

Old fighters: shaping identities beyond the last round

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Abstract

This paper discusses some aspects related to identity shaping of old fighters in combat sports in the metropolitan area of Vitoria (Espírito Santo, Brazil). The empirical data were collected with semi-structured interviews with five fighters between 38 and 74 years old. The paper discusses recurring aspects in studies devoted to mapping the frames of reference that take part in the construction of identities of fighters, as well as works that have researched fighters' retirement. It concludes that fighters develop manners (alternatives) of maintaining their identity when they face their own decline in sport performance.

KEY WORDS: Combat sports; Identities; Body; Retirement.

Introduction

In recent years, several studies have focused on combat sports, and especially on the ways in which identity shaping of fighters happens¹⁻⁹. In these studies, the prevailing argument is that body reference is predominant in the constitution of warring identities, in alignment with what ORTEGA¹⁰⁻¹¹ has named as bioidentities. In this interpretation, the body constitutes itself as the main identity vector, becoming the target in the attempts of maintaining an identity that is attractive, strong, healthy, beautiful, long-lived, jovial, etc.

The bioidentities are formed from body investments and relate to procedures that aim to "improve" what is in deficit to us by nature (the body). In this analogy, the fighter subject recognizes himself through the references that grant him the necessary characteristics in order to acquire such chosen bioidentity. According to ORTEGA¹⁰⁻¹¹, the procedures carried out by the individual towards the idealized identity (bioascetic practices) are formed as key elements in the construction of "warrior" identities. The ascetic practices

[...] lead to subjectivity processes. The modern bodily asceticism, the bioasceticism, reproduce the rules of biosociability within the subjective focus, emphasizing the procedures for body, medical, hygienic and aesthetic care in the construction of the personal identities, of the bioidentities. This is about the building of a subject who is

self-controlling, self-vigilant and self-governing. A key feature of this activity is self-expertise. The self that acts as an expert has the basic source of their identity in the self-expertise action.¹⁰ (p.64).

Bioascetic practices merge body and mind in the formation of somatic bioidentity, producing a self that is inseparable from the work on the body. Therefore, it is in exercising the self over himself that the subject recognizes himself and intends to be recognized. In this relation that happens privately (from them to themselves), the subject is the one who takes responsibility for their choices.

However, ORTEGA¹⁰ points out that in the contemporary bioidentity building, the aging process is perceived to be a deficiency, in other words a decline in adulthood. Yet, ways to mask this decline are found in the body techniques. That leads to a question: how do aging individuals deal with bioidentity requirements in body performance contexts?

Following this movement, we developed a study in order to understand the (bio)identity construction / maintenance process in veteran combat sports practitioners in the metropolitan area of the city Vitoria, in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo^a. Thus, we emphasize the bioidentity character of the practices that have been analyzed and we discuss other possibilities related to them. We work with the thesis that the frame of reference present in the (bio)identity

shaping of fighters examined in this paper go towards deconstructing the fighter as well as guaranteeing their continuity as the chosen identity as physical decrepitude advances. The first notion is linked to the incidence of bioidentity references related to fitness, power, virility, and youth. Because of that, identities solely based on these parameters sooner or later are doomed to “end”. The second notion is associated with the warrior’s behavior (their bravery history, their fight experience) as well as with the identity benefits resulting from the meanings attached to their practice. So the fighter, even aged and worn, still has a chance to follow with their life still connected to the fighter career. Through incorporating a sporting ethos based on self-control and on the prerogatives for maintaining the fighter body, will take place the permanent struggle to maintaining the chosen identity.

The theme of sporting retirement has been the subject of different disciplines in the academic context¹²⁻¹⁷. It is possible to identify different approaches, as well as aspects related to the idea of retirement as a difficult stage of life, a transition, a moment of hesitation and uncertainty. This diagnosis on the drama experienced by many athletes when they can no longer continue working as professional athletes has gotten a lot of attention, as it shows a moment of life in which identities built from performance related references tend to

be continuously devaluated due to requirements inherent in professional sporting performance. Mindful of this thematic importance, researchers have paid particular attention to these issues, and in a review work on the causes and consequences of the transition from sports career, it was pointed out that “[...] age, new emerging interests, psychological fatigue, difficulties with the technical team, declining in sports results, injury and health problems, not being selected for the matches, among others”¹⁸ (p.50), are factors that the athlete takes into consideration when the time comes to decide about retirement.

