Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) was either an unknown or a controversial sport for most Swedes when this project started back in 2007. Media talked about “death galas” that were glorifying violence while the supporters said it helped youth stay out of the streets. Since then MMA has undergone gigantic steps forward through a sportive legitimization process.

Today MMA is widely spread around the world. In Sweden there are more than a hundred MMA clubs and a lot of mainly male practitioners who train, compete or just use the sport as workout. Elite trained athletes enter fighting tournaments and earn a living on the sport. Still questioned by medics and others MMA can be seen as a supermodern gladiator game.

In this thesis the author explores the everyday world of mixed martial arts practice. Two of the investigated topics are the controlled and performative violence in the fights and the bodily constructions of gender among male (and even female) practitioners. The study is based on more than three years of intensive ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation in the gyms and interviews with the fighters. What does it mean to be a MMA fighter? What makes this fast growing sport so attractive?

Magnus Stenius is a researcher in ethnology at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University. His research focuses on embodied ethnographic methods, masculinity, violence and body culture. This is his thesis.