

Crimes against non-human animals: Examining dog fighting in the UK and the USA through a green criminology perspective

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Abstract

This article reviews the social scientific literature published between the late 1990s and 2021 on the illegal 'sport' of dog fighting in the UK and USA. Adopting a green criminological perspective, it argues that studying dog fighting is important for understanding the ways in which this form of animal cruelty contributes to a range of social and animal harms. The review is structured in five sections. The first situates the review theoretically by introducing key ideas within green criminology that will inform the discussion. The next section presents a typology of the different levels of dog fighting in both countries. The third section then explores both the motivations of contemporary dog fighters, as well as the justifications they deploy to defend their 'sport' to outsiders. The fourth section then adopts a green criminological perspective to explore the various social and animal harms associated with dog fighting. The final section then brings the threads of the discussion together and highlights some directions for future research.

KEYWORDS

animal fighting, animal harms, companion animal harms, dog fighting, green criminology

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The 'sport' of animal fighting has a history stretching back at least to the ancient world with fighting dogs being mentioned in Roman texts and the first recorded cock fight occurring in China in 517 BC. In England, bear- and bull-baiting can be traced back to the eleventh and thirteenth century respectively, where, alongside hunting, they were a form of entertainment for the nobility and gentry. Over time, however, baiting was increasingly taken up by commoners, with a particular breed of dog—so-called bulldogs—starting to be bred during the latter sixteenth- and early-seventeenth centuries specifically for the purpose of bull-baiting. Throughout the period, baiting was criticised by the Church, largely because it took place on the Sabbath, and during the Commonwealth it was banned alongside a number of other activities. During the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries, as rural populations moved to cities, the popularity of baiting declined with dogfighting replacing it as the predominant form of animal fighting among the emerging industrial working class. It was also during this period that dogfighting emigrated to the United States with British settlers (Evans & Forsyth, 1997; Harding & Nurse, 2015; Ortiz, 2010; Semencic, 1984). (Add a sentence here to highlight the harm involved and how review essay will explore this understudied phenomenon.)

Dog fighting has been illegal in England and Wales since 1835 and in the United States since 1975.¹ Nevertheless, as a largely hidden crime, it retains a degree of illicit popularity among professional 'dogmen', hobbyists and informal street fighters. This article aims to shed light on this understudied phenomenon by examining the manifestations, motivations, and harms of dog fighting through a green criminology perspective.² The review will argue that studying dog fighting is important for understanding the ways in which this form of animal cruelty contributes to a range of social and animal harms. Dog fighting is a form of animal cruelty that can not only result in physical and psychological harm to the dogs involved, but is also associated with numerous social harms too, such as illegal gambling, drug trafficking, organised crime as well as antisocial behaviour and gang activity. To this end, the article will be structured in five sections. The first will situate the review theoretically by introducing key ideas within green criminology that will inform the discussion, specifically the concepts of harm, non-speciesism and species justice. The next section will then begin the review itself by presenting a typology of the different levels or types of contemporary dog fighting found in the UK and USA. In doing so, it will explore how they differ in terms of frequency, level of organisation, visibility, participants, and the nature of the fight itself. Following on from this, the third section will explore both the motivations of contemporary dog fighters, as well the justifications that they deploy to defend their 'sport' to (often critical) outsiders. The fourth section will adopt a green criminological perspective to explore the various harms of dog fighting for society in general and, not least, for the fighting dogs themselves. The final section will then conclude by bringing together the threads of the analysis and highlighting some directions for future research.

1.1 | Green criminology and dog fighting

Although dog fighting is illegal in both the UK and USA, prosecution and conviction rates in both countries are very low³ and it is often perceived as a victimless crime. As a consequence, it is typically of marginal interest to mainstream criminologists. An alternative, and much more fruitful lens to study dog fighting, however, may be found within the emerging field of green criminology. As a subfield of criminology, green criminology is concerned with the study of environmental harms and crimes, including both illegal activities such as pollution, wildlife trafficking, and illegal logging as well as ostensibly legal but harmful activities such as hunting, the legal trade in animals, or even the killing of non-human animals for food or sport (Nurse, 2016b). While there is some debate among green criminologists over whether 'crimes' (and thus a strictly legal approach) or the broader conception of 'harms' should be the focus of attention, the majority of those working in the area focus on the latter. Green criminology thus focuses on "...those harms against humanity, against the environment...and against non-human animals committed by both powerful institutions...and also by ordinary people" (Beirne & South, 2007, p. xiii).