This context, in which the athletes’ farewell to big events and to the fighting profession is imminent, still adds to the notion that, “[...] in Brazilian society[,] the individual is valued for keeping himself active, for his professional position, and for his social position. Thus, the word ‘retire’ [...] could be perceived as a synonym of social exclusion, loss of power and status”¹⁹ (p.30). This would also justify the effort of many fighters to keep themselves active¹⁹.

In the following topics we will present the path and strategies to achieve the study’s objectives and, after that, we will analyze and discuss the data collected based on two axes named “bioidentities and the fighters’ body declining “ and “fighters’ bioidentity maintenance”.

Method

This is a qualitative research from reports and interviews with five subjects that are combat sports practitioners. In this study, these individuals are identified as:

Fighter 1 - 38 years old, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and jiu-jitsu fighter, with experience in international competitions. He has taken part in the biggest mixed martial arts event in the world (Ultimate Fighting Championship) for a few years. He teaches classes and courses on the combat sports he practices.

Fighter 2 - 45 years old, police officer, teacher and boxer with experience in capoeira [Brazilian martial art]. He was president of one of the confederations in the Espírito Santo State^b.

Fighter 3 - 39 years old, was the world’s vice-champion for jiu-jitsu and is a physical education teacher. He is not currently in the competitions circuit.

Fighter 4 - 40 years old, martial arts practitioner during 34 of them. He is an MMA event fighter; a

black belt in five fighting sports (Kung Fu, kickboxing, muay thai, rapkidô, jiu-jitsu), teaches classes in those categories and works as a security guard.

Fighter 5 - 74 years old^c He is experienced in vale-tudo [full contact combat sport originated in Brazil and considered to be a precursor to MMA], jiu jitsu, judo, telecatch [staged wrestling] and is still active in the “noble art” of boxing.

The criteria for selecting the subjects were established from the demands resulting from the process of building this work towards its established objectives. In this sense, the first criteria for selecting of the study subjects were: to be a practitioner (veteran) or to have practiced more than one kind of fighting sport, and to be experienced in fighting sports that are important in the entertainment / performance scene (boxing, MMA). Characterizing the participants as veterans comes from the idea of being a fighter as an occupation for many years, and having recognition from other

fighters in the area. In this perspective, establishing the age in which the fighters move away from competitions (a recurrent variable in the investigations about athletes' retirement processes) happened along with the process of the first visits and interviews. In this sense, from the initial criteria on, we looked for fighters that have been competitors in the sport for a long time.

From an initial plan, which aimed to establish a closer view to the object of study, we conducted a first interview to know the fighter's life story; the importance of the fight; of the fighter's body and of the fighter being. The information collected

lead to a second stage of interviews two months later. Generally, that second stage investigated the fighter's retirement; the moment of pulling away from fighting; the ceasing to be a fighter.

When analyzing the material gathered in the interviews, we discussed how the fighters took care of themselves within the perspective of avoiding physical decrepitude, questioning the hardships and bioidentity maintenance strategies in the face of physical degradation. These aspects were constituted as basis for establishing the thematic axes presented and analyzed as follows.

Results and discussion

Bioidentities and the aging of fighters^e

This analysis axis relates to the importance given to the frames of reference that are remarkably related to the body among veteran fighters. The process of decreasing in body strength and in the physical attributes that motivated the fighter's recognition in the sporting context, lead to a bioidentity deconstruction of the athlete at a later point of their career. The benchmarks related to physical fitness, performance, health, longevity, body power will be put to the test when assessing the individual's qualities. In this sense, to consider the choices related to the individual decision of stopping or continuing as the chosen identity (fighter being), in the dissemination and incidence of bioidentity references, it means to consider that the stress from the fans, the media and / or sponsors contribute to / emphasize the idea that the decision should be made taking performance and efficiency as a benchmark²⁰.

