “Cyborg” nickname from her husband, and arguably made it more recognizable than he did. Ranallo notes that during this time he was her coach and trainer. He helped to prepare her for these fights (*Part One*). This comment reveals another adjustment to the rhetoric. By highlighting that Santos is trained by a successful male MMA fighter, it provides her with credibility in the sport. Because it is known that she was trained by a successful male fighter, the viewer can assume her skill reflects that. As a result, the viewer becomes more aware of Santos’s skill. Similar to Santos, Carano also appears energetic and as she approaches the cage, and also continues to punch her fists together and throw punches into the air. In Carano’s introduction the commentator’s rhetoric adjusts in a way to offer credibility to a female in a male-dominant sport. Ranallo notes, Carano is “A young lady who comes from a family of athletes” (*Part*

*One*). Ranallo continues to note that her father was a NFL quarterback and her brother was heavily into sports as well. By noting her athletic bloodline from her athletic male relatives, the credibility to Carano's natural ability and talent is acquired.

But why is she referred to as a "young lady"? And why are her looks and beauty continuously mentioned at times when Santos's are not? If you look at these two women as they stand in the cage before the fight begins, the answer starts to become clear. It's true, Gina Carano is a beautiful woman and her looks are striking. Santos, on the other hand, appears very muscular and unfeminine. Santos fits the image of what we think of, when we think of female fighters; masculine women. However, Carano does not fit this assumed image. Johnson states, "She is the female face of mixed martial arts, she's a cover girl, a TV star, and one of the most talked about female athletes in the world" (*Part One*).

While none of the accomplishments listed by Johnson prove that Carano is a better fighter, his comment suggests something interesting. This statement does play into traditional stereotypes dealing with the sexualization of women in sports. But why? A fight with talented fighters will sell, but a fight with a sexy talented fighter will really sell. This is supported as, Johnson continues, "But underneath her beautiful exterior, is a vicious and calculated destroyer" (*Part One*). She's beautiful and talented, and by selling both of those features it opens the door to increased viewership. When viewership is increased, so is awareness about women in MMA. While this does help to create awareness about women in MMA, it comes at a price. Carano's looks are also used to help market this event to the fighting public to make

money. Her beauty has nothing to do with her fighting ability, but by selling her “sexiness” more viewers are likely to tune in. This holds Carano back. By continuing to note her beauty, it becomes difficult for the viewer to see her as a fighter, because traditionally beautiful women would not be considered talented fighters. As a consequence, she is still viewed as a *female* athlete.

As the announcer Jimmy Lennon, Jr. proclaims it is time for the main event, the referee of this fight, Josh Rosenthal, checks to make sure that the judges and fighters are ready to start. As the fight begins, Santos moves towards Carano quickly, punches her repeatedly in the face and throws a right kick to her left side. Santos then attempts to throw Carano to the ground, but Carano lands on top of her and throws multiple punches into Santos’s face. Ranallo states, “These two ladies wasting no time going at it” (*Part Two*). And Johnson states, “Five-five minute rounds, the ladies are normally accustomed to going three” (*Part Two*). These statements reveal an adjustment in the rhetoric that helps to mediate between the inclusion of women in the masculine world of MMA. First, the term “ladies” is seen in both. But their aggression and strength are also seen in both. It suggests that while these two fighters may be women, they are forceful from the beginning and they have the power to fight through five minute rounds, the same amount of time allotted for male fights. This also helps to bring awareness to women’s powerful new role in MMA as forceful, strong fighters.

Although the commentators draw attention to Carano’s feminine features and play into the sexualization of women in sports, they also continue to acknowledge the

skill and athleticism of these two women. As a result, they challenge the dominant cultural values that assume women cannot compete in MMA. In doing so, they face a risk. By challenging dominant cultural values about assumptions that women are not strong or aggressive, these commentators open themselves to scrutiny, judgment or possibly acceptance (Campbell 78). The rhetoric produced that creates this challenge is unique because it is the male voice constructing the female. The women cannot speak for themselves in the cage, so they take actions and the all-male commentators speak for them. As the fight continues, both women are on the ground and Santos grabs the right leg and ankle of Carano to hold her in a heel hook. Carano is then able to shift her body and escape Santos's hold. Santos begins to take the back of Carano and punches her in the face while she holds her to the ground. Carano is eventually able to stand to her feet and throws punches into Santos's body and face as the crowd erupts.

