

2020 Global Sport Research Conference ASU/UoB – Alex Channon (UoB) Abstracts

Violence, Communities, and the Constitution of the Self through ‘Edgework’ in Mixed Martial Arts

In this paper I outline the ways in which Stephen Lyng’s concept of ‘edgework’ offers a valuable and unique vantage point for making sense of the sport of mixed martial arts (MMA). I propose that theorising this form of fighting as an example of edgework helps clarify the experiences and motivations of its participants within a social-psychological framework that is well-attuned to the extant research literature. In illustrating its potential utility, I focus on how the concept provides a means of addressing the paradoxical problem of ‘violence’ in MMA; that is, in understanding how and why people might engage in ostensibly ‘violent’ activities with those whom they simultaneously claim to respect and admire. I contend that the notion of edgework can be used to reconceptualise the action of MMA as a form of mutually-constructed risk, instead of ‘violence’. Central to this discussion is the importance of collaboration between competitive opponents in MMA, whose purposeful attempts to beat one-another are necessary in order to sustain the activity’s appeal in offering opportunities to experience ‘authentic’ reflexivity, identity construction, and community formation.

Keywords: Combat sport, Edgework, MMA, Violence