The Fight Beyond the Octagon: Women in the Ultimate Fighting Championship

Natasha Navejar
Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

Abstract: This case study discusses women's participation in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the premier mixed martial arts (MMA) promotion company showcasing the most elite fighters in the sport. For the majority of its history, the UFC barred women from participating in its tournaments—undeniably the most visible platforms for the sport—and glorified the brutality of the male-dominated culture. Ronda Rousey, former Olympic judo medalist, was the first woman to join the ranks of the organization. Her fiery stage presence and exceptional skill ignited interest in women's MMA and challenged the established construct of masculinity within the sport. While Rousey became one of the most dominant athletes in all of MMA and impacted the culture of the sport irrevocably, she and other female fighters still face unique, gendered challenges in a male-dominated domain compounded with the adversity they already face as participants in a controversial and misunderstood sport. Their greatest opponents are often not the other women facing them in the Octagon, but those beyond it who undermine their fighting caliber, sexualize their bodies, and question their inclusion in a traditionally masculine sport.

Introduction

On February 23, 2013, Ronda Rousey and Liz Carmouche made history by becoming the first women to fight in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the premier mixed martial arts (MMA) promotion in the world. Their fight was the main event of the evening—with all other male fights appearing beneath them on the fight card—and garnered over 450,000 pay-per-view buys according to *MMAPayout* (2008). Up until that point, the UFC had deprived women the right to fight in its tournaments, which were undeniably the most visible platforms on which the combat sport was displayed and the ones on which men had been competing for two decades.

While women's debut in the UFC was a momentous occasion for many female fighters who had been thirsting for a chance to compete against each other in such a high-profile event, it did not mean equity. They grappled with misogynistic language and behavior from the public and even a subset of their male counterparts who belittled women with their words and actions—the worst of these including domestic violence. Even the UFC capitalized on the women's gender by objectifying their bodies to garner interest and viewership. Ultimately, these female fighters transgressed the gender ideal of the passive, nurturing female, and supplanted it with another option: the powerful, combative woman. Not everyone was open to such diverse gender expression. Their critics—members of the public audience along with influential legislators—

sought their exclusion from MMA and even the eradication of the sport as a whole on grounds of excessive, unwarranted violence.

History of Mixed Martial Arts and the Ultimate Fighting Championship[1]

MMA emerged in the Americas when Japanese immigrants brought the martial art of jujitsu to Brazil in the early 1900s. One of these immigrants, Mitsuyo Maeda, shared the art of jujitsu and the related throwing techniques of judo with a local Brazilian family—the Gracies. The Gracies, most notably the patriarch Helio Gracie, began to incorporate their own styles of fighting that focused on groundwork and submission wrestling, eventually founding Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) in the 1920s. Each of Helio's sons—Rorion, Relson, Rickson, Rolker, Royler, Robin, and Royce—learned the art, taught others, and competed in spectacular duels that demonstrated their combat prowess. A local paper dubbed their sport "vale tudo" (Portuguese for "anything goes") in reference to their no-holds-barred style of fighting.

In 1978, Rorion Gracie, son of Grand Master Helio Gracie, brought his family's sport to North America. For over ten years, he taught BJJ out of his garage and challenged critics of the sport to fight him, continually proving the dominance of his family's fighting style. Although his skills were undeniable, he struggled to market the sport to the American public who were more mesmerized by the flashy kicks and punches seen in Bruce Lee's kung fu movies. Seeking to introduce BJJ to the world, he found advertising executive, Art Davie, who had the revolutionary idea of creating a tournament that would pit fighters of different martial arts backgrounds against one another. The Gracies, confident in their developed martial art and intent on marketing their brand, pursued the venture, later known as the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). From the beginning, Davie and the Gracies envisioned the UFC as a violent spectacle. Proposed ideas for the fighters' arena included electric fences and alligator-infested moats. In the end, they chose the iconic chain-linked, octagonal cage—often referred to simply as The Octagon—which was practical for both containing the action and allowing easy viewing for spectators. UFC 1 on November 12, 1993, boasted eight fighters from kickboxing, karate, Kung-Fu, Kenpo, sumo wrestling, and—of course—Gracie BJJ backgrounds. Davie and Gracie excluded women from the competition—a fact that remained a part of UFC history for the next two decades. It never occurred to the promoters that the public would pay to see women fight each other—in fact, it verged on taboo—as it went against the unspoken gender binary that women were gentle and men were aggressive.

Davie, keen on capitalizing on the inherent violence of the sport, suggested only enforcing three rules in the tournament: no biting, eye gouging, or groin shots. Everything else was fair game. Still, the promotional slogan "There are no rules" drew in spectators to the live pay-per-view event that boasted a $50,000 grand prize. Eighty-six thousand viewers tuned in to watch Royce Gracie emerge from UFC 1 unscathed and victorious, and were left thirsting for more. The initial vision of a style vs. style competition transformed into a consumer-driven spectacle where fighters fought to submission, knockout, or death. The temporarily effective, yet reckless marketing strategy eventually led to widespread backlash that would hinder the spread of MMA for years to come.

One of the most vocal and powerful opponents of no-holds-barred MMA was Senator John McCain. His wife holds a sizeable stake in the distribution of Budweiser, one of boxing's largest sponsors. Once MMA began to encroach on boxing's hold on pay-per-view television, it presented

[1] Information in this section is, unless otherwise stated, informed by: Walters, Jared V. 2015. ""There Are No Rules! Except These 108." The Multidirectional Flow of Influence Between Sportication, Subculture, and Violence on the History of Mixed Martial Arts." Master's Thesis. The University of Western Ontario.

a serious threat to the boxing industry. McCain responded by labeling the bare-knuckled, anything-goes sport as "human cockfighting", and called for it to be banned altogether. Although he staunchly opposed MMA on the grounds of its violent nature, he cheered on boxers in the ring and even witnessed a fatal knockout (Holthuysen 2011). Whereas over 2000 deaths from boxing are recorded, as of 2014, only four deaths are known to have occurred in sanctioned MMA contests (Svinth 2007). MMA fighters could honorably surrender (known as tapping out or submitting) any time they felt their health was at risk, and often did so from arm locks, knee locks, and choke holds that posed no risk of permanent damage so long as they submitted. Boxers typically continued until time ran out, they suffered too much damage to continue, or were knocked unconscious.

Nevertheless, McCain continued to write letters and call for support from the governors of all fifty states. He succeeded in getting MMA banned in 36 states by 1995, and major cable providers like Cablevision succumbed under the pressure to remove mixed martial arts from their programming. Until the early 2000s, the political pressure forced the sport underground.

To revive the controversial sport, MMA organizers and supporters had to reverse the damage they had done by advertising it as a violent, fight-to-the-death spectacle. In 2000, the UFC adopted the *Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts*, a new set of rules and regulations created by the New Jersey Athletic Control Board that enforced over thirty safety penalties, weight classes, and protective gear.

New leadership took hold of the UFC in 2001 in the form of two brothers, Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta, and their business partner Dana White, who would become the controversial figurehead of the organization due to his larger-than-life personality and provocative style. Lorenzo Fertitta had previously been the president of Station Casinos—a gaming company based in Las Vegas, Nevada—and a member of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, which contributed to the legitimacy of MMA as a sport. Together, they bought the UFC for $2 million and formed the parent company to the UFC, Zuffa. With the new ruleset, the UFC succeeded in rebranding itself as a regulated athletic competition rather than a back-alley brawl. White implemented an aggressive marketing and public relations agenda focused on educating the public, especially the athletic commissions that were instrumental in regulating the sport on a state level:

> Lorenzo has a lot of credibility. He's a stand-up guy and a great businessman, with a lot of respect from a lot of people. Rather than butt heads with the commissions, we went in and sat down with them and said, 'Hey, listen,' and they listened (Krauss and Aita 2002).

Zuffa took their fighters to cable call centers to educate the cable providers and demonstrate that their fighters' athleticism and professionalism could match that of a professional football or baseball player. The overhaul of the ruleset even won over McCain, who admitted to *NPR* in 2007 that the sport had made significant progress since its inception. MMA continued to surge in acceptance and popularity with the airing of *The Ultimate Fighter*, a reality television series featuring up-and-coming mixed martial artists vying for a contract with the UFC. The UFC went main-stream as the premier MMA entity, meeting standards similar to the National Football League and Major League Baseball (Krauss and Aita 2002). By 2009, the UFC was dominating pay-per-view television, not only holding the top spot for pay-per-view buys that year but also five other spots in the list of top ten pay-per-view events. While men were still the primary consumers, the UFC had successfully expanded the demographic of its fan base from solely 18-49-year-old males to men and women of all ages (Holthuysen 2011).

Women's History in Combat Sports

With the meteoric rise of the sport in the late 2000s into the mid-2010s, women sought the opportunity to fight on a stage with the visibility that only the UFC could offer. Up until then, women had only entered the MMA sphere in the eyes of men as scantily-clad Octagon Girls who held the numbers announcing each successive round or girlfriends or wives of fighters—rarely as fighters themselves.

That is not to discount the women who had been participating in MMA and similar combat sports at varying levels—from informal brawls to elite events, sanctioned and unsanctioned—for thousands of years. Yet, the athletic achievements of their male counterparts often overshadowed their own accomplishments—if they were allowed to compete at all. Women participated in the 1900 Paris Olympics, but it was not until the twenty-first century that they were permitted to compete in Olympic boxing and wrestling events. One court case in 1955, *State of Oregon vs. Hunter*, involved a female wrestler named Jerry Hunter who was charged with the crime of "participating in wrestling competition and exhibition" as a "person of the feminine sex." It resulted in the Supreme Court actually supporting the right of men to halt the "ever-increasing feminine encroachment upon what for ages had been considered strictly as manly arts and privileges" (Fields 2005, 104).