When Johnson notes, "Could you ever have imagined two women entering the cage with this kind of fanfare?" (*Part Two*). This suggests the risk of challenging dominant cultural values for the women and the commentators is low. The crowd is roaring and excited for the Carano vs. Santos fight, and the commentators make note of that. With the support of the audience and the larger fighting public, the women and the commentators face little risk. They increase acceptance of women in MMA, and challenge dominant values to construct a new identity for women in MMA.

Both women continue to take turns throwing one another to the ground using kicks and takedowns, pinning the other to the fence and throwing jabs and hooks into

each other's faces. One of the final comments in the fight comes from Ranallo. He states, "One cannot question the championship heart of both of these tremendous athletes" (*Part Two*). Here there is an adjustment and shift in the rhetoric. No longer are these fighters "ladies," they are athletes. Towards the end of the fight Carano launches a kick into the right side of Santos, but Santos is able to grab her left leg and throw her back into the fence. Santos then jabs her left knee into the back of Carano's left side and she falls to the ground as Santos takes her back to hold her to the ground. From there, Santos continues to throw punch after punch into the middle of Carano's face. When Carano covers her face and is unable to continue fighting the referee, Josh Rosenthal, ends the fight. The announcer, Jimmy Lennon Jr., then declares Santos as the winner of this fight. Based on these continued aggressive actions taken by the women in the cage, they have proven themselves as powerful fighters who deserve to be recognized for their athleticism, not their gender. The commentator's rhetoric reflects not only their skill, but their heart, passion, and determination in this sport. By revealing more than skill, they create a new type of awareness about women's devotion to MMA.

### **Conclusions**

After analyzing the stylistic features of my artifact, it becomes clear that in addition to substance the rhetoric employed by the commentators is also stylistically distinctive and unique. The commentators are able to adjust to women's relative lack of experience in the male-dominant world of MMA, even though many of them have long-standing roles in their respective martial arts. Although we see issues of gender

in the rhetoric, as they are female competitors in a masculine sport, the commentators focus on talent and skill to construct these women as athletes. While one might be described as more feminine than the other, they are both athletes none the less. A focus on talent and skill helps to bring awareness in a way that can change perceptions about women in sports in a manner that allows the viewer to see the identities of Carano and Santos as fighters.

Now that I have analyzed both substance and style within the three parts of my artifact, I will finally determine how the identities of Carano and Santos have been rhetorically constructed. Campbell argues that, for a body of discourse to produce social change, it must hold unique and distinctive “rhetorical qualities that are a fusion of substance and style” (75). Given my unique approach to Campbell’s theory, I turned to more than discourse in determining social change. Due to women’s relative lack of voice in MMA, I examined the actions they took and how those actions were framed rhetorically by the commentators. I was then able to determine if the actions of the women, and in turn, the rhetoric produced by the commentators was substantively and stylistically unique and distinctive.

As women enter the overwhelming male sport of MMA, they face many challenges. One of those challenges arises from their identities. They are women, competing in a predominately male sport, and to succeed in this sport they need to possess non-traditional female qualities. My novel use of Campbell’s theory in analyzing how Carano and Santos’s identities are rhetorically constructed required me to look at both the physical actions taken by the women and how the male voice of the

commentators frame those actions to construct their identities. So do Carano and Santos play into traditional stereotypes about women in sports, or do their actions challenge those stereotypes? Additionally, do the commentators invalidate the women's advancement in the sport through how they frame their actions, or do they reflect the actions of the fighters?

An analysis of substance revealed that the actions taken by Carano and Santos were distinct. These two did not play into traditional stereotypes about women in sports. Instead, they violated the female role through their aggressive, competitive actions. In looking at the limited voice provided by the women, we saw they bought into the masculine metaphors in MMA to justify their role in the sport. In doing so, they were able to construct themselves as powerful fighters. While this limited a challenge to dominant values, other actions taken by the women highlighted it. This opened the door for a rhetoric from the all-male commentators that could also challenge dominant cultural values and change the way women in this sport are viewed.