The current struggles of Wanderley Silva, a Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighter are a good example. He is 37 years old, and even after a victory on March 3, 2013, a retirement has been constantly considered in interviews. The issue, however, does not seem to please the Brazilian fighter. In an interview to Inside MMA, a show from the American cable network channel AXS TV, [Wanderley Silva]²¹ "stated that he is planning a career [with] one fight at a time"^f, referring to the possibility of his career as a professional wrestler coming to an end. About his future in fighting, the fighter says: "The audience is the boss. As long as the audience wants me, I will continue."²² This tension fueled by TV news, by businessmen and by the public, could also be

felt in our research field. One of our contributors commented on how he woke up to the idea that he could be greatly aged in relation to his practice:

I realized I had aged when a reporter asked me on screen, 'it's time to stop, isn't it?' Then I: 'Stop what?' I told him, 'Stop fighting?' He said, 'Yes. You're greatly aged, you are 40ish!' (Fighter 5).

It is important to note that depreciation and difficulty to accept exhibitions deficient in standard performance is not exclusive to sports commentators and viewers, but can also be seen from the fighters' perspective. On this, Fighter 1 reports:

[...] The MMA is showing the sport evolution, is showing that older fighters are still fighting, but I think Randy [Cuture - veteran MMA fighter] has reached such a point that he should stop already, I think that he's already [...] looking old really, slow, the other punching all the time, you get it? Whatever!

Amid demands for acquiring and maintaining contemporary bioidentity characteristics, there seems to be no escape for these fearless "iron men"⁴. In this game, the evaluation criteria referring to the qualities essential to the processes of bioidentity self constitution constantly reinforce and refer to "[...] a vocabulary based on biological constants, cholesterol levels, muscle tone, physical performance, aerobic capacity [...]"¹¹ (p.31) and indicate the popularity of these terms that acquire and suggest a moral implication in the individual assessment.

In this core, and as the great fighting events are targeted by those who want to achieve financial independence and fame by living and doing what they chose for themselves, if the fighter does not meet the requirements of the performance market, of the

public's expectations, and of images and codes relating to this scene, it is time to rethink their life in the ring.

In our research scope, despite their advanced age, the fighters have a strong (bio) identity bond with their practice, be it in a professional capacity or as an amateur. However, these are not renowned fighters, nor are they celebrities of national and / or international level. They are men intensely connected to the recognition benchmarks enabled by the sport they practice. Despite their age, four of the fighters interviewed still wish to accomplish great things through fighting. They want fame, sponsorship, setting records. Amid these ambitions, keeping themselves active for as long as possible means increasing the chances of making a difference and it means achieving recognition.

In this process in which the body and its performance tend to a continuous devaluation, in addition to strategies to extend the fighter's working life through specific training, rest, proper nutrition, the attributes that are shaped and impregnated in the warrior's "modus operandi" are also linked to other (bio)identity references that enhance its legitimacy / perpetuation^{4, 7}. These references are linked to the fearless features. In addition to technical skills, the physical attributes in the fighting practice highlight courage, bravery, power and virility, characteristics inherent to the trade that should be cultivated and preserved. Those other references, not necessarily linked to the optimal body performance, allow us to say that we did not find sufficient evidence that could identify the fighters as "former" sportsmen or masters (sportsmen in mature age)⁸. They forever define themselves as fighters.

But in case of failing to overcome the limitations imposed by the performance decline, the athlete should exit the stage and take up less ennobling new assignments. This idea pushes many of them forward and towards not giving up the recognition benchmarks, especially if these benchmarks are linked to the ways of being that define social positions. This idea acquires new nuances when considering fighters' identity configuration, since in these relations "[...] the bodies of combatants / fighters, besides being used as weapons against other bodies, in a process that requires ways of dealing with the body as an object, [...] also have an important identity function that refers the subject to a particular social group"²³. In this regard, to fail would be related to a decrease in the ideal of the specific individual/group. Thus, moving away from competition, and the difficulty in disconnecting from sports activities that reinforce identity links,

are examples of some situations that several athletes encounter when their recognition attributes linked to the dominant values are challenged and fall to disuse.