While the opportunities for women increased in 1972 with the passing of Title IX, the largest piece of gender equality legislation to date, it still restricted women and girls from participating in contact sports like wrestling and boxing. Women often had to take their cases to court before they had a chance to obtain professional boxing and wrestling licenses. It was not until 1993 that the USA Boxing Commission actually lifted their longstanding ban on female boxers. Prior to the decision, certain states could license women, but there remained an absence of federal regulation and sanctioned competition. The 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games featured female judo practitioners (judokas) for the first time, and the 2012 London Olympic Games met another milestone by including female boxers (Jennings 2014). An Olympic medalist judoka named Ronda Rousey was the one to convince the UFC with her talent and style that women's MMA would be a spectacle worth watching.

Ronda Rousey

Ronda Rousey was born in 1987 with her umbilical cord wrapped around her neck, choking her nearly to the point of death. The medical emergency resulted in slight brain damage, leaving her unable to speak until the age of six. At the age of eight, Rousey's father committed suicide after a sledding accident left him with paraplegia and a terminal diagnosis due to complications from a blood disorder. Although Rousey's childhood was marred by tragedy, her mother—Ann Maria De Mars, the first American to win a gold medal at the World Judo Championships—inspired Rousey to take up the martial art. Her mother was a militaristic coach, forcing Rousey to fight through illnesses and even train on a broken toe despite her protests. Rousey's strict training regimen paid off, and by the time she was 17, she was competing in the Athens Olympics. During that period, she struggled with bulimia stemming from the weight cuts she had to endure to fight in her 63-kilogram weight class. After moving up to the 70-kilogram weight class, her health dramatically improved as did her performance, leading her to win Silver at the 2007 World Judo Championships, Gold at the 2007 Pan American Games, and Bronze in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

After retiring from judo at 21, Rousey struggled to find new purpose and support herself. She juggled three jobs, squandered money on alcohol and other drugs, entered doomed romantic

relationships, and saw her $10,000 cash prize from the Beijing Olympic Games disappear quickly. After glimpsing an MMA highlight reel on the television during her shift as a bartender, she thought, "I could totally do that" (Callahan 2015). In 2010, she made her amateur debut in women's MMA, ending the match in just 23 seconds with an armbar submission, a joint manipulation that involves hyperextending the opponent's elbow joint until the victim escapes, taps out, or snaps his or her ligaments, tendons, or bone. Her next two fights also lasted less than a minute and ended with her opponents submitting to the armbar.

Rousey began fighting professionally under Strikeforce, a kickboxing organization turned MMA promotion that had its own women's league, unlike the UFC. She and other female fighters pressured the organization to allow women to fight full 5-minute rounds like the men did, rather than shortened rounds for women. She dominated her competition, but only fought twice before Zuffa bought out the organization. Suddenly, the women on Strikeforce's roster feared for their professional futures under a UFC president who, when asked, "When are we going to see women in the UFC?" answered, "Never" (TMZ 2011).

A year later White changed his mind, announcing Ronda Rousey as the first UFC Women's 135 lb. Bantamweight Champion. She quickly became one of the most recognizable figures of MMA, even being named the most dominant active athlete by both *Business Insider* and *Sports Illustrated* in 2015. She was a powerhouse, continuing to defeat her opponents within a minute with her signature armbar submission. Her brazen, trash-talking personality and stunning looks (see Appendix A) skyrocketed her into the limelight. "I'm gonna talk a bunch of shit. And I'm gonna break a couple of girls' arms, and I'm not gonna feel the least bit sorry about it," she boldly proclaimed in one interview with *Rolling Stone* (Hedegaard 2015). Despite ruffling the feathers of multiple female fighters, she admitted that her trash-talking is not the least bit personal. In fact, in an interview with *MMAjunkie*, she admitted that her publicity-garnering antics were for the purpose of asserting women's place in MMA culture:

> The work's not done yet, the fight hasn't happened yet, and I want women to be able to headline fights on a regular basis, not like every three or four years. So I really want to go out and win this fight in extremely impressive fashion, and so people are looking forward to the next women's fight (MMAjunkie 2012).

Rousey's mission ended in success, catalyzing the realization of an all-female MMA promotion company called the Invicta Fighting Championships (IFC) and prompting the UFC to expand women's MMA with a 115 lb. Strawweight division. She was the self-proclaimed best fighter in the world and quickly became the highest-paid one in the UFC. Skilled at turning each bout into a reality television-esque grudge match with her trash talking and signature stare down before each fight, Rousey rose to stardom first and foremost as a fighter, but also as a successful autobiographer, model, and feature film actress.

Still, Rousey herself was an enigma. Some lauded her as a feminist icon, while others dubbed her the "anti-feminist." Although her muscular physique and unconventional career path elicited criticism from those who found her too masculine, Rousey described herself as "femininely badass as fuck" in episode 2 of the *UFC 190 Embedded: Vlog Series* (2015). But, despite posing in swim suits and even topless with her arms covering her breasts flirtingly for *Maxim*, Rousey would openly criticize scantily-clad Octagon girls like Arianny Celeste without provocation, mocking their sexualized career paths and derogatorily referring to them as "do-

nothing bitches" (Rousey 2015). Celeste condemned Rousey's behavior, and argued that Rousey was not a good role model for women.

Celebrities like Beyoncé and Ellen DeGeneres applauded Rousey's raw, unapologetic attitude, but others found her narcissistic and hypocritical for letting her own body become sexualized in *Sport's Illustrated*'s swimsuit issue and other advertisements. Rousey explained her reasons for her behavior in an interview with the *New York Post*:

> Pretty looks are going to get people to glance in your direction, but it's not going to get them to sit down and watch. That's why it was important to push the rivalries at first. If any of these girls knew how much I actually worry about them and their careers and that we're all part of this symbiotic ecosystem. I need that for the future of the sport. I need them to wake up every day wanting to kill me (Callahan 2015).

Ultimately, she used everything—her looks, her explosive fighting prowess, and her sharp tongue—as tools for self-promotion, completely subverting the traditional feminine notions of modesty, gentleness, and propriety. Despite her controversial persona, Rousey became the catalyst for women's MMA.

Domestic Violence

While Rousey undeniably opened doors for women in the realm of MMA, behind closed doors were still high rates of domestic violence and sexism, primarily among the male fighters. After winning the 2015 Best Fighter ESPY Award in a scene televised live on the red carpet, Rousey looked into the camera defiantly and wondered aloud how "Floyd feels [about] being beat by a woman for once." The jab referenced professional boxer Floyd Mayweather's dozen-year-long history of misogyny that included violent assaults on five different women resulting in confrontations with police and arrests. Although Rousey is highly critical of Mayweather's misconduct, she writes in her memoir, *My Fight/Your Fight,* of a violent encounter with an ex-boyfriend she calls "Snappers McCreepy" who took nude photos of her without consent:

> He wouldn't move. I punched him in the face with a straight right, then a left hook. He staggered back and fell against the door . . . I slapped him with my right hand. He still wouldn't move. Then I grabbed him by the neck of his hoodie, kneed him in the face, and tossed him aside on the kitchen floor (Rousey 2015, 228).

The encounter ends with her pulling him by the neck of his hoodie out of her car, leaving him writhing on the sidewalk as she speeds away. In response to critics, she argues that her actions were a means of self-defense since he was barring her home's doorway and trying to prevent her from escaping in her vehicle. Although Rousey may have had just cause for her acts of violence, a disturbingly high number of other MMA fighters, predominantly male, did not.

In 2015, HBO's *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel* released a report that found domestic violence rates involving MMA fighters to be over twice the national rate, even more than the National Football League. The show included investigative reporting and interviews from notable MMA figures as well as Christy Mack, the past girlfriend of the ex-UFC fighter War Machine (formerly known as Jon Koppenhaver) who horrifically beat her and attempted rape in August of 2014. She posted the brutal evidence of the assault—18 broken bones, a broken nose, missing and broken teeth, a fractured rib, and a bruise that covered her thigh—to Twitter, where it was

retweeted over 40,000 times. War Machine had previously attacked Mack and posted disturbing tweets, such as "Real men rape," revealing his twisted perception of masculinity. As Mack retold the history of her abusive relationship with War Machine in the pretrial hearing, he smiled and laughed in his chair. Although War Machine was convicted of his crimes in March of 2017 and sentenced to life in prison in June of that year, if he had walked free he might still have had a job. UFC President Dana White welcomed back domestic violence assailants like Thiago Silva into the UFC even after vowing that they would never fight in the promotion again.

While the UFC would welcome back male perpetrators of domestic violence with open arms, female fighters felt the need to constantly prove themselves worthy to fight in the promotion. Rousey had been an exceptional fighter and public figure, a token in an otherwise male-dominated space. The female fighters who followed her into the UFC had the pressure of proving that they too could fill stadiums and ensure the survival of women's MMA. As Miesha Tate, fellow UFC fighter, explained to *USA Today*:

> I would like [women's MMA] to [get] more attention. Obviously I think we deserve more, because we work hard — or harder than the men do, because we have to go through an approval process, and there's constantly people questioning can we, should we, could we, would we. There's always that kind of secondary guessing of whether females can even do it — we have to go through this whole proving process (2010).

The future of women's MMA rested upon their shoulders, as they were now the most visible female fighters in the history of their sport. While they hoped to defeat their opponents in the Octagon, they also grappled with the added responsibility of advancing women's participation and achievement in a sport that once barred them from competing.

Women Choose Their Corner

Despite the growing popularity of MMA, not all women saw it in a positive light. Many feminists and women's rights groups balked at the disturbing statistics emerging from the world of MMA. This controversy, combined with the stigma of MMA left over from the no-holds-barred era, resulted in public condemnation and opposition to the sport's legalization, most fiercely in New York, the last state to uphold the ban on professional MMA.