It became clear that while the rhetoric of the commentators did challenge dominant cultural values, it did not challenge them completely. The aggressive and powerful nature of the women is discussed, but more for Santos than for Carano. Santos dominated Carano in this fight, and alongside her masculine attributes the commentator's rhetoric constructed her as a powerful athlete, in turn, challenging cultural values. However, while Carano is also powerful, she ultimately could not beat Santos. Her looks and feminine features were discussed alongside her skill. As a

consequence the commentator's rhetoric constructed her as a powerful *female* athlete. The identification of these women as athletes in MMA, feminine or not, remains a contradiction to traditional norms and changes the way current reality is perceived. Despite existing cultural norms that assume women cannot be competitive fighters, the actions of these women prove they can be.

Stylistically, the rhetoric produced by the commentators worked not only to challenge tradition, but bring awareness to women's new role in MMA. It does so in an important and unique way. Women have little to no voice within MMA; as a consequence the all-male commentators at these events speak for them. The limited amount of voice that was provided from the women, revealed a fearful Carano and a more dominant Santos. Carano constructed herself as a weaker and more feminine fighter, while Santos constructed herself as a more dominant fighter. Turning to the male voice of the commentators, it was able to adjust in a manner that allowed the viewer to see females in a non-traditional way. It framed the actions of Carano and Santos in a way that could mediate between the masculine and the feminine.

Although this is a male-dominated sport, commentators were able to raise awareness about women's skill. They also continued to comment on Carano's feminine attributes. Carano's beauty has nothing to do with her ability to be a skillful fighter. While Carano does not play into her beauty in the cage, the commentators do. As a consequence, it becomes difficult for viewers to see her as a fighter. So while they do show her as a fierce competitor in this sport, the commentator's rhetoric also invalidates some of Carano's ability by continuing to remind the viewer that she is a

woman. In the discussion of both women's skill, fighting styles and physical attributes it becomes clear how the commentator's male voice constructed the identities of these women within the context of MMA. Santos is a masculine and dominant athlete, while Carano is a powerful *female* athlete.

When Carano and Santos appeared on the main stage in MMA, they took on a complicated role. They faced the challenges of being a female in a very masculine and male dominant sport. So what is their identity within MMA? Are they females? Are they fighters? Or are they both? Their powerful and aggressive actions, alongside the substantive and stylistic rhetorical features that frame those actions reveal that while Carano and Santos are females, they are more importantly fighters and athletes. In the following chapter I will delve deeper into the conclusions of my analysis. I will also discuss the limits of my research as well as the possibilities for future research.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

Applying Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's theory to the rhetoric surrounding the Carano vs. Santos fight yielded insight into the construction of the female in MMA. I was able to determine how the identities of mixed martial arts (MMA) fighters Gina Carano and Cristiane Santos were rhetorically constructed within the context of MMA. I concluded that, through substantive and stylistic rhetorical features, the rhetoric employed by the all-male commentators was only able to challenge *some* dominant cultural values and assumptions about women in sports. As a result, Santos was constructed as a masculine and dominant athlete, while Carano was constructed as a powerful *female* athlete. This chapter will serve as a point of reflection, a place to consider the various strengths and weaknesses of this study. I will begin by returning to the analysis in the previous chapter. I will focus on the significance of determining the identity of the female in the male dominant world of sports, specifically MMA. Secondly, I will assess the merits of this study, its significance as well as its limitations. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting avenues for future research.

To begin, I will return to what the research and analysis illustrate. The reader should now understand that American culture has gone from a time when women's sports were largely marginalized, to a time where women have increasing access and opportunity to participate in sports. Unfortunately, discrimination against women in sports still exists. Females participating in sports continue to struggle to achieve parity with male athletes in sports. This is due, in part, to the continued existence of stereotypes that frame the female as "less than" their male counterparts. As a

consequence, women in sports can be and have been misrepresented. That being said, it is important to examine the ways in which the identity of the female is rhetorically constructed in male dominant sports.

MMA has proven to be the most visible introduction of females into sports that have traditionally been considered exclusively for men. This could be due to the one-on-one nature of MMA. It focuses our attention on women as distinct, individual, athletes. However, as MMA's popularity has grown, so too have concerns about women's involvement in it. Women entering the world of MMA face challenges that involve the construction and representation of their identities. Through Carano and Santos's participation in MMA, they violate conventional standards of womanliness and highlight issues with the social standards of femininity. Nancy Hogshead-Maker, senior director of advocacy at the Women's Sports Foundation states, "Participation in combat sports in particular helps break down stereotypes that hold women back" (Gregory 48). In breaking down stereotypes, Carano and Santos are able to challenge dominant cultural values. When they challenge these values, they open the door for a rhetoric to occur alongside it, that can reflect that challenge and eventually lead to a change in the way the identity of these women as females and as fighters are viewed. The rhetoric produced from the male commentators surrounding the Carano vs. Santos fight was only able to partially challenge dominant values. However, it did challenge them in a manner that allowed the viewer to see a more accurate construction of their identities. In doing so, stereotypes that lead to misrepresentation of women in sports have begun to fade; however, women in sports still have a ways to go.

With a clear understanding of the significance of this study, I will now assess the strengths and weaknesses of it. I will first look to my method, and second to my analysis. To begin, I want to look to the limitations of Campbell's method. Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn point to one weakness. Dow and Tonn question the range of applications that can extend from Campbell's insights. They explain that her theory does not expand beyond the context of women's liberation, and it should, as it is applicable to other efforts for social change (Dow and Tonn 286). While Campbell claims she would change this if she were to re-write her theory today, it still primarily lends itself to the rhetoric of women's liberation. It could prove to be a more useful theory and method if it had been applied and viewed through multiple efforts to challenge the system and bring about change. That being said, my modification to Campbell's method is meant to uphold the best of what she offers, while also addressing the complications that critics have pointed out.

Another limitation that can be found in Campbell's theory deals with voice. Campbell's theory highlights that the female voice is important for understanding experiences for awareness and change. As seen in this study, the female voice is not always present. It is constructed in ways that extend far beyond Campbell's initial articulation. As rhetorical theory has expanded, the ways in which we conceive of voice and self have also expanded. Written and spoken words are no longer the only ways in which we express our rhetorical position relative to others. Campbell does not address these issues with voice. In turn, it becomes unclear which voice to turn to, or how to analyze rhetoric, when the voice of the female is absent. Expanding the range

of what is considered both figuratively and literally “voice” could result in a productive addition to the tools for rhetorical analysis and criticism. This thesis is part of that process.

These limitations in no way militate against the continued benefits of referencing and using Campbell’s theory. One benefit in using this method is that it allows the critic to examine multiple features of rhetoric. In Campbell’s theory, she claims that it is necessary to analyze aspects of substantive and stylistic features within rhetoric. Examining substance allows the critic to see how the rhetoric employed challenges the structure, while examining style allows the critic to see how it creates awareness of that challenge. Using a fusion of substance and style allows the critic to gain deeper insight into the rhetoric they are analyzing through the perspective of multiple features. Campbell’s theory remains beneficial to the critic because they are not only able to determine *how* the rhetoric is able to potentially challenge dominant cultural values and raise awareness, but *if* that rhetoric is successful in moving from potentiality to actuality. This, in turn, allows the critic to understand the complexities within social change.

As with Campbell’s method, my analysis also has weaknesses and strengths. The clearest weakness in my analysis is the limited female voice. Traditionally, when we think of the rhetorical construction of the female, we analyze how the female voice constructs the feminine. However, as noted previously, the female voice in MMA is different from what is commonly conceived to be “voice”. The fighters, outside of interviews and press conferences provide little to no voice. Instead, they enter the

cage to fight and their actions speak for them. As such, I was only able to include a small amount of commentary from Carano and Santos. The majority of the rhetoric analyzed was from men who commented on the actions (in and out of the cage) of the athletes. In this study, it became clear that the literal voice is different from the rhetorical voice. This required me to reframe Campbell's method to examine the actions taken by the women as they enter the cage, and how the rhetoric employed by the all-male commentators constructed their identities by framing those actions. This, in turn, led to a strength in my analysis as I was able to look at new artifacts using a more nuanced approach to traditional categories.