This seems to go through the logic of performance sports in general; however, when we look at the subjects in this research (some of them away from competitions), we cannot identify a significant identity deconstruction. In this saga, a fighter

[...] It is not just the one who climbs in the ring; the fighter is the one who is prepared to fight. In my opinion, even if he doesn't enter the ring, the guy is a fighter, but he is not a competitor, that's another story, another perspective, I think I will always be a fighter, I will die a fighter, I just don't go in the ring, but I die fighter (Fighter 1).

Fighter 2 clarifies that "[...] even if not fighting in the ring, he is fighting outside the ring for the sport to happen, which is why psychologically, if I give up as a fighter, I give up everything" (Fighter 2). Thus, the fighter "[...] is always the fighter, he does not cease to be a fighter, you can be sure" (Fighter 5).

The references taking part in the building of the warrior are shaped in such a way that neither time nor other difficulties will make them forget the chosen (bio) identity. In this manner,

[...] If he dedicated his entire life to be a fighter, this will always be part of his essence. Like me, I'm always watching the fights. In the Olympics I like to see the judo matches, the social projects that the guys do, training to keep... not to keep fit, but to be there as part of the group [...] (Fighter 3).

The dedication to the fight, to training and to the personal connections to the group is also linked to the practice specificities, to the financial reward, the gratification in expressing the sports' values. However, much more than a financial alternative, symbolic representations of themselves that enhance the practice as an occupation are built. The symbolic capital is also linked to the ability to perform tasks that suggest how powerful, brave and fearless the fighter is. In this sense, "[...] the passing of time doesn't seem to overwhelm the fighter, there may be something to be salvaged in him"²⁴ (p.6) because, whatever happens, the fighter will never let go of being a fighter:

[...] Anyone who saw him, who followed his career, always calls him a fighter. He is a fighter to the children, to neighbors, he is a fighter in the bus, he is a fighter in nightclubs, wherever he goes he is a fighter. I say this based on something. I started when I was 20 years old and now I'm 74, I never stopped being a fighter, and I will never stop being a fighter (Fighter 5).

However, there are differences between being a fighter and being a professional fighter. Here we have established an important distinction, as Fighter 4 reminds us:

I want to be a fighter until I die and I intend to make myself immortal, because what makes a man immortal is not what he is, but what he does [...]. I intend to be immortal, so I have to do something good. Throughout my life, I intend to be a professional wrestler. And fight professionally, while my mind forces my body to walk, not as while my body gives up. As long as my mind, I repeat, says that my body can do it, I want to fight professionally.

The distinction presented by Fighter 4 links the end of the identity built as a fighter to “carnal death,” and at the same time it incorporates more than being a fighter until he dies. In this regard, aligned to the idea of retirement as the first death of the professional athlete (symbolic death), ceasing to be a fighter also refers to an identity death. So if retirement would represent the first death for some athletes, there may be an attractive path for this fighter, a kind of bridge to immortality, even if it is at the end of a life. As much as life may be perishable, it is in life and through life that it is possible to make the fighter immortal. Realizing these aspects means to note that, in this battle, “[...] even the failure may be acceptable, since the warrior does not abandon his terms”²⁵ (p.138).

Along this way, the bio ascetic practices continue as a key element in the warrior saga, both in regard to physical training (even if less intensive), as in the attention given to the care and commandments that preserve the image in the chosen bioidentity 10,11. The practicing of the self experienced and incorporated by the fighters as valid behavior in the constitution and maintenance of the contemporary warrior refer to “[...] an exercise of the self over oneself through which it is intended to elaborate oneself, transform oneself and achieve a certain way of being.”²⁶ (p.265). In the specific case of the participants in this study, it is in exercising the self over oneself that the fighter forge will take place permanently and it should accompany him throughout life. He will tread a process of self (re) development, transformation and reaching a certain way of being that overcomes physical limits or at least guarantees part of the status acquired at the height of his performances.