In one letter from the New York State chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW-NYS) to New York Governor Cuomo in 2013 (see Appendix B), President Zenaida Mendez denounced the purported economic benefits of legalization and alleged a greater, ethical cost to the citizens of New York State. Mendez regarded the "so called 'sport'" with disdain, referring to it with the more barbaric moniker, "cage fighting." She claimed that children who witnessed the sport became desensitized to violence, of which women were inherently the recipients.

Ten women's advocacy groups wrote a similar letter to then-Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver just two months before the one penned by Mendez (see Appendix C). In this appeal from such organizations as The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence and End Violence Against Women International, the emphasis was on the misogynistic language and jokes espoused by UFC fighters and UFC president Dana White. They cited a particularly heinous example with UFC fighter Quinton "Rampage" Jackson, who created a video of himself pretending to rape a woman in a parking garage with chloroform and zip ties. The sentiments of these women's advocacy groups resurfaced on the floor of the Senate and the Assembly, with opponents to the

bill like Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee leading the charge. She echoed both letters, arguing that women are harmed by the glorification of distorted masculinity that cage fighting embodies.

Executive Vice President of the UFC, Ike Epstein, responded with a letter of his own penned to Silver (see Appendix D), promising that his company would prove itself as a responsible corporate citizen dedicated to rooting out any speech that could be considered misogynistic, homophobic, racist, or bigoted. He urged Silver not to make a decision based on the inappropriate actions of his company's fighters, and cited examples of notable figures like Michael Vick redeeming themselves after public mistakes—in Vick's case, becoming an advocate for the humane treatment of animals after being convicted on dog fighting charges. Furthermore, the UFC directed attention to the newly enacted Code of Conduct (similar to the NFL's), which all signed athletes were required to be in compliance with. It included a clause regarding the prohibition of discriminatory behavior (see Appendix E):

> Derogatory or offensive conduct, including without limitation insulting language, symbols, or actions about a person's ethnic background, heritage, color, race, national origin, age, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation.

Although a host of women's rights groups opposed the UFC and the sport it promoted, they neglected to address the issue of women's participation in MMA, perpetuating the idea that the Octagon was a male-only space. While until recently, this was true, women were now challenging the notion that "men ruled society, men protected women, and men played contact sports" (Fields 2005, 161). Women's advocacy groups like NOW-NYS promoted women's self-defense as an empowering tool for women, but the idea of women fighting for competition alongside men did not receive the same support. Women's self-defense training is often centered on preventing (sexual) assaults from male perpetrators, while competition training involves harnessing "aggression, toughness, and combat skills. . . associated with men and masculinity"—making it a particularly gender-transgressing phenomenon (Channon and Matthews 2015, 12).

Although they had been overlooked by a host of women's organizations, female mixed martial artists organized themselves to defend their sport, even holding a press conference aimed at the New York State Assembly. BJJ-athlete Ottavia Bourdain remarked that female fighters were "wonderful role models for girls, healthy in mind and body, strong and able to defend themselves" (Virtanen 2013). She also discredited the alleged brutality of the sport by declaring that she does not see blood when she watches the sport, not because she is desensitized to it, but because she appreciates the technical skill and training required to compete. To her, the sport promotes equality between men and women, not senseless violence. Rousey echoed her words, proclaiming live on *Good Morning America*, "Fighting is not a man's thing, it is a human thing. To say that it is anti-woman is an anti-feminist statement" (Zidan 2015). She boasted herself as the largest draw to the sport, and asked aloud how that could be possible if the sport itself were anti-woman.

Rousey went on to condemn New York as the "most dangerous place to do MMA", reporting that over 1,600 unregulated amateur bouts were taking place without proper medical testing, drug testing, or pregnancy testing for female fighters (Zidan 2015). The UFC emphasized these benefits to the state, which ranged from an economic boost of $135 million each year to provisions regarding the health, safety, and financial well-being of the fighters. It would even commission a study to explore the potential for lifetime insurance to cover costs as a result of brain injury from participation in MMA. The increased risks linked to unregulated amateur MMA,

compounded with the challenges female fighters faced as tokens in the male-dominated sport, meant that it was they who had the most to lose if the ban was upheld for another year.

Epilogue

On April 14, 2016, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed bill no. S5949A, ending the eight-year legal and political battle to get MMA legalized in New York. Professional MMA is now legal in all fifty states. Despite the UFC's history of sexism and misogyny, it has continued to showcase women's talents alongside men's in a way not many other sports have. Whereas a sport like basketball has the National Basketball Association separate from the Women's National Basketball Association, UFC events present both male and female bouts in one arena on one night—with equal opportunity for the headlining fight to be a women's match.

In UFC 193 on November 14, 2015, Ronda Rousey headlined to defend the UFC Women's Bantamweight Championship against Holly Holm and—for the first time in her professional MMA career—lost. While Rousey's defeat was personally devastating, the match was one of the biggest upsets in MMA history and garnered over one million pay-per-view buys according to *MMAPayout* (2008). The upset reinvigorated interest and excitement in women's MMA, and brought deserved recognition to another female fighter besides Rousey. Holm paid homage to Rousey after her shocking win:

> I have a lot of respect for her. I wouldn't be here and had this opportunity if it wasn't for what she has done. There are a lot of female fighters before her who paved the way, and all of that has built up to this. But she was definitely the biggest to really make a splash (Shelburne 2015).

Just over a year later, Rousey made her much-anticipated return to the Octagon on December 30, 2016, to challenge Amanda "The Lioness" Nunes, the Bantamweight Champion (see Appendix F). All of the promotional material for the fight featured Rousey with the slogans, "She's Back" and "Fear the Return", in bold print while the Bantamweight Champion Nunes received little mention. Despite the lack of promotion from the UFC, Nunes dominated the match, quickly landing a volley of punches that ended the fight by technical knockout in the first 48 seconds. It was another crushing blow to Rousey, but also the beginning of what may be a new era for women's MMA.

As the first openly gay Latina UFC champion, Nunes is a much different poster girl for women's MMA than Rousey, a white feminine bombshell who tapped into her looks as a business tool. Even after her win, Nunes has a mere 3% of Ronda Rousey's 9.5 million following on Instagram, and does not participate in the kind of trash-talking that characterizes Rousey's fiery public persona:

> I'm really professional, I respect my work. And I really talk about myself, about what I can do to get the win, what mistakes my opponent has, things like that… I don't need to trash talk to be the champion (Pachelli 2016).

After her historic victory, Nunes declared, "This moment is my moment," boldly asserting her reign over the Bantamweight division on her own terms—without the theatrics and sexualization of her predecessor. Although the UFC may have wished for a more marketable face

for women's MMA, Nunes is in a position to make the UFC a more inclusive domain for all types of women, regardless of sexual orientation or race, and supplant spectacle with sport.

Although Rousey's face may be fading from the UFC's limelight, she remains a powerful symbol of societal change in the world of sport, in much the same way Muhammad Ali was for persons of color even after his loss to Joe Frazier in 1971:

> For many viewers, Ali was still the mouth that poured, the renegade traitor and rabble-rouser whose uppity black ass needed dusting. For many others, of course, he symbolized all successful men of color who did not conform in a white man's world-and the hope that one, at least one, would overcome (Nack 2003, 167).

The women of the UFC, led now by Nunes, are overcoming the barriers to their success in the Octagon and beyond. They know what is being said about them: they are too transgressive, too sexualized, too manly. No single armbar submission—even if it is done within a minute—will topple the patriarchy or convince their critics that they deserve a place in the Octagon. And, as seen with Ronda Rousey's second consecutive defeat, they are far from invincible. Despite these realities, they continue to fight for the right of every woman and girl to participate and compete in sport at all levels—especially those that were once off-limits to them. Their accomplishments speak not only to their skill in martial arts, but their commitment to a more inclusive world of sport.

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Appendix A: Ronda Rousey

Source: Bottari, Jeff /Zuffa LLC via Getty Images. 2013. "UFC Women's Bantamweight Champion Ronda Rousey poses for a portrait during a UFC photo session on December 26, 2013 in Las Vegas, Nevada."

Appendix B: Letter to Governor Cuomo from the National Organization for Women-New York State

National Organization for Women-New York State
1500 Central Avenue, Albany, New York 12205
Email: Info@nownys.org
www.nownys.org

Dear Governor Cuomo,

The National Organization for Women-New York State has recently learned that you support what is commonly known as the "Cage Fighting" bill (#A6506/S02755). It is marketed as a form of martial arts. This knowledge comes to us with great distress.

As we read this piece of legislation, we wonder how, as our Governor of New York State, you can, on one hand, create and support the Women's Equality Agenda and on the other hand, you support such a vicious and violent sport in our great State of New York.

The Cage Fighting bill does not promote "martial arts" in New York State. In fact, many martial arts professionals are insulted by the fact that this type of sport is lumped together with sports that are professional and regulated.

The argument that Cage Fighting will bring resources into New York State is a misnomer and hypocrisy. In fact, we take issue with this and we would ask you, what is the cost to New York State and its tax payers? We know that violence begets violence. We know that violence in sports exacerbates violence within the homes of women and children Time and time again, it has been proven that when children witness violent sports, they become desensitized to violence. Who are the recipients of this violence? Women!

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Violence and Injuries Kill more people ages 1–44 in the U.S.1 than any other cause and the cost is staggering. The violence and injuries cost more than $465 billion annually in medical care and lost productivity. http://www.cdc.gov/injury/index.html

We ask you, have you and other legislators of this great state become so desensitized to violence in the world that you believe this is truly a good thing for New York? We hope that you have the moral and legal sense to outlaw this type of so called "sport."

