

Manifesto

Love Fighting Hate Violence (LFHV) is a campaign aiming to raise awareness of the important moral difference between sport-based combat, and violence. It seeks to encourage practitioners and fans of martial arts and combat sports to reflect on this distinction, and to encourage various forms of anti-violence action within and through their different disciplines.

This manifesto aims to clarify some of the central ideas and objectives of LFHV. It outlines the reasoning behind the campaign, points to the general spirit of what we hope it can achieve, and also hints at some ways it could be put into practice.

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'FIGHTING' AND 'VIOLENCE',
AND WHY LOVE ONE BUT HATE THE OTHER?**

When we try to understand what is meant by 'violence' in the context of combat sports, martial arts, and related activities, it is vital to consider the relationships people form within them, and how these relationships shape the experience of apparently 'violent' actions. Here, the issues of violation, consent and respect are key to grasping what should – and should not – be counted as violence.

While many people refer to (for example) boxing or mixed martial arts as 'violent sports', we argue that this phrase is misleading. While these activities involve actions which might be defined as 'violent' in everyday life, they are most often – although not always – experienced and understood differently by their practitioners. This is because they are performed in ways which do not actually violate what boxers, martial artists, etc. consent to.

Clearly, people do not enter boxing matches or engage in sparring without expecting – and thus consenting – to being hit in certain ways, and with specific degrees of force, by an opponent or partner. They should, however, enter into such exchanges in a spirit of respect for one another's boundaries, as laid out by the rules or norms of their discipline, and with a view to fair competition or mutually beneficial learning.

Indeed, many people who train in such activities embrace the experience of punching, kicking, throwing and grappling. Generally speaking, they accept the risks involved and understand that this physicality is central to the personal development that martial arts and combat sports can offer. Therefore, far from being a violation, being hit by another person may in fact be something that practitioners want to happen to them.

Compare this to types of hitting, throwing, etc. that might take place outside of martial arts and combat sports, or indeed, to that which takes place outside of what is considered acceptable within them. When a person does not consent to being punched or kicked but is hit anyway, then the relationship between the people involved is clearly very different, and so too is the experience of being on the receiving end of that treatment.

Such actions do not constitute mutually respectful competition, and neither are they likely to involve attempts to help or support each other's learning or development. Striking someone who does not consent to being hit denies them the right to set and maintain personal boundaries. It is disempowering, demeaning and oppressive. In other words, it violates them as a person; it is 'violent'.

This distinction might seem unimportant if all we care to consider are the physical effects of being hit. Of course, while much training or competitive fighting might involve relatively minimal risk, it is possible that more physical damage could be done to a person's body through tough sparring or competitive fighting than in a relatively light physical altercation 'on the street', for instance.

But this does not change the fact that consenting participation in fighting activities is experienced and understood very differently to such violence by the people who are engaged in them. Despite its physical risks, what we describe here as 'fighting' is entered into voluntarily and in a spirit of mutual respect, unlike violence, which is forced upon a person and carried out with no regard for their wishes.

Therefore, when figuring out where 'fighting' ends and 'violence' begins, the relationship between the people involved matters more than the physical actions themselves, whether these take place 'in the ring', 'on the street', or anywhere else. These are the key points of difference which underpin the LFHV message – what is described here as 'fighting' is built on consent and respect, while 'violence' involves the violation of another person.

**WHY SHOULD THIS DIFFERENCE BE DISCUSSED,
AND WHAT GOOD CAN TALKING ABOUT IT DO?**

We believe that understanding where and how people draw boundaries in their relationships with others is a crucial aspect of living a healthy, moral life. By training in, and/or watching martial arts and combat sports, we come close to one such boundary – that which exists between fighting and violence. Because of this, people experienced within this field have a unique and valuable form of knowledge that is worth developing and sharing.

By learning about and reflecting on what makes up the difference between ‘fighting’ and ‘violence’, we can help people to think about how they can avoid or challenge violence within martial arts and combat sports, as well as elsewhere in their lives. We want LFHV to become a resource to help people do this.

Although martial arts and combat sports are regularly claimed to help people learn lessons we have associated here with ‘fighting’, rather than to do ‘violence’, sadly this is not always the case. It would be naïve to suggest that training always gives people a sound appreciation of consent and violation, teaches them to be respectful of all others, or otherwise works in such very positive ways.

Additionally, watching combat sports may be understood by some as a ‘celebration of violence’, rather than a showcase of athleticism, determination and skill. Indeed, it is often the case that the marketing of competitive fighting events creates an impression that these are fundamentally violent activities. This can lead to a harmful misrepresentation of the athletes involved in them, and distorts the potentially positive meaning of martial artistry in the process.

Because of this, we believe that an initiative like LFHV can be useful in helping martial arts instructors, combat sport promoters, and others work towards ensuring a more positive social value for these activities. Specifically, it provides a clear moral framework which can be used to directly promote non-violent values through or alongside physical training and competition.

We intend that this kind of discussion will lead to the development of practical steps to challenge violent behaviour in its various forms. This might involve building or further developing various anti-violence teaching methods in martial arts classes, but could also include anti-violence advocacy by combat sport athletes, wider awareness-raising regarding various anti-violence initiatives, or related charitable work which builds on the platform provided by LFHV's message.

Lastly, while we do not believe that there is a specific 'problem' concerning violence within combat sports or martial arts, we are sensitive to the fact that such a stereotype does exist. Particularly following high-profile cases of violent crimes committed by combat sport athletes, shadows are often cast over all others training or competing in similar disciplines. This distorts public perceptions of these activities and unfairly stigmatises other people involved in them.

Therefore, while not the primary aim of LFHV, we hope that the campaign will challenge this sort of misconception, in addition to advocating against the commission of violent acts to begin with. Because of this, we imagine LFHV will be valued by governing bodies of martial arts, promoters of combat sports, and others who stand to gain from spreading the message at its heart.

FURTHER READING

The ideas developed above are based on Dr Alex Channon's and Dr Christopher R. Matthews' personal involvement within combat sports, as well as many reflective discussions with academic and professional colleagues. In addition, the message of LFHV is informed by various research projects undertaken by Drs Channon and Matthews both together and separately. A selection of this research is listed below, and more work can be accessed online *here* and *here*.

Channon, A. (2013) *'Do you hit girls?' Some striking moments in the career of a male martial artist*. In R. Sánchez García and D.C. Spencer (eds.) *Fighting Scholars: Ethnographies of Habitus in Martial Arts and Combat Sports*, London: Anthem, pp.95-110.

Channon, A. and Matthews, C.R. (eds.) (2015) *Global Perspectives on Women in Combat Sports: Women Warriors around the World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (NB – see *here* for editors' introduction chapter).

Matthews, C.R. and Channon, A. (2016). *Understanding sports violence: Revisiting foundational explorations*. *Sport in Society*, online first, doi: 10.1080/17430437.2016.1179735

Matthews, C.R. and Channon, A. (2016). *'It's only sport': The symbolic neutralisation of 'violence'*. *Symbolic Interaction*, in press.