Bio identity maintenance in fighters

The attempt to overcome the limitations linked to the fighters’ body decline enforces strategies that can shape the maintenance of the condition acquired along his athlete career. In this relation, the mental capacity should guide and instill maximum control in order to lengthen and/or extend the professional competitor’s working life, as well as to maintain the status the fighter enjoys (will enjoy) and dreams about making immortal. In this context, being a fighter is choosing and appreciating a way of life to be followed, which means accepting and converting himself to the warrior’s faith commandments or, in the words of Wacquant, to the “boxing catechism”¹. It means continuing with their training, because the fighter, in order to continue being a fighter,

[...] (he) has to train, keep training and such, it’s a mentality too, right? Yeah, I think so (Fighter 1).

[...] (he) has to stay on the mat, he has to always be training just like a good football player, he can’t lose to the body. He has to disbelieve and make the body into whatever he wants, or in the sport he wants in the job he wants (Fighter 5).

Moving away from the professional sports practice is, in this context, connected to the possibility of staying in it for as long as possible. Therefore, some practices should be kept and new measures should be adopted so as not to lose control of what is subtly fading (the body). The sacrifice inherent in sporting performance is enhanced as the fate is decided in a moment when bio identity references reach the declining body. In this direction, considering the permanence and maintenance of bioidentity building signs in the combat sport context means not forgetting that traditional masculine representations linked to these ways of being tighten self control and enhance the desire of remaining as the fighter/man being. On this, Fighter 1 highlights the difficulties in accepting the performance decline:

[...] A lot of people fight and such ... I’m serious! There’s that alpha male thing, being the pack chief, being the parade champion. Many people fight because of it. I see examples of this at the gym all the time. When the guy realizes he doesn’t perform anymore, he hates himself, hates his own body for not responding the way he wanted.

Under these masculinity parameters based on violence, power and virility²³, the fighter ways of being are pegged to the value attributed to the best, strongest and most victorious. So knowing when to stop or stopping in the right time become key issues in maintaining a winning image or idol image. Extending this image can also ensure enhanced recognition.

What is more evident in our research field does not refer to the victory and/or defeat in the ring, but is beyond the ring. It is a dispute with themselves (in the ring, on the mat, in training, in life) in favor of maintaining the attributes that were the warrior identity forged in the daily labor⁴ and corresponding bioidentity rituals. To remain a fighter, the subject must train to ensure their stay in the real fighters' world. If he can win in the ring, he goes on for some time; if not, stop being a fighter seems to be the worst of all defeats. It means losing what he has always sought. In this game, fate is once again in the hands of the individual, be it for glory or defeat. The higher the sacrifice, the greater the behavior value. As a consequence, chances of victory in the (self) recognition process increase. We can identify aspects of this analogy in the fighters' statements:

[...] In my latest fight I broke my arm [...]. I had to put platinum pins in my arm. In the first two minutes of the fight, the guy kicked me and broke my arm, then kicked again and smashed it. I had four loose pieces bone in my arm and I kept fighting. [...] I do not stop, no I don't. I'll continue. I fought and I won the fight over that guy (Fighter 1).

I choked on my own blood in a Vale Tudo ring. In former days there was a protective count, like in boxing [...]. In MMA there is no count - there was one in the amateur category - and I said, choking on blood: 'I can't give up, I will fight without breathing' and I won the fight (Fighter 4).

If we agree with Simmel that "[...] all value is derived from the sacrifice it demands, and any object's value is measured by how difficult it was to acquire"²⁷ (p.298-9), the greater the confrontation and challenge, the bigger will be the credits for the effort. In this battle, the fighter needs his body and needs "[...] the body of his opponent to imprint his superiority in his opponent's flesh, to subdue him thereby reaffirming his supremacy (physical or technical), to reward his performance in the ring with victory"⁸ (p.4). Thus, according to Bourdieu, the fighter can share his achievement with his social circle, with "[...] the other athletes of his

confederation because virility has to be validated by other men in its truth as potential or real violence, and has to be certified by the recognition of being part of a real men group."⁸ (p.4).

For the fighters in our research, the "mind" and the will should guide the fighter in the struggle to overcome difficulties, whatever the nature. In the course of their career, the age and the body limitations simultaneously act to deconstruct the fighter identity and allow enhancing the sense of belonging through the signs acquired during practicing. If stepping away from competition, even away from high performance scenario, the desire to be a fighter will guide his way of life. The body, even in decay, still remains a valid target for the efforts of the self. In other words, this is the only fight that cannot be lost. In our research field, data indicate that the elements of valid behaviors for constructing the fighter ethos merge in such a way that, in the analyzed circumstances, are inseparable from an honorable, pleasurable, respectful, dignified conduct, and should be forever. Those principles are essential to the fighter "ethos". They are experienced and transmitted to the apprentices and act as a kind of moral pedagogy as they build to the idea of a hero that incorporates the aspects that are expected of a great man³.

In the process of determining the qualities to be validated throughout the analyzed fighters' life, it is possible to be/keep being a fighter without climbing in the ring, without necessarily being a competitor. However, this depends on certain strategies. This rearranging requires a process of accumulating experience. This path is presented as a way out in the face of a possible body limitation and performance decrease. For this to happen, along the fighter's life he must increase his body/ symbolic capital acquired in the combats and performances³, as well as the experience provided by the fights. In this game, he [...] has to be experienced. [...] He has to decide whether he wants to stay alive in the sport or if he wants to be a champion. If he wants to be world champion, he can risk his life, but if he takes a few fights here and there, and have another project on the side, with discipline [...]. I'll keep fighting (Fighter 3).

Thus, accumulating experience serves both to keep the fighter active in the ring as to increase the symbolic capital that can be (re) converted into his performances as a fighter/trainer/teacher. In the game flow, body capital is still relevant. However, amid its deterioration, the fighter should search for something that allows him to have an advantage in

the group and, if possible, and his knowledge will lead him to the ring again, he will feel all the tension of being there, of being one of them, of being who he really is, even if it is through his students' performance. In this context,

The best working life of an athlete is when he prepares to be a manager, a coach and when he feels happy transmitting his experience because today if he stops fighting, then I'll feel bitter because I stopped fighting [...]. No, it passed but my experience remains (Fighter 2).

This idea is also present in the accounts of Fighters 1 and 5:

I want to be an MMA coach [...]. All right, the guy can coach even though he never fought, but I think it helps having the experience, knowing how it goes, and feeling not only in theory but in practice (Fighter 1).

I even dream of preparing someone to face Anderson Silva [biggest MMA champion today]. I think about that, this idea goes through my head day and night. Every time I turn on the television and it's airing [referring to the fights broadcasting], I dream (Fighter 5).

In our analysis, four of the five fighters that were interviewed, all of them notably in "performance decline," demonstrated connection with the sport in a way that he lengthens and guarantees a livelihood for himself after stepping away from competitions. Thus, through bio ascetic practices in the exercise of the self on himself seeking improvement or maintenance of physical fitness and seeking continuous training, the fighter lives and demonstrates he is following the catechesis of the warrior and that, as much as he is worn, "the dragon still spits fire" (Fighter 4). For the fighters, it will still be valuable when they can no longer continue fighting in competitions, because the value of converting the self into the act of becoming a fighter (all of the investments in himself along his career) may be converted again into a kind of "competence mastery": a process of transmitting the lived experience to those who seek to become fighters. The master, in his wise man condition, is responsible for transmitting the knowledge to his disciple, a knowledge that suits the work related to the manners and traditions necessary to the warrior's practice.

Nevertheless, during the process and development of our analysis, we realized that moving away from competitions, as experienced by many professionals and/or amateur athletes, is a remarkable event in the life of those subjects. However, even with all the

chances of defeat in the face of relentless physical decrepitude, fighters develop strategies to secure part of their combat arsenal as they face the possibility of bioidentity defeat.

In the bioascetic exercise present in the elaborations featured here, enhancing the body and displaying it in the ring gradually gives way to the ability to keep it in use as for as long as possible and, from the perspective of one of the fighters interviewed, he can be remembered for his performances and achievements even after death. During this process of performance degradation and moving away from competitions, it is still necessary to enhance the body. However, the obligation of being a fighter is gradually redefined so that the bodies lasts and offer support to the sacrifices that are inherent in the perpetuation of the warrior.

From field research information, we note that, in addition to the current rules on the fit body, these references are interwoven, they reinforce recognition parameters that already exist, and they define social positions, when considering the fighters. Thus, the attempt to perpetuate the warrior identity is, above all, an attempt to stay alive as a man, to keep representing the group, to carry battle scars, to have history, to be able to teach and be valued for that. Noticing these aspects means paying attention to other values attached to benchmarks of shaping the fighter.

In this analogy, it is possible to note another view of the body, one that participates in the fighter maintenance from accumulated experience. In this sense, the notion of moral pedagogy present in the shaping of the fighters is essential and inseparable from understanding part of this process. It suggests setting the bioidentity benchmarks relating to a type of behavior that is honored, respectful, dignified and, at the same time, supports its perpetuation.

In these "fighting games", we can see that the desire to be who you want to be propels those that build themselves to continue and to spare no efforts to ensure their recognition in a group in which the fighter's ethos dictates boundaries and justifies the attempt to perpetuate the fighter.

So even considering the importance of the body in the fighters' lives, this study did not identify transition from fighter life to former fighter. Advancing age and body wear and tear initially seem to indicate a career ending or encourage fighters to look for another livelihood, but they are not enough for that to happen. The data indicate that references associated to the fighter shaping push him to go on as a fighter, and throughout his identity maintenance path, he

will seek ways to perpetuate the fighter identity, whether in the professional category, or as an amateur or as fighter / coach / teacher. A process characterized by a permanent will to (re) build themselves.

Notes

- a. The veteran fighters who took part in this study are over 38 years old and have been fighting one or more kind of fight sport, for many years.
- b. There are two boxing confederations in the Espírito Santo state. In this sense, people that come from Espírito Santo are called espírito-santense.
- c. Although there is a big age difference between Fighter 5 and the other fighters featured in the research, we did not identify significant differences between the fighters in relation to age. The quest for remaining a fighter seems to lessen this aspect and integrate the explanatory core of interviewees.
- d. In compliance with Deliberation 196/96 from the National Health Council (Conselho Nacional de Saúde - CNS), this work was carried out from the submission of project n. 005/11 to the Research Ethics Committee (Comitê de Ética e Pesquisa - CEP) and subsequent approval.
- e. As emphasized in the introduction, "With aging, the dominant biomedical model defines aging exclusively as decline in adulthood, as a condition, a disease to be treated [...] At the same time, old age is 'rebuilt as a market oriented lifestyle that connects market related youth values to body care techniques that mask the aging appearance' [...] ¹⁰ (p.65). In this direction, our article considers aging and body decline of fighters as connected elements.
- f. Interview to sportv.globo.com²¹. The reference to Wanderley Silva is illustrative only, as it is taken by us only as an example of discussions present in the literature consulted during research.
- g. Usually middle-class and/or upper-class individuals with "free time", which live longer, enjoying financial independence in the "non-productive" stage of life; individuals that found an active lifestyle in sports, opposing to the image of wear and tear, and downtime, that age would once impose²⁸.

Resumo

A forja identitária de lutadores veteranos: além do último "round"

Discute aspectos relacionados com a forja (bio)identitária de praticantes veteranos de esportes de combate na região metropolitana de Vitória, Espírito Santo/ES. A pesquisa se desenvolveu por meio de trabalho empírico, realizando entrevistas semiestruturadas com cinco lutadores com idades entre 38 e 74 anos. Problematiza aspectos recorrentes nos estudos que se dedicaram a mapear os referenciais que participam da construção (bio)identitária de lutadores, assim como aquelas pesquisas que se dedicaram às análises sobre o término da carreira esportiva. Conclui que os lutadores desenvolvem maneiras (alternativas) de manutenção (bio)identitária diante a diminuição do rendimento esportivo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Esportes de combate; Identidades; Corpo; Aposentadoria.

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