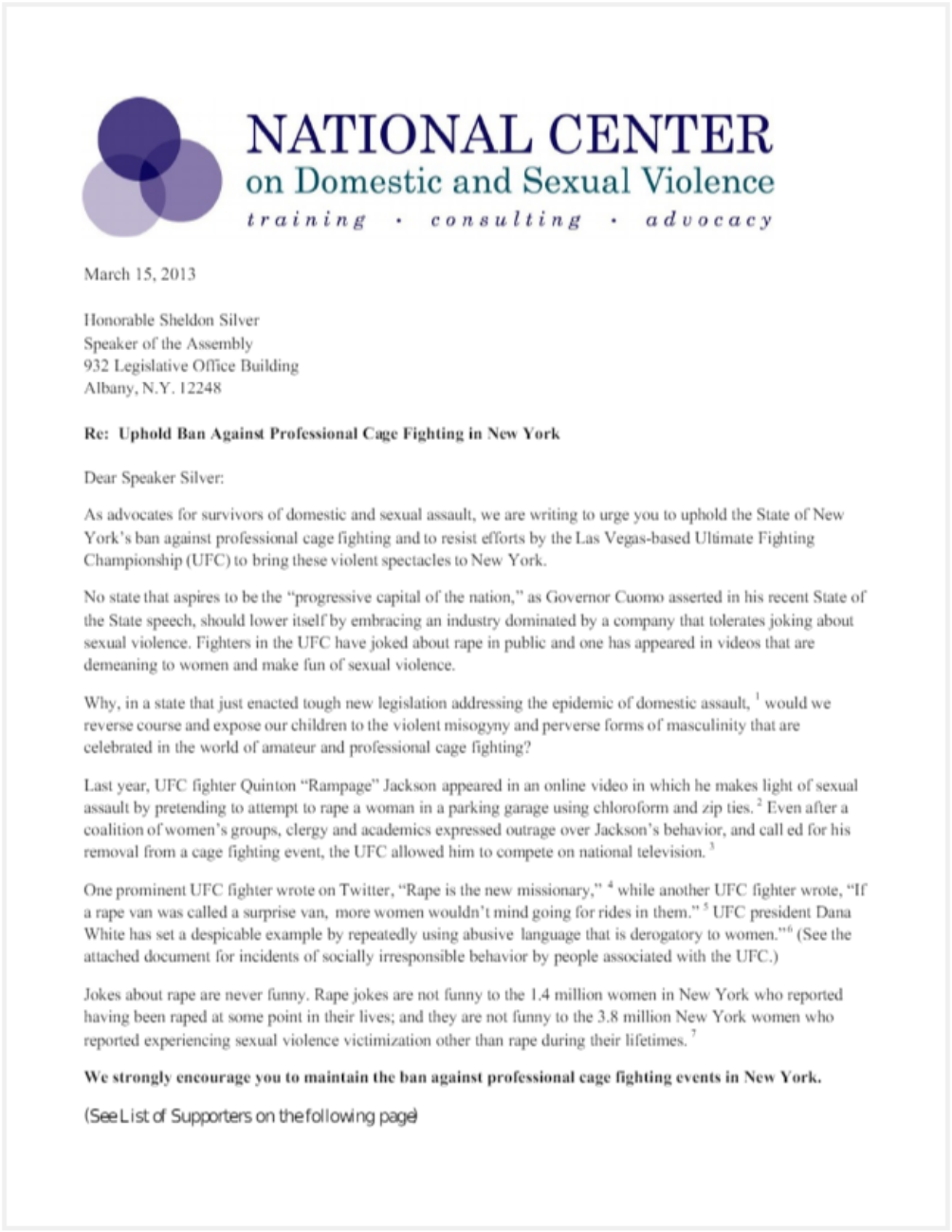
And we ask you once again, how can you espouse women's equality and violence? We hope that you will reconsider your support for this legislation. (#A6506/S02755). Women and children of New York State are depending on you to do what is right and what keeps them safe.

Sincerely,

Zenaida Mendez, President
NOW NYS

Source: Harding, Robert. 2013. "NOW-NYS president to Cuomo: Reconsider position on MMA legalization bill." *Auburn Citizen,* 29 May, 2013.

Appendix C: Letter to Then-Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver from Women's Advocacy Groups



NATIONAL CENTER
on Domestic and Sexual Violence
training · consulting · advocacy

March 15, 2013

Honorable Sheldon Silver
Speaker of the Assembly
932 Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Re: Uphold Ban Against Professional Cage Fighting in New York

Dear Speaker Silver:

As advocates for survivors of domestic and sexual assault, we are writing to urge you to uphold the State of New York's ban against professional cage fighting and to resist efforts by the Las Vegas-based Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) to bring these violent spectacles to New York.

No state that aspires to be the "progressive capital of the nation," as Governor Cuomo asserted in his recent State of the State speech, should lower itself by embracing an industry dominated by a company that tolerates joking about sexual violence. Fighters in the UFC have joked about rape in public and one has appeared in videos that are demeaning to women and make fun of sexual violence.

Why, in a state that just enacted tough new legislation addressing the epidemic of domestic assault, [1] would we reverse course and expose our children to the violent misogyny and perverse forms of masculinity that are celebrated in the world of amateur and professional cage fighting?

Last year, UFC fighter Quinton "Rampage" Jackson appeared in an online video in which he makes light of sexual assault by pretending to attempt to rape a woman in a parking garage using chloroform and zip ties. [2] Even after a coalition of women's groups, clergy and academics expressed outrage over Jackson's behavior, and call ed for his removal from a cage fighting event, the UFC allowed him to compete on national television. [3]

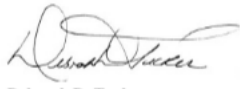
One prominent UFC fighter wrote on Twitter, "Rape is the new missionary," [4] while another UFC fighter wrote, "If a rape van was called a surprise van, more women wouldn't mind going for rides in them." [5] UFC president Dana White has set a despicable example by repeatedly using abusive language that is derogatory to women."[6] (See the attached document for incidents of socially irresponsible behavior by people associated with the UFC.)

Jokes about rape are never funny. Rape jokes are not funny to the 1.4 million women in New York who reported having been raped at some point in their lives; and they are not funny to the 3.8 million New York women who reported experiencing sexual violence victimization other than rape during their lifetimes. [7]

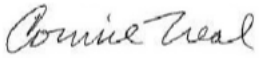
We strongly encourage you to maintain the ban against professional cage fighting events in New York.

(See List of Supporters on the following page)

Respectfully submitted, and on behalf of the following supporters,



Deborah D. Tucker
Executive Director
National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCDSV)

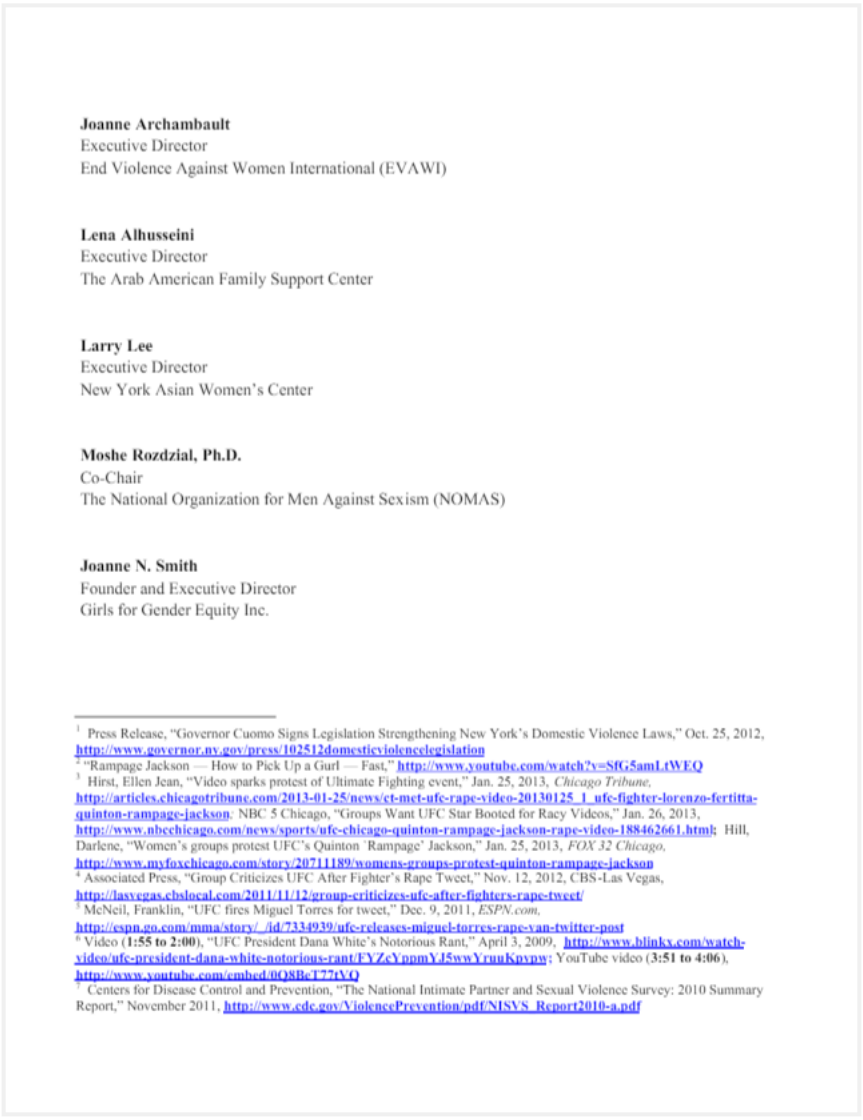


Connie Neal
Executive Director
New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV)

Joanne Zannoni
Executive Director
New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Zenaida Mendez
President
National Organization for Women (NOW) – New York State

Roger A. Canaff
President, Board of Directors
End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI)



Joanne Archambault
Executive Director
End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI)

Lena Alhusseini
Executive Director
The Arab American Family Support Center

Larry Lee
Executive Director
New York Asian Women's Center

Moshe Rozdzial, Ph.D.
Co-Chair
The National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS)

Joanne N. Smith
Founder and Executive Director
Girls for Gender Equity Inc.