Green criminology provides a particularly useful approach for framing dog fighting for two main reasons. The first obvious reason is that green criminology is concerned with harms inflicted upon non-human animals, such as dogs.

In contrast to mainstream criminology, green criminology adopts an overtly non-speciesist perspective; a rejection of the human-centric view that non-human animals and their concerns are inferior and secondary to humans and theirs (for discussions, see Beirne & South, 2007; Nurse, 2021; White & Heckenberg, 2014). Thus, whereas mainstream criminology, if it examined dog fighting at all, would be concerned with its relationship with human harms/crimes - such as the involvement of organised criminals - green criminology, in contrast, is also concerned with the various harms inflicted upon the dogs themselves through the 'sport'.

Linked to this, green criminology is also committed to the notion of species justice: the contention that, as sentient beings, non-human animals should also be considered alongside humans as potential victims of crime. Whereas non-human animals are often considered as the 'property' of humans (such as being their 'pets'), a species justice perspective instead contends that, at the very least, humans have a duty of care towards non-human animals and, some would argue, that they should have rights comparable to humans (Nurse, 2016a; White & Heckenberg, 2014). This involves not just seeking to avoid unnecessary suffering in non-human animals by setting minimum standards of care and prohibiting certain forms of cruel behaviour, but actively promoting animal welfare. This may be seen in the previously discussed UK Animal Welfare Act (2006), which makes owners responsible for "ensur(ing) that the needs of an animal for which he is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice" (9:1). These needs, in turn are defined, as a suitable environment, diet, "to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns", "to be housed with, or apart from, other animals", and "to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease" (9:2) (for a discussion, see Nurse, 2016a).

Having briefly introduced green criminology and explored why dog fighting is of interest to this emerging area of study, the following sections will now discuss the social scientific literature on dog fighting in the UK and USA. The review will first provide a typology of the levels and characteristics of those involved with dog fighting, before exploring both their motivations for doing so and the rationalisations that they offer to explain their involvement to others. Finally, it will highlight the various social and animal harms associated with the 'sport'.

2 | A TYPOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY DOG FIGHTING

Initial research by the Humane Society of the United States identified three levels of contemporary dog fighting: off the chain fights by young males who are often gang affiliated; hobbyists or enthusiasts; and, finally, professional dogmen. These levels are, however, fluid and, as will be seen, there are overlaps between the latter two. There is also the possibility that those in the first two levels may 'graduate' into the next level (Harding & Nurse, 2015). Moreover, although this typology was developed to understand the dog fighting scene in the United States, Harding (2012) has concluded that it is also applicable to the scene in the UK.

2.1 | Level one: Street fights/rolls

The first level of dog fighting found in the UK and USA are informal, and largely impromptu, fights where two dogs are simply squared against each other by their owners. Such fights—or 'rolls'—likely occur on a daily basis and take place in local parks and housing estates in disadvantaged housing estates/inner city areas. As such, in contrast to the other levels of fighting, they are relatively visible occurrences—taking place in public view—albeit being observed by those who, for various reasons, may be reluctant to report them to the authorities. They are typically arranged on the spot and, in contrast to the other levels of fighting discussed below, there are no agreed-upon rules or a referee present. Rather, the two dogs are either let 'off the chain' or remain tethered while they fight, typically for a few minutes. There will also be no 'purse' per se for the winning owner, although small bets may take place between participants. At most, the owner of the winning dog will receive bragging rights for being the owner of the dog in question. Those involved in such fights as owners and audience are typically young males in their teens or early twenties who may be

gang affiliated. Consequently, the dogs may also be used in criminal enterprises or as a form of protection. In contrast to dog fighters at the next two levels, they will typically have little knowledge of—or interest in—their dog's lineage or breed, or how to train and care for them. Rather, they are attracted to such dogs simply because of their reputation, size and aggressiveness (Harding & Nurse, 2015; Lawson, 2017; University of Chicago Survey Lab, 2008).⁴