Reframing Campbell's method as a consequence of the limited and complex female voice in MMA can be viewed as a strength in my analysis and study. I took a novel approach to Campbell's method as I challenged what is commonly thought of as voice. In MMA, Carano and Santos focus on action, not oratory. So, it became important to look to their action, and the how that action was rhetorically constructed. My alteration to Campbell's method can be supported through Richard Schechner's performance theory. Schechner contends that performances, or actions, also operate to communicate meaning (1). The critic must examine the behavior of the action and how it interacts with those who view it, in order to analyze the meaning being created through the action (Schechner 2). By examining and analyzing the actions taken by the women in the cage, and, in turn, how those actions were rhetorically framed by the male voice of the commentators in constructing their identities, I was able to offer a new and unique perspective. My analysis was able to demonstrate the continued

utility of taking traditional approaches and testing them against current issues.

Additionally, my analysis of women in MMA can be viewed as an extension to Campbell's theory. While Campbell could not have conceived the world of MMA, especially women in MMA, she did conceive of a similar world where women could enter a larger public in a non-traditional manner. My analysis extends Campbell's original notions concerning women and social change into a whole new world. With women's increased participation in the masculine world of sports, it becomes important to analyze the inclusion of the female to the masculine. My analysis is able to highlight how these women enter the masculine world of MMA, and in turn how their identities are rhetorically constructed and represented when they do so.

After assessing the significance as well as the strengths and weaknesses of this study, I will finally point to avenues for future research. The timing of my study was quite fortuitous. There has been more attention paid to, and opportunities for, women in MMA since the Carano vs. Santos fight. During the time of the Carano vs. Santos fight, women were not allowed to participate in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). In 2007 UFC President Dana White stated, "I don't want to see two women beatin' on each other" (Gregory 48). Women's continued involvement and success in MMA, has made White reconsider. On November 16, 2012 Dana White signed Ronda Rousey to be the first woman in UFC (Gross). Soon after, the first female fight in UFC took place. On February 23 of this year (2013), Rousey and her opponent Liz Carmouche fought in the main event for UFC-157. Rousey was able to defeat Carmouche with her famous move; the arm-bar. While it is clear that women are

continuing to expand their role within MMA, discrimination against them still exists. *TIME Magazine* reports that Rousey received 90,000 dollars for appearing in and winning the fight; only about half of what male UFC champions receive (Gregory 50). I believe it would be interesting to analyze the continued discrimination against women in MMA, despite their success. What is holding them back? Why are they perceived to be unequal? Future research could look into these types of questions and help provide an answer to this problem.

Women in sports are often stereotyped and perceived to be less feminine because of their participation in the masculine world of sports. This, in turn, raises questions concerning the sexual orientation of female athletes. As such, another avenue for potential research could turn to an examination of sexual orientation in MMA and in the UFC in particular. As women struggle with their identities in MMA, it would be interesting to see if their sexual orientation plays into the construction of their identities and how they are represented. Liz Carmouche, for instance, became the first openly gay fighter in the UFC (Gregory 48). If others choose to come out and reveal their sexual orientation, do they face a risk? Are they accepted? And how does that play into their identity in MMA? This could provide an even deeper insight into the construction of identity. Furthermore, is a discussion of their sexual orientation avoided? Or do commentators play into it? I think these questions could form the basis for a very thought provoking study.

Women will continue to pave a path for themselves within MMA and UFC. Carano and Santos broke down barriers. They are females competing in a masculine

sport, and concerns about their identity arose. Because there was such a limited role for women in MMA, it has been difficult to analyze their inclusion and their representation. This first major introduction of females into MMA, has yielded insight into the construction of the female identity in MMA. We see that while the rhetoric produced by the male voice did take a shift to acknowledge these women as fighters, it only took a partial shift. There is still more work that needs to be done concerning stereotyping and the sexualization of women within MMA. This study has helped to reveal why *female* is still emphasized in the phrase *female athlete*.

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