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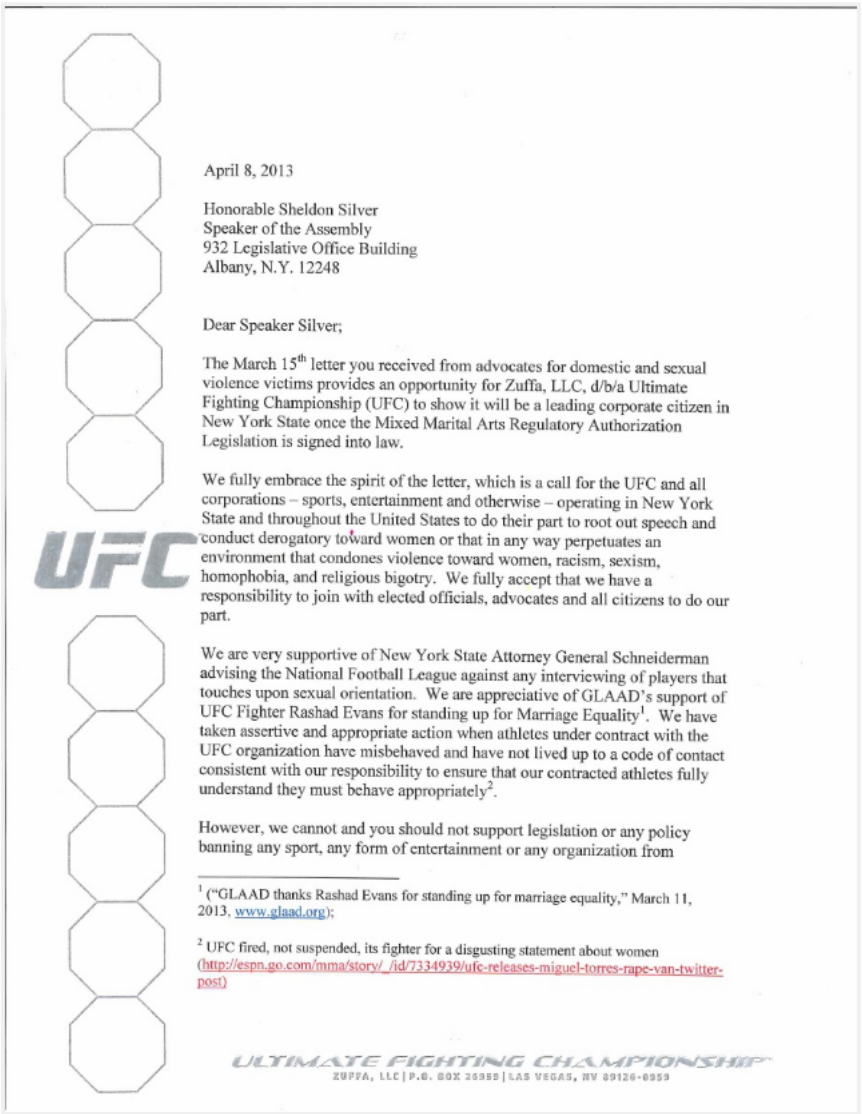
[1] Press Release, "Governor Cuomo Signs Legislation Strengthening New York's Domestic Violence Laws," Oct. 25, 2012, http://www.governor.ny.gov/press/102512domesticviolencelegislation
[2] "Rampage Jackson — How to Pick Up a Gurl — Fast," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfG5amLtWEQ
[3] Hirst, Ellen Jean, "Video sparks protest of Ultimate Fighting event," Jan. 25, 2013, *Chicago Tribune,* http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-01-25/news/ct-met-ufc-rape-video-20130125_1_ufc-fighter-lorenzo-fertitta-quinton-rampage-jackson; NBC 5 Chicago, "Groups Want UFC Star Booted for Racy Videos," Jan. 26, 2013, http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/sports/ufc-chicago-quinton-rampage-jackson-rape-video-188462661.html; Hill, Darlene, "Women's groups protest UFC's Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson," Jan. 25, 2013, *FOX 32 Chicago,* http://www.myfoxchicago.com/story/20711189/womens-groups-protest-quinton-rampage-jackson
[4] Associated Press, "Group Criticizes UFC After Fighter's Rape Tweet," Nov. 12, 2012, CBS-Las Vegas, http://lasvegas.cbslocal.com/2011/11/12/group-criticizes-ufc-after-fighters-rape-tweet/
[5] McNeil, Franklin, "UFC fires Miguel Torres for tweet," Dec. 9, 2011, *ESPN.com,* http://espn.go.com/mma/story/_/id/7334939/ufc-releases-miguel-torres-rape-yan-twitter-post
[6] Video (**1:55 to 2:00**), "UFC President Dana White's Notorious Rant," April 3, 2009, http://www.blinkx.com/watch-video/ufc-president-dana-white-notorious-rant/EYZcYppmYJ5wwYruuKpypw; YouTube video (**3:51 to 4:06**), http://www.youtube.com/embed/0Q8BcT77tYQ
[7] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report," November 2011, http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/NISVS_Report2010-a.pdf

Source: National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence. 2013. "Re: Uphold Ban Against Professional Cage Fighting in New York." http://www.ncdsv.org/images/LetterToNYAssemblyReUpholdBanAgainstProfessionalCageFightingInNY_3-15-2013.pdf

Appendix D: **UFC's Letter to Then-Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver in Response to Women's Advocacy Group Letter**



April 8, 2013

Honorable Sheldon Silver
Speaker of the Assembly
932 Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Dear Speaker Silver;

The March 15th letter you received from advocates for domestic and sexual violence victims provides an opportunity for Zuffa, LLC, d/b/a Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) to show it will be a leading corporate citizen in New York State once the Mixed Marital Arts Regulatory Authorization Legislation is signed into law.

We fully embrace the spirit of the letter, which is a call for the UFC and all corporations – sports, entertainment and otherwise – operating in New York State and throughout the United States to do their part to root out speech and conduct derogatory toward women or that in any way perpetuates an environment that condones violence toward women, racism, sexism, homophobia, and religious bigotry. We fully accept that we have a responsibility to join with elected officials, advocates and all citizens to do our part.

We are very supportive of New York State Attorney General Schneiderman advising the National Football League against any interviewing of players that touches upon sexual orientation. We are appreciative of GLAAD's support of UFC Fighter Rashad Evans for standing up for Marriage Equality[1]. We have taken assertive and appropriate action when athletes under contract with the UFC organization have misbehaved and have not lived up to a code of contact consistent with our responsibility to ensure that our contracted athletes fully understand they must behave appropriately[2].

However, we cannot and you should not support legislation or any policy banning any sport, any form of entertainment or any organization from

[1] ("GLAAD thanks Rashad Evans for standing up for marriage equality," March 11, 2013, www.glaad.org);

[2] UFC fired, not suspended, its fighter for a disgusting statement about women (http://espn.go.com/mma/story/_/id/7334939/ufc-releases-miguel-torres-rape-van-twitter-post)

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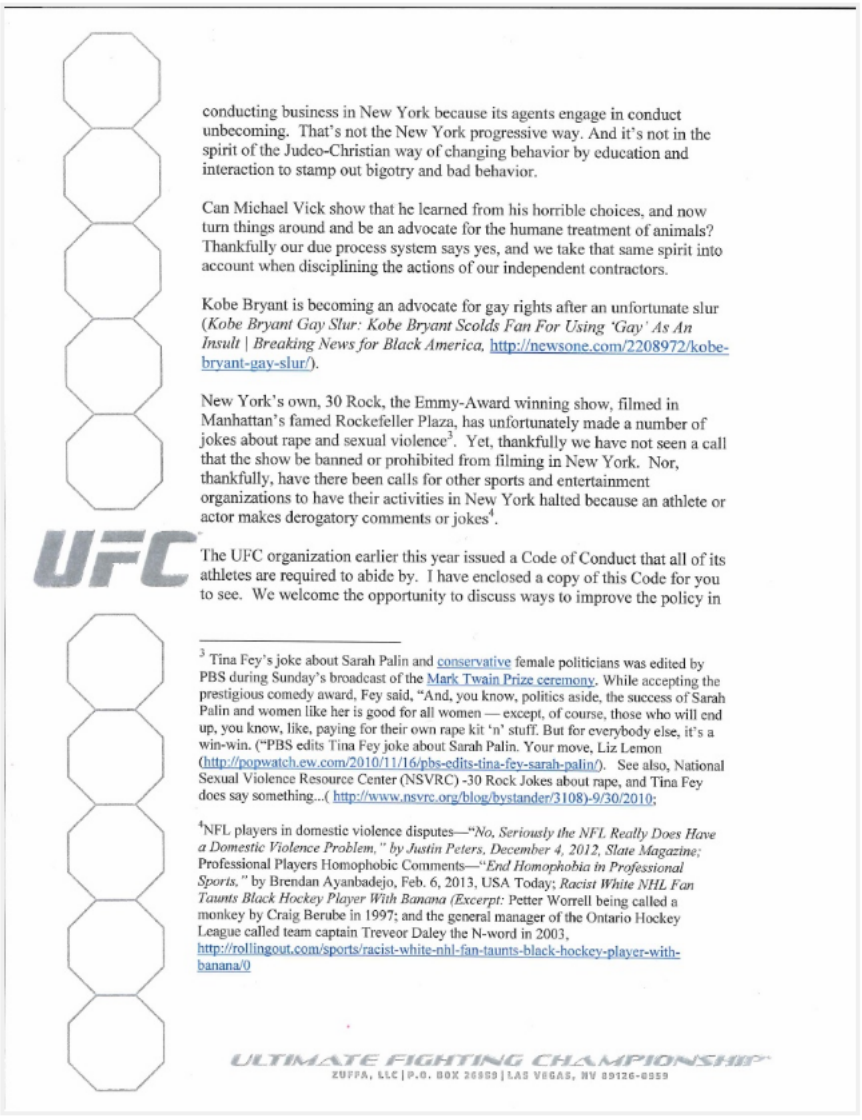

conducting business in New York because its agents engage in conduct unbecoming. That's not the New York progressive way. And it's not in the spirit of the Judeo-Christian way of changing behavior by education and interaction to stamp out bigotry and bad behavior.