2.2 | Level two: Hobbyists/enthusiasts

The second level of dog fighting, by hobbyists, enthusiasts or 'fanciers', are likely to occur every few weeks. Such fights are more organised than the impromptu ones discussed above and they also typically somewhat less visible, occurring in more hidden urban or rural locations, such as lockups, abandoned buildings, or, in some cases, converted bedrooms or garages/outbuildings. Likewise, fights are organised on a local fighting circuit, rather than an ad hoc basis, and will attract a small invited audience of friends and family. In these ways, hobbyists are more akin to professional dogmen than those who fight their dogs in the street. Like professional dogmen, hobbyists are likely to be knowledgeable about their dog and the breed itself, as well as about how to 'train' dogs for fights. Moreover, as will be discussed below, both the nature of the fight itself and the attendant preparations at this level will approximate those found at the professional level, albeit with some differences (Harding & Nurse, 2015; Lawson, 2017; University of Chicago Survey Lab, 2008).

2.3 | Level three: Professional dogmen

Professional dog fights typically occur every few months in hidden locations and are by invitation only; the fights being promoted through trusted networks. Such fights are highly organised and will attract owners from across the UK and possibly from overseas. The number of participants at such fights ranges from between 10 and 50 in the UK, although in the USA up to two hundred persons may be present. According to Smith (2011, p. 342) dog fighting at this level in the UK is best characterised as an ecosystem of economic reciprocity involving three main groups of people alongside organisers and middlemen. First there is the 'gambling fraternity', consisting mainly of "middle class rogue businessmen and entrepreneurs who attend as a diversion", and who place bets on the outcome of the fight. Second, there is the 'criminal fraternity, consisting of "working and underclass men, including travellers, thieves, drug dealers and gangsters", who not only train the dogs but benefit from a venue wherein they can conduct illegal activities. Finally, there are "a mix of rogue farmers and rural working class men' who provide venues for fights.

Professional 'dogmen' represent the elite of the 'sport', and consequently invest significant sums of money in buying, training and fighting dogs, organising and promoting fights. They are also highly knowledgeable about the breed, as well as about training regimes and the rules of dog fighting. In contrast to street fighters' simple concern with the look and aggressiveness of their dogs, professional dogmen work only with dogs with a reputable bloodline. Moreover, as Evans and Forsyth (1998) have noted in the case of professional dogmen in the USA, they will also feel a keen sense of connection to the history and traditions of their 'sport' and to famous dogmen from the past.

Although, as will be discussed below, the fight itself and the attendant preparations are similar for both 'hobbyists' and 'professionals', the latter differs from the former in significant ways. While both will train their dogs prior to the fight, professional dogmen may use the services of an experienced trainer. Either the owner or the trainer will utilise a training regime codified by professional dogmen since the nineteenth century. Likewise, there are likely to be a larger number of both spectators and participants at a professional fight, such as a referee and timekeeper, yard boys to set up the pit and gofer during the fight, a video maker, and a 'street surgeon' to 'patch up' injured dogs to fight again. The purse at a professional fight is also likely to be significantly higher at a professional level, and owners of dogs from successful lineages can also profit substantially from stud fees. Lockwood (2012), for example, claims that between \$20,000 and \$30,000 may change hands in a single fight, with \$500,000 being seized by US authorities

raiding major fights. The League Against Cruel Sports (nd) also states that £100,000s are wagered at professional UK dog fights. In both cases, however, hobbyists and professionals will ensure that the fight takes place according to strict rules, again codified over a number of years (see Semencic, 1984, pp. 29–47) (Harding & Nurse, 2015; Lawson, 2017; University of Chicago Survey Lab, 2008).

2.4 | Old/new school dog fighting

Another way of framing the forms of contemporary dog fighting in both countries is to make a distinction between 'old' and 'new' school fighters. This distinction is cited by professional dogmen to distinguish themselves from the younger dogfighters, such as those found at Level One, who, they claim, are merely 'thugs' who not only challenge the traditions of the 'sport', but who are also more overtly linked with criminal behaviour. In both countries, this distinction corresponds to a split in age and ethnicity: whereas professional dogmen are typically older and white, the newer dog fighters are younger and members of ethnic minorities. In the UK, for example, there is some evidence to suggest that since the early 2000s younger members of the Pakistani community have become increasingly involved in dog fighting, either importing and breeding Bully Kuttas from Pakistan or fighting with pit bulls like their white peers. In 2009, for example, a BBC Radio 4 documentary warned that dog fighting had "become a problem in some sections of the Asian community", with the chief inspector of the RSPCA's Special Operations Unit claiming that "Out of all the work we do 98% is Asian" (Basse, 2009:np). Indeed, one youth worker in Birmingham alleged that there was a close relationship between spectators in the UK and Pakistan, with some travelling from the UK to watch dog fights or even owning fighting dogs in that country, paying locals to look after them. The documentary also suggested that dog fighting could be becoming more acceptable among this community because family members are known to attend such fights in Pakistan (on rural dog fighting in Pakistan, see Kavesh, 2021).

3 | MOTIVATIONS AND RATIONALISATIONS

A number of motivations have been suggested for why persons, particularly young males, engage in dog fighting. On one level, some owners might welcome the sense of control and purpose that they achieve from training their dog to fight. Others may see the ownership of such a dog as a transgressive act: one that is not only illegal, but which subverts dominant cultural understandings of dogs as wholesome family pets. Others still may want to project their own aggression and express their oppositional status by owning an aggressive dog or want to belong to a deviant subculture. Professional dog fighters may also be attracted to 'the sport' because of its traditions and culture, or for the financial and reputational incentives of owning winning dogs (see Evans & Forsyth, 1997 for a discussion). Within the literature, however, there are the two dominant explanations offered for both the appeal of such dogs and for dog fighting.

The first explanation, that has been offered to account primarily for those at level one, is the desire for status/street capital and/or to appear tough. Drawing on subcultural criminology (see Cohen, 1955), it has been argued that young people, particularly those from deprived backgrounds for whom conventional routes to status and respect are effectively closed off, may be attracted to status dogs and to dog fighting because of the status that such dogs can accrue to their owner within their milieu (Harding, 2012). Kalof and Taylor, for example, have argued that among gang members in urban areas,

...ownership of menacing dogs [are] indicative of high self-esteem, macho imagery and gangster mentality...For those who own fighting dogs, the animals are used as extensions of social status, as

symbols of masculine power, as tools to intimidate others, and as weapons for the protection of property and illicit drug activities.

(Kalof & Taylor, 2007, p. 327)

Indeed, they go on, for such persons “a brave, ferocious, winning dog reflects positively on his owner and, as a ‘trophy animal’ is similar to the ‘trophy wife,’ the prized possession that is displayed over and over again as a symbol of the owner’s status” (ibid). Likewise, in its research on dog fighting in Chicago, the University of Chicago Survey Lab (2008, p. 10) concluded “...that the desire to appear tough and gain street credibility motivated these respondents to pursue dog fighting even though they were initially turned off by it”. In addition, they found that dog fighting was also used as a means of resolving conflicts among gang members, as a means of earning money, and as a way of competing against their peers. Last, but by no means least, dog fighting provided excitement in lives where there is very little else to escape from everyday monotony.

The second, overlapping explanation sees dog fighting as a means of expressing and validating masculinity, particularly, again, among those whose access to conventional routes for doing so are closed off. For some young males, ownership of a dog that is condemned by society confers upon both them and their dogs an ‘outlaw’ status that can, in turn, enhance their sense of masculinity among their peers (Nurse, 2021). Alonso-Recarte (2020), for example, has explored the ways in which both the pit bull breed and dog fighting are deployed within gangster rap as a means of expressing a counter-cultural and Black hyper-masculine identity. Within this context, she argues, pit bulls “...are portrayed as creatures of the aggressive inner-city environment, the dog-eat-dog domain that normalises violence and the male’s compulsive need to gain respect” (Alonso-Recarte, 2020, p. 854). Similarly, Angus Nurse (2021) has analysed dog fighting as an example of what he terms an ‘organised masculinities-based animal harm’; a form of animal harm that is fundamentally bound up with cultural understandings of masculinity.

The most detailed discussion of the link between masculinity and dog fighting, however, has been provided by Rhonda Evans and her colleagues in their ethnographic work from the late 1990s on professional dogmen in Louisiana. Drawing on the notion of the ‘Southern code of honour’ (see Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), they argue that dog fighting represents a symbolic attempt to attain and maintain masculine status and honour. This, they suggest, is especially important for working class males, particularly those enmeshed within an honour culture that equates manhood with “masculine courage, physical strength, and warrior virtue” who are denied avenues for achieving status and validating their masculinity in the increasingly post-industrial workforce (Evans et al., 1998, p. 348). For dogmen, dog fighting thus represents an arena where they can compete for other men for status; where “...the actual combatants serve as symbols of their respective owners, and therefore any character attributed to the dogs is also attributed to the men they represent...If the dogs behave as heroes, then the men must be heroes also” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 348). This may best be exemplified by the way in which dogs who refuse to fight or act in what is seen to be a cowardly way during the fight are routinely killed afterwards by their owners. Although dogmen claim that such ‘curs’ are killed so that their ‘poor’ character will not be passed onto their offspring, Evans and her colleagues point out that this could easily be achieved through neutering. Rather, they argue, these dogs are killed because within the dog fighting milieu they reflect badly upon their owners. Indeed, the quick, and often violent dispatch of the dog in question by the owner can be seen as a means by which they can reassert their masculinity.⁵

Drawing on the work of Sykes and Matza (1957), Evans and her colleagues have also explored the ‘techniques of neutralisation’ used by dogmen to rationalise their ‘sport’ to outsiders, and also possibly to themselves. Primarily, they adopt the technique of ‘denial of injury’, claiming that the dogs are natural fighters who are bred for fighting, and who actually ‘enjoy’ fighting. Consequently, any attempt to deny them the opportunity to fight, is to deny them the ability to express their natural instincts. Second, they also ‘condemn the condemners’, by arguing that dog fighting is no more sadistic than, say, boxing; a sport that is both legal and has a degree of popular support. Extending this, they portray themselves as akin to sports coaches, who merely train their ‘athletes’ to compete against others. Third, they ‘appeal to higher loyalties’, by emphasising the long history and traditions of the ‘sport’ and their loyalty to other dogmen, both past and present, and claiming that those who participate are in fact reputable members of society.

Finally, and echoing the previous point, they claim that, far from the inhumane criminals portrayed by proponents of dog fighting, 'we are good people' (Evans & Forsyth, 1997).

4 | DOG FIGHTING AS SOCIAL AND ANIMAL HARM

Dog fighting is a cruel and inhumane activity that is associated with a variety of social and animal harms. Turning first to the social harms, an extensive body of research has highlighted the ways in which animal cruelty is linked with interpersonal violence either in terms of an offender 'progressing' from animal to human violence or by it being part of a wider pattern of violence and criminal behaviour. To give some examples, research has found that animal cruelty is often a predictor and/or associated with domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, bullying, juvenile delinquency, violence and other forms of criminality (for reviews of the literature, see In Linzey, 2009; Flynn, 2011). In terms of dog fighting, Ortiz has argued that children either attending dog fights or being raised in an environment where it occurs can both negatively impact their development and lead them to become violent adults. As one Minnesota Attorney she cites puts it: "Not only are (children who attend dog fights) taught to take pleasure in the pain of a creature, but they are taught that their affection for a being is expendable". Moreover, "...the fact that children see adults engaging in the activity lends a certain aura of permissibility to the event" (Ortiz, 2010, p. 43, p. 49).

More specifically, dog fighting in both the UK and USA is also associated with a number of other social harms, ranging from organised crime, and illegal gambling to youth gangs and antisocial behaviour (Gibson, 2005; Harding, 2012; Smith, 2011).⁶ Although the dogmen in the USA studied by Evans and her colleagues discussed above insist that they are 'good people' and law abiding citizens, Harding (2012, p. 167) argues that "criminal connections are characteristic of those involved in dog fighting, both in the UK and the US". For example, research in Chicago in the early 2000s found that over a 3-year period, 86% of those involved in dogfighting as either dogmen or spectators had two previous arrests, 70% had previously committed felonies, and 59% were members of gangs (Ortiz, 2010). Likewise, in the UK, 92% and 63% of those arrested for dog fighting offences in Merseyside and the West Midlands respectively again in the early 2000s had criminal convictions (Harding & Nurse, 2015).

Equally importantly, dog fighting also entails a variety of harms and welfare issues for the dogs themselves. Dog fighting at all three levels discussed above is characterised by a combination of active and passive abuse that in many cases leaves the dogs in question severely injured if not dead. Dogs bred for fighting routinely undergo harmful procedures to prepare them for when they fight, such as the docking of their ears and tail to prevent their opponent gaining purchase, thus encouraging them to go for the neck, and also to make it difficult for them to signal aggression. They may also have their teeth filed to a point to make them more dangerous to their opponent, as well as being administered various legal and illegal drugs in order to enhance their physique and aggression. Indeed, even their conception may be achieved through violence with the use of what is called a breeding stand - or 'rape stand' - to hold their mother in place while she is mounted by a stud (Harding, 2012; Lawson, 2017).

Before a fight, particularly at levels two and three, a dog is put through an intense period of training—referred to as 'the keep'—that is, again, characterised by active abuse towards them. For example, the dog may in some cases be starved in order to increase aggression or follow a prescribed diet in order to reach/maintain their fighting weight. Diuretics may also be utilised to ensure this outcome. The dog may also be trained in a room kept especially hot in order to get them used to fighting in the hot environment of the fight pit, or spend hours on long walks or running on a treadmill to improve stamina. Another common training strategy is for them to hang from a tyre with their jaws, possibly with weights attached to them, in order to improve both their grip and upper body strength. Although there is little direct evidence to support the assertion, it is also believed that some owners will use 'bait animals in order to 'blood' the dog and prepare them to kill their opponent during the actual fight. Such bait animals can include small animals as well as, potentially, dogs that have either been stolen or obtained from breeders naively offering them for free or a low price 'to a good home' (Gibson, 2005; Harding, 2012; Harding & Nurse, 2015).

Finally, there is the fight itself. As discussed above, at level one, this will involve very little in the way of an organised fighting space; the dogs will simply be squared off against each other. However, at levels two and three,

fights will take place in a constructed fighting pit, although fights can also take place inside sunken garage repair bays, in abandoned swimming pools or, indeed, even in converted rooms in dwellings. The dogs will be placed in the pit accompanied by their handler behind a 'scratch line' in what is, to use a boxing image, their 'corner'. The handlers will then be instructed to 'face' and then 'loose' their dogs and the fight then commences, continuing until one dog turns away from its owner. At this point, both dogs return to their corner, rest briefly, and then are re-engaged. The fight ends either when one dog refuses to engage its opponent or is too exhausted or injured to continue. Not surprisingly, the injuries that dogs can receive while fighting can be horrific, if not fatal. Consequently, dogmen either attempt to 'patch up' their dogs themselves using whatever makeshift means they have, or seek the services of a 'street surgeon'. Alternatively, as discussed above, some owners will simply kill their dog; the dog paying with its life for its 'failure' to fight as expected (Gibson, 2005; Harding, 2012; Harding & Nurse, 2015).

5 | CONCLUSION

This article has briefly reviewed the social scientific literature on dog fighting in the UK and USA. It has presented a typology of contemporary dog fighting in both countries, showing how such fights range from ad hoc street fights through to professional fights, organised secretly and involving rules and a wider set of actors. It has also explored both the motivations and rationalisations for dog fighting, highlighting in particular the role of masculinity and desire for status/street credibility as important considerations at all three levels of fighting. Street fighters, hobbyists and professionals all use their dogs as proxies for their own masculinity: their dogs' heroism, tenacity and fighting prowess hopefully reflecting back upon themselves. At all three levels, successful dogs also confer status upon their owners, whether in the eyes of the small number of typically young males watching a street fight or within an organised fighting circuit/milieu. Indeed, a suitably aggressive dog can be the route to enhanced status in the latter for hobbyists. Recognising that their 'sport' is both illegal and socially disapproved, like other criminals, professional dogmen also deploy several 'techniques of neutralisation', such as claiming that their dogs are bred to fight or that their dogs actually enjoy fighting. Crucially, they also emphasise that they are 'good people' and not inhumane or members of a criminal underclass. Finally, adopting a green criminological perspective, the article then explored the variety of harms associated with dog fighting. Central to this section, was the argument that, while it is important to consider, for example, how forms of animal abuse such as dog fighting may lead to violence against humans or be linked with other harms that impact on society, it is no less important from a non-speciesist perspective to consider the multiple harms that dog fighting brings to the dogs themselves. From being conceived at a 'rape stand', through makeshift surgery to improve their fighting abilities and 'the keep', to, finally, the violence and potentially brutal death that await them in the fight, these dogs have led a life in which they have been brutalised by both active and passive abuse at the hands of humans.

There are as yet a number of gaps in our knowledge of dog fighting that could be filled by future research. Obvious ethical and legal issues preclude observational research of dog fighting milieus by academics in both the UK and USA. While research such as that of Rhonda Evans and her colleagues in the USA in the 1990s revealed much about the culture of 'dogmen', most notably the role of masculinity in the dog fighting milieu, such research would be unlikely to receive approval by ethical review panels now and would also involve a variety of risks for researchers themselves. This would particularly be the case for any research exploring the links between organised crime and dog fighting. Any further research in the area must therefore rely on the expertise and experiences of those whose work intersects with the consequences of dog fighting, such as animal welfare charities or criminal justice agencies. One area worthy of future study is the alleged growing popularity of dog fighting among members of the UK Pakistani community, particularly in terms of international networks of dog fighters. Research on dog fighting in other countries outside of Europe and the United States would add a further comparative dimension to the literature on the topic (see Kavesh, 2021), as would work, again, on international networks of dog fighters and breeders. Finally, more work is definitely needed evaluating criminal justice efforts to combat dog fighting. As noted in the introduction, comparatively few persons are arrested and successfully prosecuted for offences linked with dog fighting in either

the UK or USA. Research in this area could evaluate, among other things, the impact of legislation and policies aimed at combating dog fighting as well as the effectiveness of multi-agency responses (such as in the UK, the RSPCA and the police) in responding to the 'sport'. Such research would serve to both identify forms of good practice and hopefully feed into better responses to tackling dog fighting in both countries.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Dog fighting may be defined as "the act of baiting two dogs against each other for entertainment or gain. It involves placing two dogs in a pit until one either quits or dies (Evans et al., 1998, p. 358). The type of dogs commonly used in such fights are in the UK and USA are usually pitbull breeds or similar, such as the American Pit Bull Terrier, although worldwide there are a number of different breeds of fighting dogs, such as the Fila Brasileiro, Dogo Argentino, the Japanese Tosa, or the Presa Canario.

Dog Fighting was banned in the UK under the Cruelty to Animals Act (1835: 5 and 6 William 4 c.59), which also banned cockfighting and prohibited the keeping of premises for baiting sports. At the time of writing, there is no specific crime of 'dog fighting' in the UK. Rather, it is contained within broader animal welfare legislation, specifically several sections of the Animal Welfare Act (2006). A person commits an offence under Section 4(1) of this Act if, either through an action or failing to act, they cause unnecessary suffering in an animal for which they are responsible (or where they are supervising another person). Section 6 of the Act covers tail docking, and makes it an offence for a person to remove or cause to be removed any part of a dog's tail for any purpose other than medical treatment. Section covers dog fighting specifically. According to Section 8:1 of the Act, a person commits an offence if he:

- (a) causes an animal fight to take place, or attempts to do so;
- (b) knowingly receives money for admission to an animal fight;
- (c) knowingly publicises a proposed animal fight;
- (d) provides information about an animal fight to another with the intention of enabling or encouraging attendance at the fight;
- (e) makes or accepts a bet on the outcome of an animal fight or on the likelihood of anything occurring or not occurring in the course of an animal fight;
- (f) takes part in an animal fight;
- (g) has in his possession anything designed or adapted for use in connection with an animal fight with the intention of its being so used;
- (h) keeps or trains an animal for use for in connection with an animal fight;
- (i) keeps any premises for use for an animal fight.

A person also commits an offence if without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, he is either present at an animal fight (8:2) or knowingly supplies, publishes, shows or possesses a video recording of an animal fight (8:3). Finally, Section 9 concerns the duty of care of a person responsible for animal welfare - see main body text for a discussion (see <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents>). In addition, The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 bans the possession, breeding, sale/exchange of fighting dogs such as the pit bull terrier or Japanese Tosa (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/section/1>) (For a detailed discussion of the UK legislation, see Harding & Nurse, 2015).

In the USA, the Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act 2007 (H.R. 137) imposes either a fine and/or a prison term of up to 3 years for '(1) sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in an animal fighting venture; (2) buying, selling, transporting, delivering, or receiving for purposes of transportation, in interstate or foreign commerce, any dog or other animal for participation in an animal fighting venture; and (3) using the mails or other instrumentality of interstate commerce to promote or further an animal fighting venture' (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/137>). The Animal Fighting Spectator Act (H.R. 366), contained within the Farm Bill 2014, also makes it an offence to attend an animal fighting venture and/or take a minor to such a venture (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/366>).

² The review is based on English-language social science sources discussing dogfighting published between 1997 and 2021. The literature search involved two stages. Primarily, the author conducted a search using the keyword 'dog fighting' as

well as its variations on several databases such as his University's electronic journal database and Google Scholar. Once all the sources listed on these databases had been obtained, he then systematically went through the reference list of each looking for other relevant sources missing from the original database search. This process continued until no new, missing sources were found.

- ³ For example, there were only 31 conviction cases in England and Wales for animal fighting between 2008 and 2014, the majority under Section 4 of the Animal Welfare Act (2006) (see ft2). Of these, 27 received a custodial penalty, seven received a court imposed ban on keeping dogs, two a suspended sentence, and two a community penalty (2) (League Against Cruel Sports, nd: table 1).
- ⁴ The literature on dog fighting at this level intersects with that concerning the phenomena of 'status dogs' or 'weapon dogs' (see Harding, 2012; Hughes et al., 2011; Maher & Pierpoint, 2011).
- ⁵ Interestingly, this link between dog fighting and masculinity and status would appear to be cross cultural. In his discussion of dog fighting in rural South Punjab, Kavesh (2021) highlights the way in which dog fighting is fundamentally bound up with masculine notions of honour and prestige (*izzat*). As he observes: "In Pakistan, *izzat* is of utmost importance within the indigenous value system...canines for South Punjab dog fighters are an important source of their *izzat*, and by wielding control over them, the men actively raise their status among their peers" (Kavesh, 2021, p. 232).
- ⁶ Cf. the recent work of Siegel and van Uhm (2021, p. 563) on dog fighting in the Netherlands, where they similarly claim that "dog fights are often linked with organised crime, especially illegal gambling, and money laundering".

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