

In a dogfight, two dogs are put into a pit and they must fight to the end—until one is declared the winner and the other is dead. Dogfighting arises to support gambling. Bets are always placed on the dogs; dogfighting is thus considered to be “like the Saturday night poker game for hardened criminals and tens of thousands of dollars are wagered on the fights.”

The animal abuse that is associated with dog fighting is obvious to most of us. However, Michael Vick’s case in 2007 not only brought attention to the cruelty associated with the blood sport, but also to the multitude of public perceptions of dogfighting and attitudes toward Pit bull–type dogs. Public opinion was divided between two opposing views. First there were those who perceived dog fighting as animal abuse and who argued that Michael Vick committed “reprehensible acts of cruelty.” The dia-

documentation: “Almost all children interviewed in the ninth grade classes in a high school in Pontiac, Michigan, had personally witnessed a dog fight . . . and most of them believed that there was nothing wrong with dog fighting.” These children were so desensitized to violence that they did not perceive it as morally wrong or cruel. The International Gang Research Project collaborated with psychologists, city officials, religious leaders, former gang members, and community residents, to show that dogfighting

in “abuse reactive” behaviors. This means that children re-enact to animals the abusive behaviors they have witnessed. In order to survive, traumatized children suppress and sublimate their feelings, because they cannot bear the pain caused by experiencing feelings of empathy and kindness towards the abused animal. Furthermore, some children that witness a pet being abused might even subconsciously or actively elect to kill the pet in an effort to gain control over the situation. Exposures to high levels of animal abuse and trauma desensitize children to violence and delay or prevent the development of healthy feelings of empathy.

Dogfighting has also been associated with many social maladaptive activities, including use of guns, gang membership, drug

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metrically opposed view was held by those who defended Michael Vick by mentioning his “cultural upbringing in the South” where dogfighting is considered a sport. Furthermore, Michael Vick’s case made obvious the disagreement between Animal Rights and Animal Welfare groups. Animal Welfare groups considered the fighting dogs to be victims of cruelty and wanted to give them a second chance in life, while Animal Rights groups considered euthanasia as a fair treatment for the victims of cruelty. In the field of animal cruelty investigation, dog fighting is inherently violence against these animals. “Defeated dogs are killed and dumped; stolen dogs and cats are used to train fighters and give them their first taste of blood . . . Yet participants and dogfighters do not consider dog fighting a brutal sport.”

Regardless of the various justifications and points of view, the fact is that dogfighting is a critical social problem because of the associated youth desensitization to violence that results from early exposure to animal cruelty. Kalof and Taylor noted that today there are more than 40,000 dog fighters in the urban centers of the United States, and included a shocking

is very prominent and “a cornerstone of illicit commerce in Detroit.” According to a former gang member who was involved in youth educational programs, it is challenging to awaken youth to fundamental animal cruelty and the inhumane nature of the blood sport. Sadly, there is a considerable current increase in dogfighting in Detroit. It has been argued that “the increase in dog fighting seems to have come at a time when small communities lack the manpower, resources, and education to effectively combat the illegal sport.”

The late gang analyst, Clyde Sherrod, argued that there are many dangers resultant from young children’s exposure to dog fighting. He also noted the unfair and futile aspects of not directly addressing those social concerns through societal denial, and using the Pit bull as a scapegoat of convenience. It is very interesting that dogfighters and Breed Specific Legislation supporters use the same neutralization techniques and create urban myths in order to blame the victims, the mixed breed dogs used for fighting: the Pit bulls. Furthermore, Lockwood argued that children exposed to animal abuse as dogfighting, could engage

and gambling addictions, domestic violence, and other illegal activities. The blood sport and associated animal abuse seem to be part of “a larger nexus of crimes and the psyche behind them” as Sgt. David Hunt stated. Furthermore, dogfighting has been used by gang members as a component of initiation rituals. In spite of the rigorous and abusive training techniques humans use to create a fighting dog, there are losers in every dog fight. Some dogs refuse to fight and they are killed by their owner as a consequence of their failure, thus allowing the owner to recover the status he lost because of the dog’s poor performance in the ring. Those losing dogs who survive the pit are also killed or even tortured and mutilated if the owner is particularly embarrassed by the dog’s lack of courage, serving not only as a means of regaining lost respect but also as a mechanism to initiate young gang members into a culture of violence.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), animal cruelty consists of “Acts of violence or neglect perpetrated against animals.” Evidence supporting the viewpoint that animal cruelty is linked

to domestic violence and child abuse is ever increasing and compelling. There is widespread acknowledgement of the historical evidence linking abusive behavior towards animals with a high risk of those behaviors escalating towards humans. One strong rationale for implementing stricter anticruelty statutes is the recognition that by preventing animal cruelty, we thereby protect the public. Furthermore there are currently several US states that mandate the collaboration of animal abuse investigators and child or spousal abuse investigators. The connection between animal cruelty and further toxic behaviors and violence in society are well established. In an era where the proliferation of crime and violent behaviors becomes more and more prominent, it is of

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major importance to investigate, locate and prevent such behaviors.

Henry Bergh, the founder of the ASPCA, once noted, "Mercy to animals means mercy to mankind." Henry Bergh founded the first ASPCA on April 10, 1866, in order to prevent cruelty to animals throughout the United States and implement the first Anticruelty Laws. These first Anticruelty Laws were a landmark contribution to societal benefit because they were the first in the United States to embrace protection of "all living creatures." Henry Bergh's goal was to educate and raise awareness about animal cruelty. He did so by first recognizing the problem. Bergh pleaded on behalf of "these mute servants of mankind" and he pointed out that "This is a matter purely of conscience; it has no perplexing side issues. It is a moral question in all its aspects."

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References available from MVMA on request.