Can Michael Vick show that he learned from his horrible choices, and now turn things around and be an advocate for the humane treatment of animals? Thankfully our due process system says yes, and we take that same spirit into account when disciplining the actions of our independent contractors.

Kobe Bryant is becoming an advocate for gay rights after an unfortunate slur (*Kobe Bryant Gay Slur: Kobe Bryant Scolds Fan For Using 'Gay' As An Insult | Breaking News for Black America,* http://newsone.com/2208972/kobe-bryant-gay-slur/).

New York's own, 30 Rock, the Emmy-Award winning show, filmed in Manhattan's famed Rockefeller Plaza, has unfortunately made a number of jokes about rape and sexual violence[3]. Yet, thankfully we have not seen a call that the show be banned or prohibited from filming in New York. Nor, thankfully, have there been calls for other sports and entertainment organizations to have their activities in New York halted because an athlete or actor makes derogatory comments or jokes[4].

UFC

The UFC organization earlier this year issued a Code of Conduct that all of its athletes are required to abide by. I have enclosed a copy of this Code for you to see. We welcome the opportunity to discuss ways to improve the policy in

---

[3] Tina Fey's joke about Sarah Palin and conservative female politicians was edited by PBS during Sunday's broadcast of the Mark Twain Prize ceremony. While accepting the prestigious comedy award, Fey said, "And, you know, politics aside, the success of Sarah Palin and women like her is good for all women — except, of course, those who will end up, you know, like, paying for their own rape kit 'n' stuff. But for everybody else, it's a win-win. ("PBS edits Tina Fey joke about Sarah Palin. Your move, Liz Lemon (http://popwatch.ew.com/2010/11/16/pbs-edits-tina-fey-sarah-palin/). See also, National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) -30 Rock Jokes about rape, and Tina Fey does say something...(http://www.nsvrc.org/blog/bystander/3108)-9/30/2010;

[4]NFL players in domestic violence disputes—"*No, Seriously the NFL Really Does Have a Domestic Violence Problem," by Justin Peters, December 4, 2012, Slate Magazine;* Professional Players Homophobic Comments—"*End Homophobia in Professional Sports,"* by Brendan Ayanbadejo, Feb. 6, 2013, USA Today; *Racist White NHL Fan Taunts Black Hockey Player With Banana (Excerpt:* Petter Worrell being called a monkey by Craig Berube in 1997; and the general manager of the Ontario Hockey League called team captain Treveor Daley the N-word in 2003, http://rollingout.com/sports/racist-white-nhl-fan-taunts-black-hockey-player-with-banana/0

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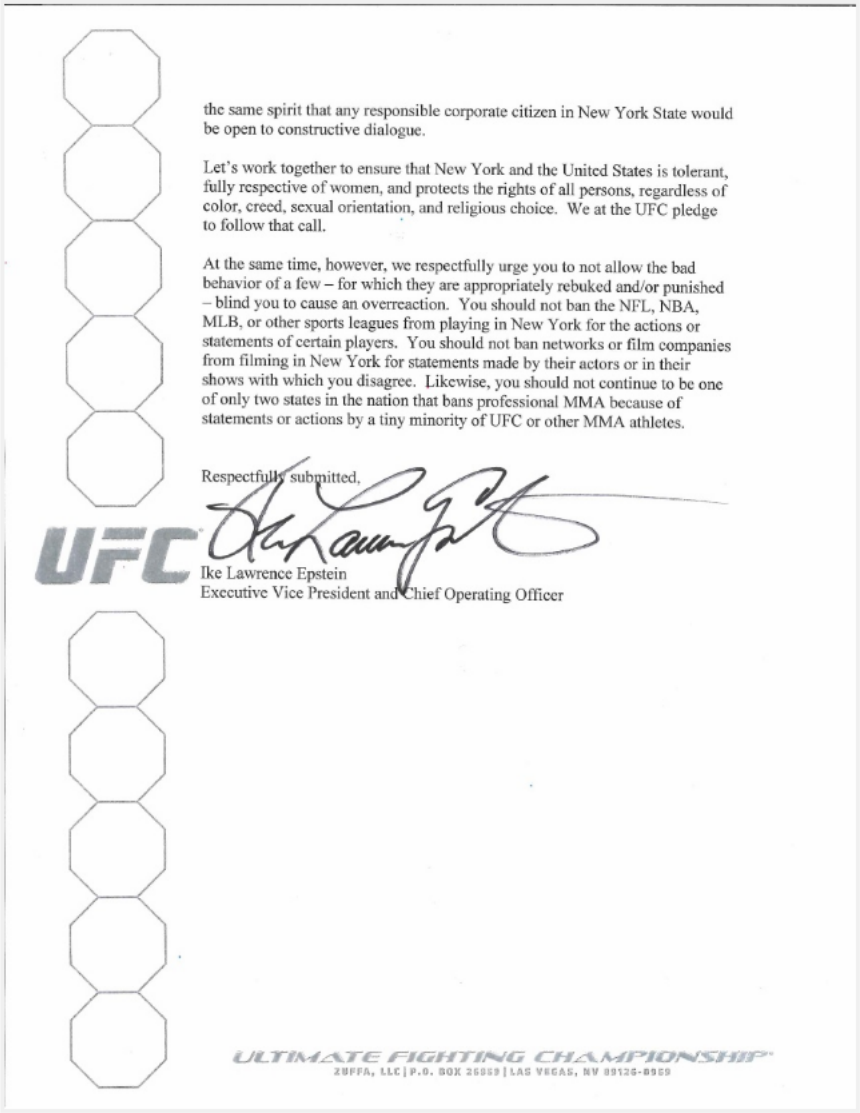

the same spirit that any responsible corporate citizen in New York State would be open to constructive dialogue.

Let's work together to ensure that New York and the United States is tolerant, fully respective of women, and protects the rights of all persons, regardless of color, creed, sexual orientation, and religious choice. We at the UFC pledge to follow that call.

At the same time, however, we respectfully urge you to not allow the bad behavior of a few – for which they are appropriately rebuked and/or punished – blind you to cause an overreaction. You should not ban the NFL, NBA, MLB, or other sports leagues from playing in New York for the actions or statements of certain players. You should not ban networks or film companies from filming in New York for statements made by their actors or in their shows with which you disagree. Likewise, you should not continue to be one of only two states in the nation that bans professional MMA because of statements or actions by a tiny minority of UFC or other MMA athletes.

Respectfully submitted,

UFC

Ike Lawrence Epstein
Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

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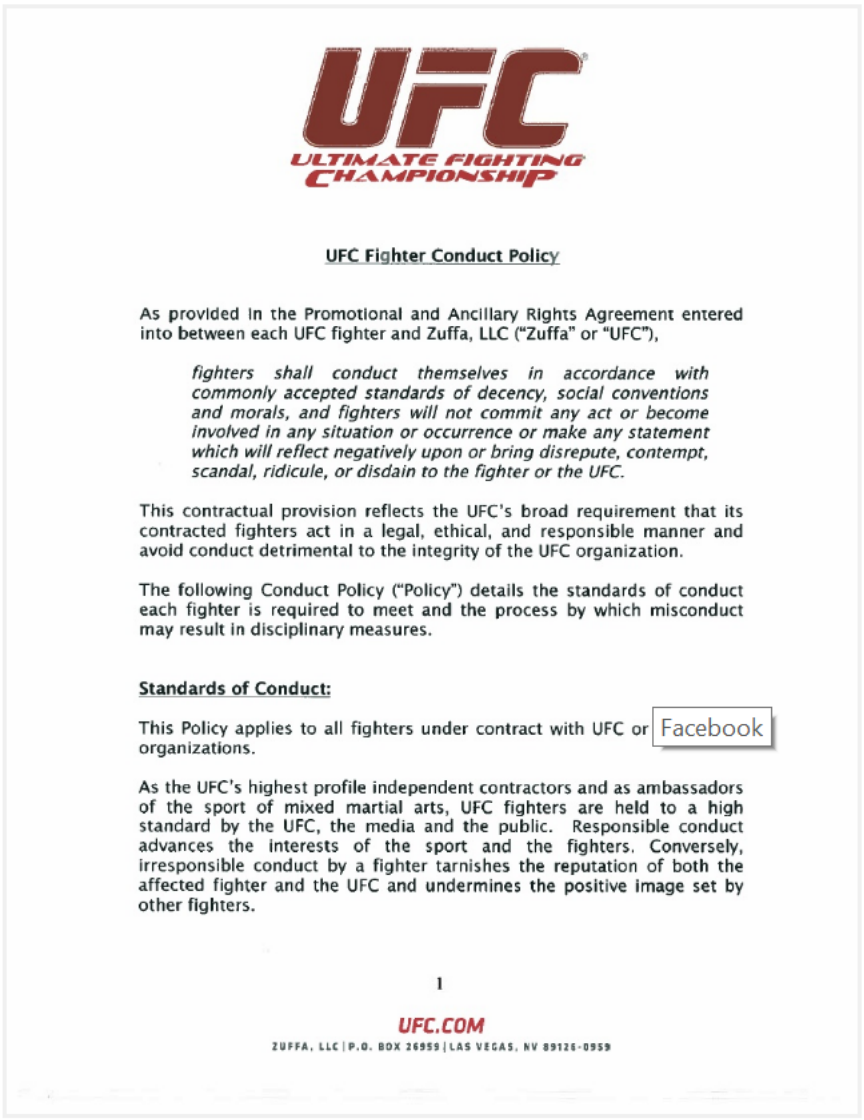
Source: New York State of Politics. 2013. "Prompted By Domestic Violence Advocates, UFC Releases Its Code Of Conduct." http://www.nystateofpolitics.com/2013/04/prompted-by-domestic-violence-advocates-ufc-releases-its-code-of-conduct/

Appendix E: UFC Fighter Conduct Policy



UFC Fighter Conduct Policy

As provided in the Promotional and Ancillary Rights Agreement entered into between each UFC fighter and Zuffa, LLC ("Zuffa" or "UFC"),

> *fighters shall conduct themselves in accordance with commonly accepted standards of decency, social conventions and morals, and fighters will not commit any act or become involved in any situation or occurrence or make any statement which will reflect negatively upon or bring disrepute, contempt, scandal, ridicule, or disdain to the fighter or the UFC.*

This contractual provision reflects the UFC's broad requirement that its contracted fighters act in a legal, ethical, and responsible manner and avoid conduct detrimental to the integrity of the UFC organization.

The following Conduct Policy ("Policy") details the standards of conduct each fighter is required to meet and the process by which misconduct may result in disciplinary measures.

Standards of Conduct:

This Policy applies to all fighters under contract with UFC or Facebook organizations.

As the UFC's highest profile independent contractors and as ambassadors of the sport of mixed martial arts, UFC fighters are held to a high standard by the UFC, the media and the public. Responsible conduct advances the interests of the sport and the fighters. Conversely, irresponsible conduct by a fighter tarnishes the reputation of both the affected fighter and the UFC and undermines the positive image set by other fighters.

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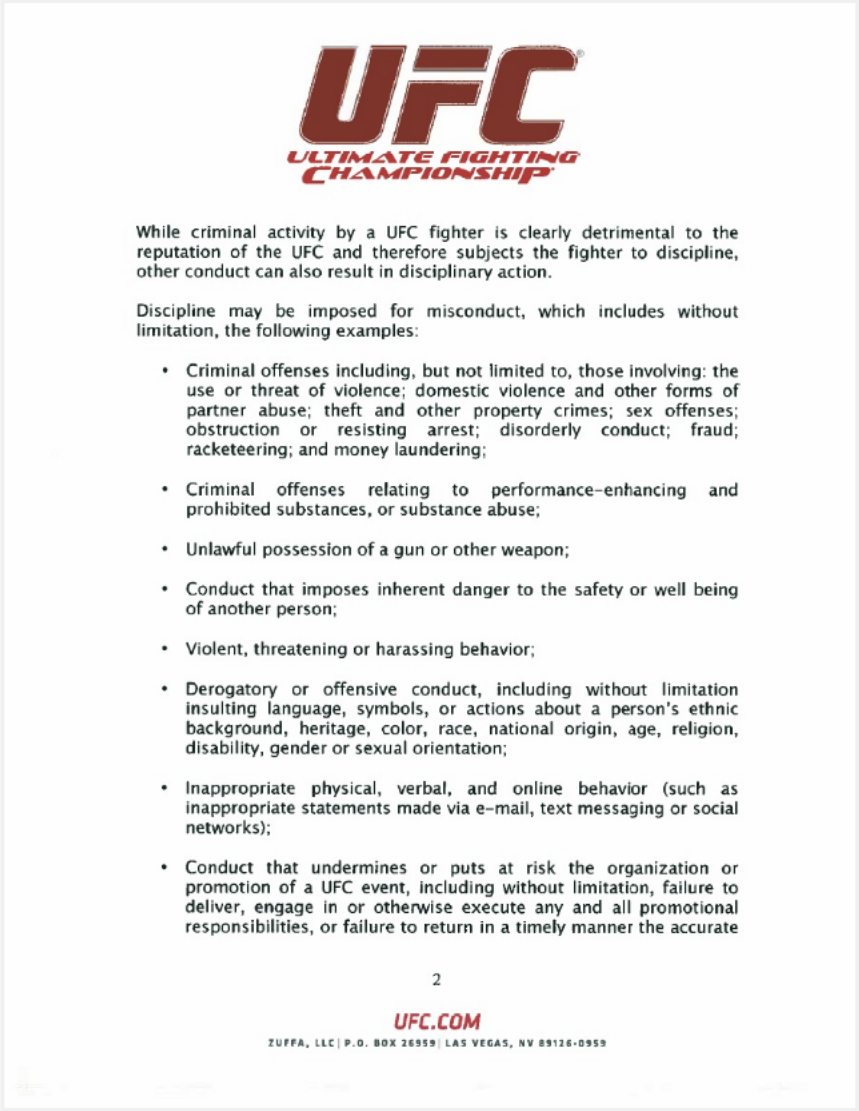

While criminal activity by a UFC fighter is clearly detrimental to the reputation of the UFC and therefore subjects the fighter to discipline, other conduct can also result in disciplinary action.

Discipline may be imposed for misconduct, which includes without limitation, the following examples:

- Criminal offenses including, but not limited to, those involving: the use or threat of violence; domestic violence and other forms of partner abuse; theft and other property crimes; sex offenses; obstruction or resisting arrest; disorderly conduct; fraud; racketeering; and money laundering;
- Criminal offenses relating to performance-enhancing and prohibited substances, or substance abuse;
- Unlawful possession of a gun or other weapon;
- Conduct that imposes inherent danger to the safety or well being of another person;
- Violent, threatening or harassing behavior;
- Derogatory or offensive conduct, including without limitation insulting language, symbols, or actions about a person's ethnic background, heritage, color, race, national origin, age, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation;
- Inappropriate physical, verbal, and online behavior (such as inappropriate statements made via e-mail, text messaging or social networks);
- Conduct that undermines or puts at risk the organization or promotion of a UFC event, including without limitation, failure to deliver, engage in or otherwise execute any and all promotional responsibilities, or failure to return in a timely manner the accurate

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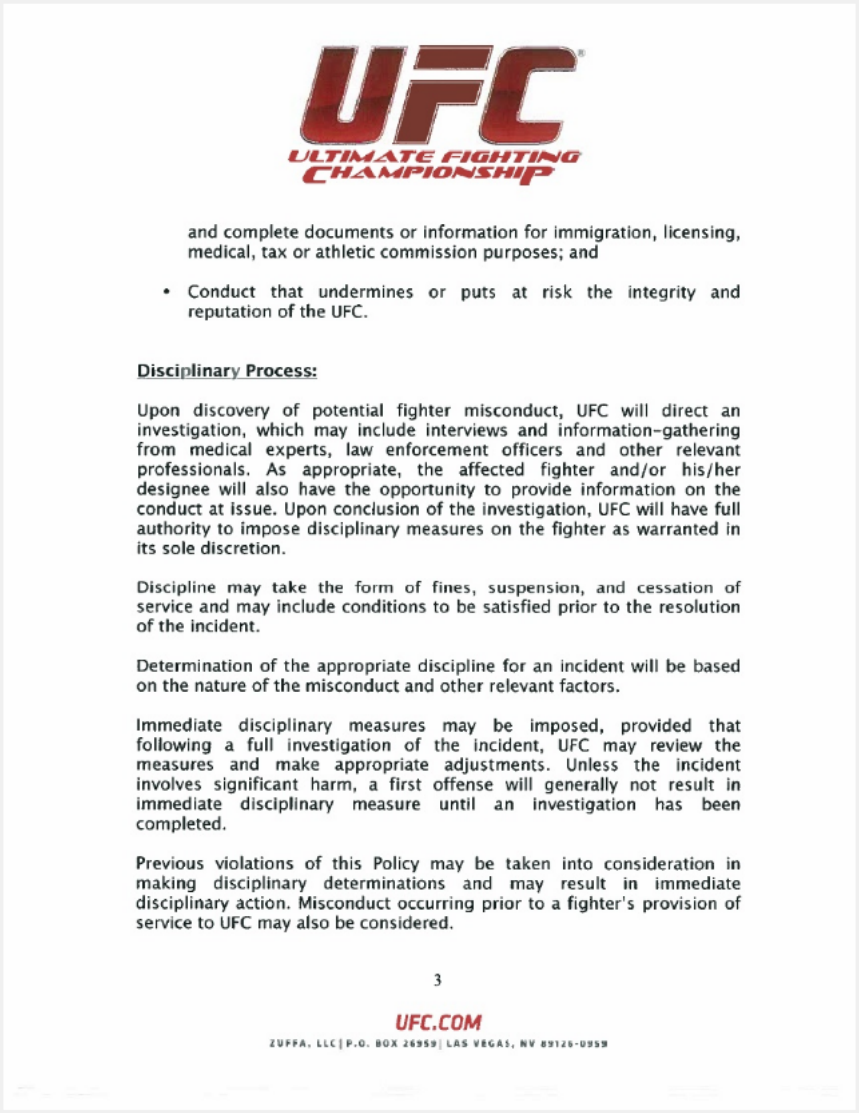

and complete documents or information for immigration, licensing, medical, tax or athletic commission purposes; and

- Conduct that undermines or puts at risk the integrity and reputation of the UFC.

Disciplinary Process:

Upon discovery of potential fighter misconduct, UFC will direct an investigation, which may include interviews and information-gathering from medical experts, law enforcement officers and other relevant professionals. As appropriate, the affected fighter and/or his/her designee will also have the opportunity to provide information on the conduct at issue. Upon conclusion of the investigation, UFC will have full authority to impose disciplinary measures on the fighter as warranted in its sole discretion.

Discipline may take the form of fines, suspension, and cessation of service and may include conditions to be satisfied prior to the resolution of the incident.

Determination of the appropriate discipline for an incident will be based on the nature of the misconduct and other relevant factors.

Immediate disciplinary measures may be imposed, provided that following a full investigation of the incident, UFC may review the measures and make appropriate adjustments. Unless the incident involves significant harm, a first offense will generally not result in immediate disciplinary measure until an investigation has been completed.

Previous violations of this Policy may be taken into consideration in making disciplinary determinations and may result in immediate disciplinary action. Misconduct occurring prior to a fighter's provision of service to UFC may also be considered.

3

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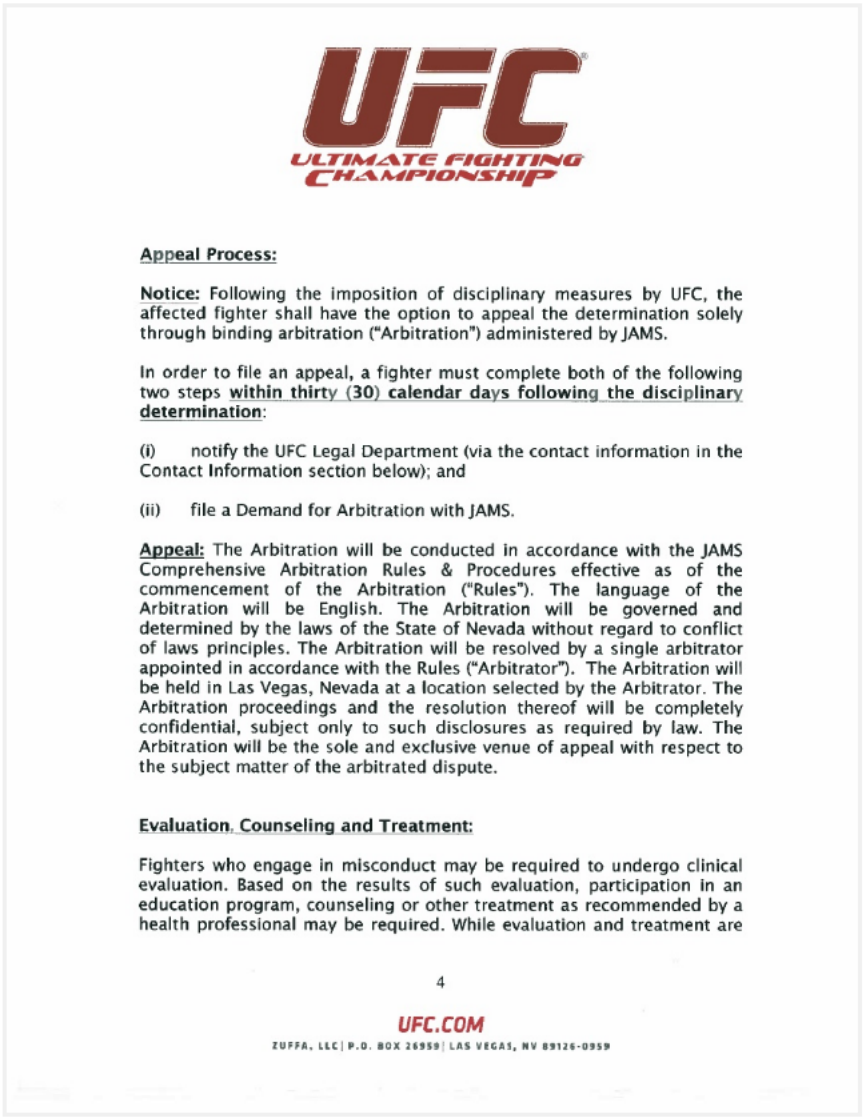

Appeal Process:

Notice: Following the imposition of disciplinary measures by UFC, the affected fighter shall have the option to appeal the determination solely through binding arbitration ("Arbitration") administered by JAMS.

In order to file an appeal, a fighter must complete both of the following two steps **within thirty (30) calendar days following the disciplinary determination**:

(i) notify the UFC Legal Department (via the contact information in the Contact Information section below); and

(ii) file a Demand for Arbitration with JAMS.

Appeal: The Arbitration will be conducted in accordance with the JAMS Comprehensive Arbitration Rules & Procedures effective as of the commencement of the Arbitration ("Rules"). The language of the Arbitration will be English. The Arbitration will be governed and determined by the laws of the State of Nevada without regard to conflict of laws principles. The Arbitration will be resolved by a single arbitrator appointed in accordance with the Rules ("Arbitrator"). The Arbitration will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada at a location selected by the Arbitrator. The Arbitration proceedings and the resolution thereof will be completely confidential, subject only to such disclosures as required by law. The Arbitration will be the sole and exclusive venue of appeal with respect to the subject matter of the arbitrated dispute.

Evaluation, Counseling and Treatment:

Fighters who engage in misconduct may be required to undergo clinical evaluation. Based on the results of such evaluation, participation in an education program, counseling or other treatment as recommended by a health professional may be required. While evaluation and treatment are

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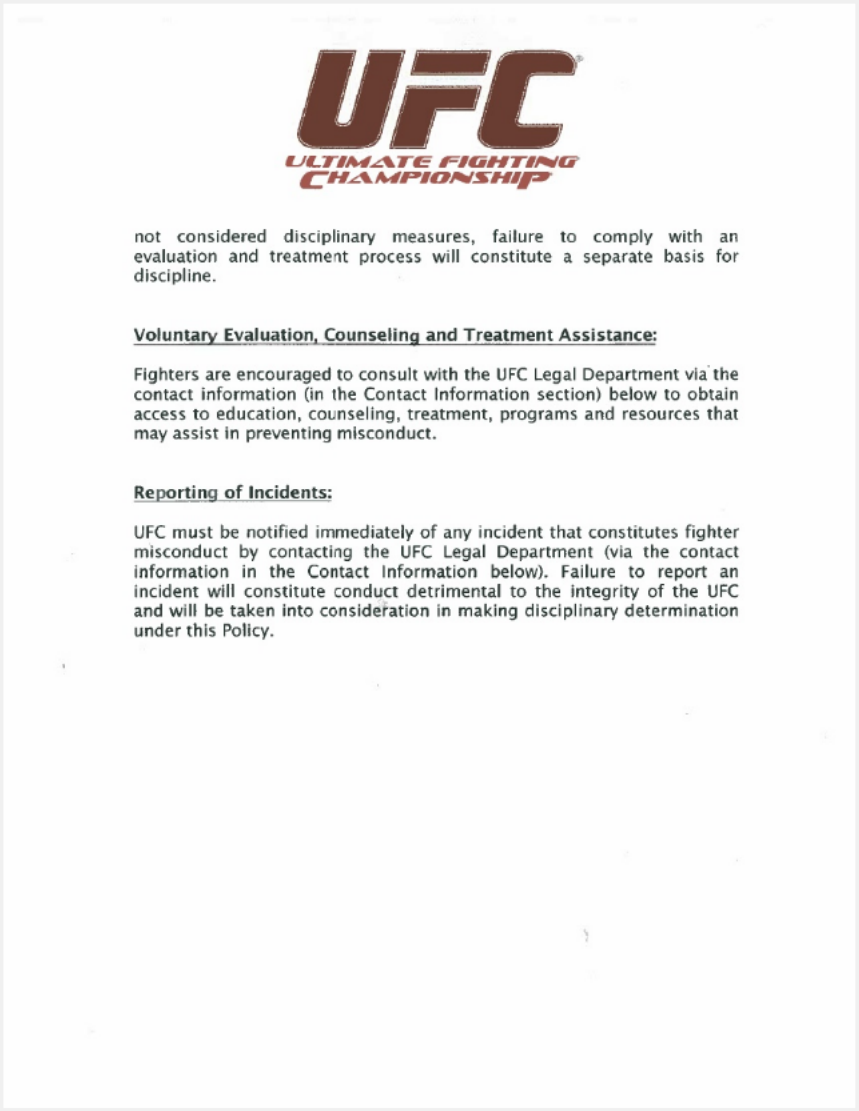

not considered disciplinary measures, failure to comply with an evaluation and treatment process will constitute a separate basis for discipline.

Voluntary Evaluation, Counseling and Treatment Assistance:

Fighters are encouraged to consult with the UFC Legal Department via the contact information (in the Contact Information section) below to obtain access to education, counseling, treatment, programs and resources that may assist in preventing misconduct.

Reporting of Incidents:

UFC must be notified immediately of any incident that constitutes fighter misconduct by contacting the UFC Legal Department (via the contact information in the Contact Information below). Failure to report an incident will constitute conduct detrimental to the integrity of the UFC and will be taken into consideration in making disciplinary determination under this Policy.

Source: Hemminger, Brian. 2013. "UFC releases full 'Code of Conduct' policy after Matt Mitrione's Fallon Fox flap." *MMA Mania*. https://www.mmamania.com/2013/4/10/4209990/ufc-releases-full-code-conduct-policy-matt-mitriones-fallon-fox-mma

Appendix F: **Amanda Nunes**

Source for Left Photo: Bottari, Jeff /Zuffa LLC via Getty Images. 2016. "UFC women's bantamweight champion Amanda Nunes of Brazil poses on the scale during the UFC 207 weigh-in at T-Mobile Arena on December 29, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada."

Source for Right Photo: Bottari, Jeff /Zuffa LLC via Getty Images. 2016. "UFC women's bantamweight champion Amanda Nunes of Brazil poses for a portrait during a UFC photo session inside the MGM Grand Conference Center on December 26, 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada."