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The aim of this research project was to explore and provide some insight concerning the otherwise clandestine, underground, subculture of dogfighting. More specifically, dogmen and dogfighting was examined using cinema, electronic media-outlets, and video websites. Apparently, the dogfighting phenomenon has been identified as a morally depraved subculture by mainstream society and sanctions against individuals identified as engaging in dogfighting is arguably non-utilitarian. It logically follows that the social and legal outcomes associated with the dogfighting phenomenon would force the subculture further underground where it could become a haven for illicit behavior and violence against people, property, and dogs. The results indicate that being a dogman and endorsing dogfighting is related to Pit Bull ownership, relative knowledge of dogfighting, deprivation, and access to the opportunity and willingness to enter the social world of dog-fighting. Additionally, the data suggests that the Pit Bull subculture is far from chaotic. The dogfighting subculture has internal systems and processes designed to regulate how the subculture operates. These systems and processes allow the subculture to not only survive, but to also thrive.

NO CURS ALLOWED: EXPLORING THE SUBCULTURE OF DOGMEN

by

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I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Tasheika, my mother, Peggy, and my beloved daughter Kennedy. You all are the fuel for my perpetual dreams. You believe in me, and support me, in spite of me. No words could I ever write truly encapsulate how I feel for you.

## APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Brief History of the American Pit Pull and Dogfighting.....	3
The Phenomenon to be Explored.....	5
Review of Literature.....	6
Table 1.0—Nonmetro racial and ethnic groups in professional-managerial occupations.....	8
Dogmen Routine Activities: Becoming the Dog of Choice, Medical Care & Kennels.....	17
Theoretical Speculation.....	22
II. METHODOLOGY.....	24
Caveats Relative to the Methodological Approach.....	26
Secondary Media Sources: Film and Video Sharing Websites.....	28
Results.....	34
YouTube Presentation of Dog Training and Dogfighting....	39
Veterinary Attention in the Pit Bull Subculture.....	41
Pit Bull Kennels.....	43
Figure 1.0 (Generalized Pit Bull Kennel).....	44
III. ANALYSIS.....	46
Keeping the Counter-Culture Exclusive.....	46
Professionalism and Amateurism in Dogfighting.....	51
Theoretical Implications.....	62
IV. DISCUSSION.....	72
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	86
APPENDIX A. DOGFIGHTING STATE STATUTES.....	91
APPENDIX B. REVIEWED WEBSITES.....	93
APPENDIX C. ORGANIZED DOGFIGHTING PIT RULES.....	94

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For the past three years, I have been competitively training dogs to compete in the German dog sport of Schutzhund. Schutzhund is a demanding sport, which challenges the dog's mental and physical capabilities. Schutzhund is a German word meaning protection dog. It focuses on developing and evaluating characteristics in dogs that make them more functional and happy companions to their owners. Schutzhund concentrates on three phases: tracking, obedience, and protection. Many retired Schutzhund dogs go onto successful careers as service canines because of their acutely developed skills in controlled aggression and scent discrimination; careers where the dogs constantly put the well-being of their handlers first. My participation in Schutzhund as a handler, owner, and trainer has given me the refined skills to evaluate a dog's temperament with very little physical interaction. I have learned how to challenge or relax a dog's mental state of mind without having to physically touch the animal. Additionally, as a trainer and competitor, I am deeply attuned to how a person's state of mind profoundly affects a dog's disposition and performance. It is with this background that I began this research project to understand the counter culture dog and to explore the subcultural world of dogmen which is almost completely based upon on the Pit Bull.

This research is an exploratory project that seeks to provide insight into the social world of dogmen (individuals who participate in the underground subculture of dogfighting). Specifically, this research concerns how dogmen and dogfighting is presented in cinema and video websites. Examining the content of docudramas and video websites may be the best methodological approach to understand dogfighting given the highly clandestine, dangerous, illegal, and perhaps violent nature of dogmen's social world. Further, this research will identify normative expectations, concepts, social attitudes, and common themes associated with dogmen. The applicability of Sykes and Matza's Neutralization, Merton's Strain/Anomie, and Cloward and Ohlin's Differential Opportunity theories relative to the dogfighting phenomenon also will be discussed.

Canine companions (including Pit Bulls) have earned the nickname "man's best friend." A variety of dog breeds, including Pit Bulls have served as search & rescue animals, guides to the blind, therapy aids, narcotics & explosive detectives, draft workers, and hunters. Mainstream society glorifies the animals that risk their lives in service of humanity at-large. However, dogs have served other roles in history; roles rooted in aggression and entertainment. Dogs have consistently served as military sentries, actors, bodyguards, and dog-to-dog combatants to which they have garnered a measured degree of acclaim. It is understandably difficult to place dogfighting and the duties of civil service dogs (i.e. those dogs which serve to guide the blind, herd live-stock, or personal protection) on the same continuum. However, a careful examination of

dogfighting reveals several basic similarities. Similarly to herding dogs, combatant dogs, rely on predatory instinct, which on some levels cannot be trained (training can only enhance the dog's genetic capability). Combatant dogs and K9 police and/or security dogs are both capable of exhibiting extreme and directed aggression in certain situations, while maintaining curiosity or neutrality in others. Combatant dogs and dogs trained to assist disabled humans similarly perform for the benefit of their respective masters because they have been conditioned to respond to a certain set of commands. Arguably, combatant dogs (the dog of choice being the Pit Bull) and human service dogs are similar. Moreover, Pit Bulls have been traditionally used, like other breeds of dogs to fulfill human service roles. Another social reality is that the Pit Bull is not the only dog that is guilty of attacking humans. In spite of these realities, the Pit Bull has been maligned. Could this be attributed to the subculture of dogfighting?

#### Brief History of the American Pit Bull Terrier and Dogfighting

The history of the American Pit Bull Terrier is inextricably linked to dogfighting. Dogfighting has existed for centuries as a recreational sport activity. In fact, dogfighting emerged in medieval Europe as a result of animal baiting being outlawed in the 1800's (Semencic, 1990). Animal baiting is the pitting of dogs (or other animals) against large and ferocious animals such as bulls, bears, and even lions. This was a sport reserved for the wealthy and prestigious members of society, where as matching dogs against other dogs was considered a poor gentlemen's sport (Semencic, 1990). The dogs which were intentionally

bred to hunt big game, eliminate aggressive vermin, control unruly livestock, and guard families had the appropriate disposition to evolve into the ultimate pit dog fighters (Semencic, 1990). As the sport of dogfighting matured, dogs were systematically bred to each other to produce breeds which were genetically predisposed for dog-on-dog aggression. Although several other breeds of dogs have been used for dogfighting, none have been as successful in the pit as the American Pit Bull Terrier. In fact, a moderately well-bred game Pit Bull would completely dominate superior specimens of nearly all other breeds (Semencic, 1990). Such domination is because the Pit Bull blends a unique balance of physical prowess with tenacity, adaptability, and intelligence. In addition, the animals have been selectively bred to be non-aggressive towards non-threatening humans; after all, the game-bred animals are in the pit with at least three humans (two handlers and a referee) and biting a person results in an immediate disqualification (Semencic, 1990). The practice of breeding Pit Bulls has a legacy and history, almost as old as the United States itself.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century America, dogfighting became a source of pride, camaraderie, and entertainment for many loyal participants and spectators, particularly in mid-Atlantic and southern states (i.e. Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana) (Semencic, 1990). Contrary to the trend in Europe, where the fighting of dogs was viewed as a sport for the economically disadvantaged, dogfighting in America transcended class. Anyone, regardless of their economic or social

standing, could competitively participate (Semencic, 1990). Dogfighting became a symbol of equality and the opportunity to create a more meaningful life.

Prohibitory legislation, the formal establishment of kennels (e.g. American Kennel Club), and humane associations (e.g. American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led to the decline of mainstream acceptance of dogfighting.

Although dogfighting was made illegal in the 1860's and re-emphasized with more legal clarity in 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sport continued across the United States and particularly flourished in the southern and western regions. As mainstream society withdrew and increasingly considered dogfighting taboo, the entire practice went underground and systematically formed a counterculture.

### The Phenomenon to be Explored

I don't really trust humans that much these days; Hmm shit, fact of the matter is, I trust dogs more than I trust humans; Shit, nothing like that dog love I tell you, Not just any dog, gotta be a Pit Bull; Yep, that's the only dog for me, You don't wanna get caught in a pit with one a dem boy; They make good companions, but even worse enemies, Its all on how you take it...By Earl Simmons aka DMX the Grand Champ Album (2003)

The above quote from rap artist DMX suggests that the Pit Bull is a beloved beast in the subcultural world of dogmen. The fact of the matter is, dogmen depend, hope, and believe in dogs more than humans. In 2007, Michael Vick, a high profile African-American athlete in the professional National Football League was convicted of participating in dogfighting, thus drawing the interest of mainstream Americans to this otherwise clandestine subculture. At the time of his

conviction (specifically, pleading guilty to transporting, arranging, financing, gambling, and harboring kennels and equipment for Pit Bull combatant dogs). Michael Vick was the franchise quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons. He was trumpeted as the ultimate quarterback and certainly had become one of the leading attractions for the National Football League. In 2006, Michael Vick jerseys (#7) were one of the top selling jerseys in the NFL. However, Michael Vick's persona quickly spiraled downward when it was discovered that he was a dedicated participant in the underground dogfighting community. For all of his public acclaim as a major and perhaps historical figure in the National Football League, Michael apparently is one of the most popular dogmen mainstream society has come to know.

#### Review of the Literature

The subcultural world of dogmen remains shrouded in secrecy. It could very well be that the brutality associated with dogfighting coupled with the danger that it poses for persons seeking to research it, creates academic alienation from the phenomenon. Searching academic journals such as *American Sociological Review*, *Social Forces*, *Criminology* and *Contemporary Sociology* reveals that very little scholarly research has been conducted on the subject. These journals were originally searched because of their reputation within the field of Sociology. In broadening the search, *Society & Animals* produced a few scholarly journal articles derived from one project. To gather more literature it was necessary to extend beyond the traditional literature search into more popular culture venues.

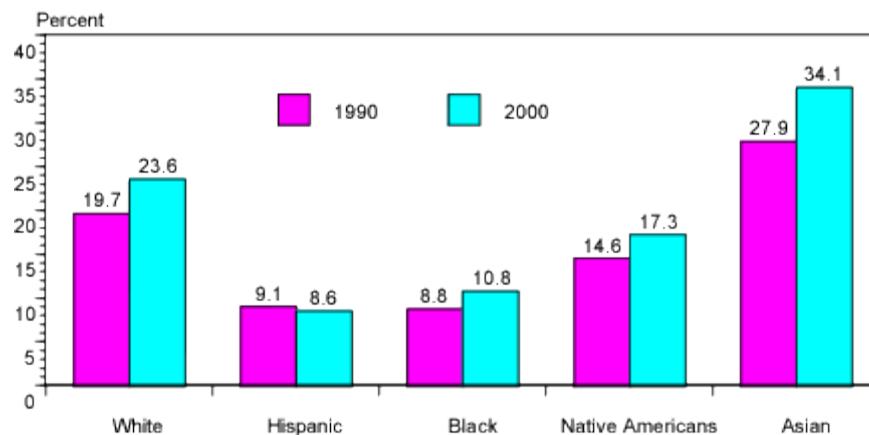
The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PSYETA) publish a vast amount of information about dogfighting. However, because of the bias orientation, sources such as these, rarely if ever, produce literature that can be considered culturally relative or even remotely objective. Due to the lack of scholarly research on dogmen and dogfighting, this project expands the search to include articles on crime, poverty, gambling, and public perceptions on Pit Bulls and Pit Bull ownership.

The following articles attempt to link deprivation and community bias to the dogfighting phenomenon. Additionally, these articles help to reify my theoretical construction by linking some of the conditions which sustain dogfighting and other criminal/taboo activities in society. Essentially, deprivation (the gap between the employed and the un or under-employed) can create a subculture of innovators/criminal/conflict. Some dogmen utilize dogfighting to bridge this gap. Given that the Pit Bull subculture is a high commodity resource in both rural and urban areas, the illegal nature of the subculture is a minimal deterrent for individuals who are forced to reside in deprived living situations. Within the eight articles, two distinct categories emerge. The first five articles suggest that deprivation, residential mobility, and blocked opportunities for success as pathways and incentives to participation in deviance, crime (e.g. gambling and dogfighting). The following three articles centers around the idea of perception of Pit Bulls and how public perception leads to the marginalization of the Pit Bull and their owners.

More than half of the nation's population of Blacks (20.1 million) lives in the south, where almost 13% of these residents live in rural communities (Smiley, 2006). According to Oleta Fitzgerald (2008), 10.8% of Blacks in rural communities (non-metro U.S. cities) have managerial/professional jobs where as 23.6% of Whites occupy similar positions (refer to table 1.0). More than 40% of rural Black families are below the poverty line, less than \$21,200 for a family four (Federal Register, 2008). Additionally, 40% of rural Black's did not graduate from high school. Given these statistics, one can see how Black inhabitants in rural communities are likely to exist in economically deprived situations. With limited legitimate opportunity to overcome the deprivation, illegitimate opportunities, including dogfighting become, viable options for some minorities to overcome depraved living conditions.

**Table 1.0**

**Nonmetro racial and ethnic groups in professional-managerial occupations, 1990-2000**



Source: Compiled by ERS from March 1989-1991 and 1999-2001 Current Population Surveys.

James Cates, Donald Dian, and Greg Schnepf wrote an article in 2002 which examined common attitudes regarding fear of crime, experiences of crime victimization, and attitudes towards criminals. The researchers surveyed 184 participants from 36 states. Ultimately the researchers found non-Whites and urban dwellers to be less fearful of crime than Whites and rural dwellers. If non-whites and urban dwellers are less fearful of crime, their lack of fear may make participating in deviance a little easier. If the researcher findings are correct, non-Whites and urban dwellers may have more familiarity and possibly even closer associations with crime, including dogfighting. In fact, the Humane Society of the United States reports that 1:5 Chicago grade school youth report having actively participated in dogfighting (Appendix B-4). For these youth to participant in dogfighting with such high frequency, their urban communities must provide access, and ultimately the children learn not to fear the environments which host the corresponding criminal activities.

In 1999, Patrick Jobe's article "Residential Stability and Crime in Small Rural Agricultural and Recreational Towns" examined the importance of migration, population size, and economic base in explaining felony convictions in rural communities. Jobe examined whether lower social cohesion and integration increased crime rates in rural communities. Jobe also investigated to determine if migration from urban districts into rural areas accounts for higher proportions of rural crime. Jobe concluded that smaller towns had proportionately more crime than urban areas, regardless of whether the crime

was committed by long-term or recent residents. Jobe suggests that high-migration towns have “greater tolerance or less efficient policing” which leads to lower numbers of reported and processed crime. Additionally, Jobe suggests that rural areas have a “community watchfulness” which aids and prompts officials to make arrests. Overall, towns with above averaged migration rates had more crime than those below the average (Jobe, 1999).

Rachel Jones and Ye Luo’s article entitled “The Culture of Poverty and African American Culture: An Empirical Assessment” was also published in 1999. It examines whether poor individuals exhibit a “culture of poverty” mentality and if Blacks differ from Whites in their attitudes toward employment, family values, and welfare. The report finds little evidence that impoverished persons have different value systems than do non-poor persons. The researchers did not find strong evidence of a consistent “Black culture,” as reflected in quantified attitudes. The researchers also found no support to suggest that Blacks are more likely than Whites to believe that a single woman is just as capable as a married couple of raising a child. Additionally, Blacks and Whites were equally likely to “work for welfare.” This holds true regardless of poverty status; additionally, non-poor Blacks were less likely than non-poor Whites to condemn premarital sex. Jones and Luo concluded that mainstream (and conservative) discussions of poverty often coalesced Black culture and poverty, thereby contributing to the spurious association of poverty and Black minority status (Jones & Luo, 1999). The culture of poverty assessment

traditionally offers that there is a subcultural value system amongst the poor, poor minorities in particular, which condones participation in deviance and crime (including dogfighting). However, a more accurate assessment would not aggregate the working poor (who often maintain conventional values) with the youth of the working poor (who often maintain “street” values) (Anderson, 1999). Jones and Luo’s failure to survey youth attitudes may contribute to the reasons why they find little evidence that impoverished persons have different value systems than do non-poor persons. Youth who are disconnected from mainstream society may not perceive as many viable opportunities for legitimate success, and therefore engage in sub or counterculture activities.

Mark Lange’s 2001 article entitled “If You Do Not Gamble, Check This Box” examined US adult gambling behaviors of 449 university students. Lange discovered that most adults in the U.S. participate in one or more gambling activities, yet most people classify themselves as non-gamblers. Individuals who had gambled at least one time with bookies, in dice games, video poker in a bar, dog or cock fights, or off track betting almost always identified themselves as gamblers. Casino visits, bingo, dog races, football pools, golf matches, local poker games, and other card games were more likely to be viewed as gambling when engaged in frequently. Scratch tickets, and lottery tickets were not generally considered gambling unless purchased frequently. Results indicated that gamblers participated in twice as many forms of gambling activities as those who classified themselves as non-gamblers (Lange, 2001). Sources such as the

New York Times, Washington Post, and NPR suggest that gambling was the underlying reason source of Michael Vick's 2007 indictment and conviction, not necessarily his direct involvement with dogfighting (Appendix B-8, 10, 23). In communities where deprivation seems unrelenting, and in which legitimate opportunities are consistently blocked, dogfighting can become a viable mechanism to create and sustain a deviant subculture which includes gambling (Off the Chain, 2004; Appendix B-8, 10, 23). Lange's article essentially explains that how individuals define gambling is variable, and that gambling, being a gambler, and participating in games of chance are not considered equal. When the law enforcement agencies and the mainstream media present their case against dogfighting, gambling is invariably mentioned as a pathological and a latent dysfunction associated with dogfighting; Lange's article suggests that the mainstream view of gambling as pathological and dysfunctional is directly correlated with the gambling activity, not necessarily the act of gambling itself (Lange, 2001, *Off the Chain*, 2004).

The 2005 article, "Managing the Stigma of Outlaw Breeds: A Case Study of Pit Bull Owners" authored by Hillary Twining, Arnold Arluke, and Gary Patronek conducted ethnographic interviews with 28 Pit Bull owners to examine the relative experience of owning a dog with a negative public image. The majority of the respondents believed that the negative public perception stemmed from the breed's image rather than any action from individual dogs. Respondents indicated that regardless of the experience that friends and family

members have had with the respondent's dog, friends and family still believe the dog (Pit Bull) to be vicious and unpredictable. To reduce the breed's negative image or lessen the impact of the breed's perception, many of the respondents chose to pass their dogs as "breeds other than Pit Bulls, denying that their behavior is biologically determined, debunking adverse media coverage, using humor, emphasizing counter-stereotypical behavior, avoiding stereotypical equipment or accessories, taking preventive measures, or becoming breed ambassadors (Twining, 2005)." This article offers the rational that Pit Bull ownership is varied. Dogmen's reputations as Pit Bull owners have managed to gain more publicity, and consequently have skewed public perception of the breed to the point that for many people perception of the breed is stronger than an individual's experience. The article also suggests that not all Pit Bull owners are drawn to the counterculture of dogfighting. What the article fails to explore is Pit Bull owners who actively participate in dogfighting or at-least do not condemn the endeavor.

In 2005, Tyrone Burrows Jr. and William Fielding published an article about the "Views of College Students on Pit Bull Ownership." The article was based on 375 college students in the Caribbean; these students gave their perceptions on a number of issues related to Pit Bull ownership. Burrows and Fielding found that age, sex, and dog-owning status influenced some of their views. Ultimately, respondents saw Pit Bulls as being different from other breeds, but not everyone supported banning Pit Bulls. Most Pit Bull owners were

under 19 years of age, and older respondents were more likely than younger ones to support a ban on Pit Bulls (Burrows, 2005).

In 2003, Nye Lavalle, the Managing Director of the Sports Marketing Group in Atlanta released an article with Microsoft Network (MSN) reporting that dogfighting was the most hated sport in America. In his study Lavalle had a (non-random) sample size of 1020 individuals who were 18 or more years of age. Lavalle found that 81% of his sample hated or disliked dogfighting. What is more interesting and informing to this project is that 99.7% of those who reported liking or loving dogfighting were Black males (Lavalle, 2003). Although Lavalle's study leaves much to be desired to the social scientist (i.e. theoretical guidance and methodological procedures), he does offer some guidance in explaining a regional (some would contend national) phenomenon. Unfortunately, the empirical study did not offer any explanation relative to why Black males overwhelmingly supported dogfighting.

Although searching academic journals in sociology reveals very little scholarly research has been conducted on dogfighting, I was able to find an essay by Clifford Geertz on cockfighting. There are several significant parallels which can be drawn from Geertz's 1973 essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" which are relevant to dogfighting in 2008. First, Geertz's work suggests that researching taboo subject matter requires that the researcher be integrated into the subject matter to more fully understand the incredibly nuanced nature of the activity. Geertz's rapport with the Balinese ultimately

increased his likelihood of understanding the larger culture. Second cockfighting is often a symbolic endeavor, where ego and masculinity are often tied to the cock's owner and the activity is a conscientious expression of something which is internal—untrammeled rage. Third, cockfighting is logical, organized, and bureaucratic in terms of relationships. Relationships are developed between man and beast, between men, between man and systems in order to sustain the cultural practice of cockfighting well beyond the status of a recreational activity. Finally, cockfighting in Bali was a component for creating economic and cultural capital for marginalized communities (Geertz, 1973).

Unfortunately, the coverage of dogfighting in scholastic journals is scarce, therefore this research contributes a social scientific approach to understanding an underground culture, provides insight into the normative expectations and informal governing norms. This research is also an attempt to explore the explanatory applicability of three theories: neutralization, anomie, and differential opportunity.

There are two major themes which emerge from the literature review. First, deprivation and community bias contribute to how the dogfighting phenomenon is portrayed by mainstream society. Grim economic statistics suggest that limited legitimate opportunity for some individuals, especially rural minorities, may actually encourage people to participate in deviate activities in order to live above a poverty stricken status. Furthermore, non-whites and urban dwellers are less fearful of crime, which may make their participating in deviance,

including dogfighting, a little easier. However this relationship between fear of crime and participant in deviance among urban dwellers does not mean that rural inhabitants do not readily engage in crime and deviance. In fact, some research suggests that rural communities had proportionally higher crime rates than urban areas. While dogfighting can occur in almost any geographic region, rural settings are universally more appealing for dog ownership and the higher crime rates in rural communities may mean that dogfighting receives less scorn in those settings because policing agencies are focused on “more serious” crimes, and those involved may be more socially integrated into the community than media reports may indicate.

The second major theme which emerges from the literature review centers around the idea of perception of Pit Bulls and how public perception leads to the marginalization of the Pit Bull and their owners. Pit Bull owners often receive as much public scorn as the dogs they own. To cope with their vilification, Pit Bull owners often create protective subcultures to shield themselves as well as their dogs from the negative public perceptions. The research suggests that Pit Bull ownership is varied, and that public perception is often based on limited experience. Restated, the general public has maligned Pit Bulls and their owners despite the interactions with either. It is also interesting to note that there is research to suggest that a growing number of Pit Bull owners are under the age of 19 years old. When we examine this population and pay more attention to deprived economic conditions, we see how and why a community which is

supportive of dogfighting can emerge. Lastly, there is also very limited research which suggests that there is a link between race and the pathological counter culture of dogfighting. It is interesting to note that within the U.S. Pit Bull subculture, black males did not appear to share the same view of the Pit Bull or the practice of dogfighting.

To gauge the current social attitude towards dogfighting, Pit Bulls, and the individuals who participate in the endeavor, an exhaustive search of relevant literature was conducted, which included Internet sites, blogs, newspapers (New York Times, L.A. Times, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, USA Today, etc.), Television Websites (CNN, ABC, MSNBC, BBC, etc.), magazines, and kennels (Appendix B). After conducting this literature search there is an obvious lack of exhaustive research on the dogfighting phenomenon. This research begins to fill this gap concerning the deviant counterculture that seems on the surface to be socially disorganized, universally refuted and isolated from conventional social networks.

#### Dogmen Routine Activities: Becoming the Dog of Choice, Medical Care & Kennels

When taking into account the global appeal of dogfighting, there is some evidence that dogfighting has appeal for various class and ethnic divisions. Thus it could be that the focused attention on dogfighting as a lower class minority phenomenon lacks a global perspective. For example, dogfighting has a history which began outside of the U.S. and consequently still thrives well beyond the

U.S. borders (Semencic, 1990). In online video hosted by the New York Times (Appendix B-8, 9), in an area just south of Moscow, two Central Asian wolf dogs are pitted against each other in a public contest. Two things are particularly interesting about this case. First, dogfighting is legal in Caucasus and Central Asia, including Russia, extending to the outskirts of Moscow (however, within the city limits of Moscow, dogfighting is illegal). Second, those who are openly participating in the sport are middle-class White people, a stark contrast to what is often perceived as the norm in American mainstream media outlets. While corresponding New York Times reports drug dealers, thugs, and gamblers also being present in the European dogfights, the legal environment of the dogfight keeps the activity from going underground and makes it acceptable for middle-class participation (Appendix B-9).

The media (which includes newspapers, television, radio, and internet) and humane societies portray dogfighting as if only hardened criminals are involved; however this may be a misrepresentation of reality given that the data suggest that many dogmen are believed to have “respectable” professions (e.g. licensed veterinarians, accountants, civil servants, and factory workers) (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Appendix B-1, 2, 8, 9, 11, 12). It would be logical to assume that the subcultural world of Pit Bulls attracts individuals from a cross-section of society, including class and race. People from lower classes are drawn primarily to dogfighting as spectators and amateurs, whereas professional dogmen may have a disproportionate representation of middle class inhabitants (*Off the Chain*,

2004; Appendix B-1, 2, 8, 9, 11, 12). This representation of the middle class who may be interested in dogfighting can be seen in the contextual references in *Off the Chain* as well as some YouTube video clips. One YouTube video shows, two short-hair dachshunds engaging in what dogmen might call a roll match. While neither dog suffers any harm, this video clearly shows a white woman enjoying a dog-fight. Furthermore, at one point in the clip, one of the dogs clearly submits to the other, yet the woman continues to instigate the dogs to fight by running around the trampoline, eliciting a prey-drive bite reflex. The prey-drive bite reflex is the desire to chase a moving object, subdue, bite, and kill it. In all domesticated canines (including the Pit Bull), the instinct to actually kill its prey has been bred down or completely out. When these dachshunds fail to catch the woman they turn their frustration onto each other. This video, with more than one thousands viewers, is an indicator that support of dogfighting among Internet users is more wide spread than what is normally reported in the mainstream media. There is a phenomenon or fascination with dogfighting that goes on behind closed doors. While the dogs fighting are amusing to the woman, this video is indicative of the fact that dogfighting is not limited to the media maligned Pit Bull. This clip also frames what the mainstream public considers a dog fight. So again, this begs the question of why the Pit Bull has become a maligned breed by mainstream society and simultaneously a dog of choice for urban residents who are actively engaged in deviant, criminal, and violent street subcultures?

In the 1980s crack-cocaine revolutionized America (particularly the underground drug economy) especially in the inner cities, by making inexpensive, extremely potent narcotics widely available (Coyle, 2002). Drug-dealers, as well as gang members, adopted the Pit Bull as their representative mascot because of the dog's ferocious animal aggression (*Off the Chain*, 2004). These individuals sought dogs that were capable of guarding drug commodities, and egos alike. The Pit Bull, by every standard in the dog world, is classified as a formidable opponent. The mythical legend of the Pit Bull's physiology and anatomy is that it is capable of getting a "locked jaw" on its opponent. While the idea of a "locked jaw" is a myth, the truth behind the legend is that the Pit Bull has an assertive personality, with very strong jaw muscles, and an incredibly high pain threshold. The incredibly high pain threshold allows the dog to maintain its grip on its target, even if the dog is being counterattacked. The Pit Bull has the temperament and physique to be "down for whatever," meaning it is confident in almost any given situation, even a hostile environment. Of those who engaged in the sale of crack-cocaine, a disproportionate percentage were Black (Anderson, 1999). As a result of the disproportionate drug convictions and the corresponding confiscation of Pit Bulls from those convicted, a partially media-generated bond was created between the Pit Bull and Blacks. This connection negated the fact that up until the 1950s the Pit Bull had been the breed of choice for America's families (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

Beginning in the 1960's and culminating in the 1980's the American Pit Bull Terrier garnered unprecedented media attention due to a few highly publicized attacks on humans by temperamental, poorly socialized, and/or unscrupulously trained dogs. Very similar to other working breeds (e.g. Beagle, Golden Retriever, Labrador Retriever, Border Collie, Bloodhound, etc.), the Pit Bull has multiple variations. During this time, the game-bred Pit Bull (i.e. potential dogfighter), the American Staffordshire Terrier (i.e. show dog), and the common Pit Bull (crossbred between the game and show dog) as well as any mongrel Pit Bull (cross between one version of the Pit Bull and any other dog) were all commonly referred to as Pit Bulls. Therefore, the Pit Bull breed suffered from the negative press of animals which may or may not have been purebred Pit Bulls. Restated, game-bred Pit Bulls are less of a threat to bite humans than Pit Bull crosses or many other pure bred dogs, such as Collies, Cocker Spaniels or Chihuahuas. While there are individual Pit Bulls which are dangerous to humans, the breed has been marginalized in a way which is largely unsubstantiated. Categorizing all the various versions of the Pit Bull along with Pit Bull crosses adds to the marginalization, alienation, and labeling of Pit Bull owners. As a result of the social sanctions associated with Pit Bulls, owners of Pit Bull are compelled to create their own subculture. Owners of Pit Bulls can find themselves hiding the dogs that they love. If owners adopt the practice of hiding their dogs, they may also have to find acceptable venues to socialize, train, and show their dogs. These venues which accept the Pit Bull owners may

or may not condone dogfighting. The creation of the Pit Bull subculture lends itself easily to the underground counterculture of dogfighting.

### Theoretical Speculation

It appears that a counter culture of dogfighting developed because of legal code standards, and social disapproval coming from mainstream society. Moreover, becoming a dogman and participating in dogfighting seems to be related to personal attempts to overcome economic, social, resource and material deprivation. What's more engaging in the dogfighting subculture certainly involves some degree of socialization regarding the informal rules, normative expectations, rituals associated with a counter-culture. It logically follows that there would be structural, cultural deviance, and learning theories that could offer some perspectives on subcultural formations, decisions to become dogmen and engage in dogfighting.

Merton's strain/anomie theory, Cloward and Ohlin's differential opportunity theory, and Sykes and Matza's neutralization theory, all offer theoretical guidance to understand deviant, criminal, and violent behavior. Each lends a perspective predicated upon specific sets of assumptions. Anomie/Strain and differential opportunity theories posit that stratification within a resource driven, capitalistic, material based society creates blocked access to socially legitimate opportunities, which alternatively forces marginalized groups of people to employ alternatives (use illegitimate resources usually associated with a subculture) to achieve desired goals (Merton, 1938; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). Neutralization

Theory contends that individuals learn techniques that serve as rationalizations, justifications and excuses to drift towards engaging in deviance, crime, and violence (Sykes and Matza, 1957). The theoretical applicability of these theories for dogmen and dogfighting will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

The goal of this project is to explore and describe the intimate details of dogmen's activities, as well as the working details of an elusive and taboo dogfighting counterculture. An empirical trail concerning the history of dogmen (taken to mean a counter-culture of dog breeders focusing on Pit Bulls) is scarce. Currently, there is no structured data set that allows for such an in-depth quantitative analysis; therefore, this research will employ a qualitative approach that concentrates on the review of film as well as video sharing websites as a strategy to explore the dogfighting phenomenon. This research will review publicly shared oral and video histories of dogmen, in order to capture nuances, which are normally not objectively noted. Due to the isolation in which many dogfighting communities exist, dogmen would probably present an "alien front" to outsiders, including researchers. The "alien front" serves to protect the subculture, where dogmen may appear distrustful or cautious of outsiders to the point of being untruthful to inquisitive outsiders. Additionally, the "alien front" refers to the extraordinary personalities and abnormal cultural traditions that dogmen use to keep outsiders away from the true essence of who they are. This "alien front" certainly varies in intensity relative to the social, physical, and

emotional characteristics of the researcher (Whyte, 1943; Goffman, 1959; Cureton, 2006).

Certainly, directly observing, and personally engaging dogmen through field research would provide a better assessment of the dogfighting phenomenon. Unfortunately, the Pit Bull subculture is often publicly associated with illegal activities including dogfighting and drug sales. The formal and informal sanctions which are firmly entrenched in the Pit Bull subculture make dogmen far less likely to display their activities to outsiders.

The very nature of dogfighting suggests elements of brutality that latently functions to alienate unsolicited attention. Researchers who seek to understand this counterculture must be able to negotiate the aggressive personalities as well as emanate their own component of strength. The culture of violence that is believed to exist with dogmen often serves as a deterrent to direct participant observation on the part of many social scientists. The Pit Bull subculture is often viewed by mainstream society as being composed of loose sets of psychologically damaged and chaotic individuals. Given it would be extremely difficult to engage dogmen in a manner that would permit authentic information gathering in a timely manner coupled with the difficulty of trying to get a participant observation approach approved through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Institutional Review Board (where the primary concerns were of institutional liability, personal safety, and security and confidentiality of

informants and information), a secondary data gathering approach is both logical and appropriate.

#### Caveats Relative to the Methodological Approach

The harshest critique of qualitative research is the potential lack of objectivity. To be deficient in objectivity reduces ones work from a state of social science to non-fiction literature. Qualitative researchers and more specifically ethnographic researchers have actively struggled to gain validity and prominence in the realm of the social sciences, where quantitative inquiry governs. Validity, from a qualitative standpoint, can only be captured when the researcher takes cognizant efforts to not disrupt the pattern of human behavior of which they desire to examine (Whyte, 1943; Goffman, 1959; Deegan, 2001).

Jack Katz contends that social scientists often suffer from a “fundamental methodological weakness,” especially in the areas of representativeness, reactivity, reliability, and replicability (Emerson, 1988). This methodological weakness is exacerbated when the subject matter engages taboo and criminal cultures. Intimate human patterns should be understood via a systematic yet scientific process that explains how individuals intrinsically produce webs of signification that cannot be understood apart from the subjective and normative actions of the social actors. Clifford Geertz explains qualitative research:

[Qualitative research is...]Looking at the ordinary in places where it takes unaccustomed forms brings out not, as has so often been claimed, the arbitrariness of human behavior, but the degree to which its meaning varies according to the pattern of life by which it is informed. Understanding a peoples' culture exposes their

normalness without reducing their particularity. It renders them accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity (Emerson, 1988:46).

The qualitative methodology of this project presents two methodological problems. The first problem concerns the degree to which docudramas and online videos offer a degree of authentic reality concerning dogmen and dogfighting. A preliminary analysis of a few video sharing websites reveals that the dogmen have a great deal to say, and they want to state it from an authoritarian vantage point. None of them had to speak to the film's directors or share the stories via the internet, thus, it is reasonable to assume that there is some measure of phenomenon authenticity being offered. The second problem concerns the extent to which findings from qualitative data are reliable enough to be generalized. If the goal of this project were to produce some level of statistical significance or predict future trends, this would be a valid critique. However, the goal of the project is the exploration of an underground counterculture, and the secondary media analysis, given the academic restraints, may be the most appropriate methodological technique a student researcher can use to gain access, especially if the target population is not easily identified (Adler & Clark, 1999). Moreover, examining docudramas and electronic video clips online is certainly not a fatally flawed approached and is sufficient enough to offer some degree of insight on a clandestine counter culture. Moreover, when considering the fact that there simply is little to no scholarly research on dogmen and Pit Bull fighting, any logical social scientific approach would bring us one step closer to

understanding a subculture that seems to almost universally draw extreme criticisms and outright objections from mainstream society.

While this project has its methodological shortcomings, it is not without significant methodological strengths. By analyzing the dogfighting population by viewing docudramas and shared online videos, we can practically ensure that this research project has not disrupted the pattern of human behavior among dogfighting participants; thus bolstering the project's validity (Whyte, 1943; Goffman, 1959; Deegan, 2001). Furthermore, the shared online videos add a dimension to the research which may not have been able to be captured via any other methodological procedure. The shared online videos were created, edited, and uploaded by dogmen. The videos and interviews highlight the sections of the clandestine activity which dogmen view as important; rather than a researcher's limited interpretation of what is important. Ultimately, online videos allow us to understand how dogmen want mainstream society to view them in terms of their normative actions and them as social actors.

#### Secondary Media Sources: Film and Video Sharing Websites

This project is based upon two types of media: films and video sharing websites. The three primary films reviewed were *Off the Chain* (2004) directed by Bobby J. Brown, *Ghetto Dawg* (2002), and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) both directed by Jeff Cook. *Off the Chain* is a documentary which chronicles the history of the American Pit Bull Terrier, and how the dog has been transformed from America's beloved pet into a public crisis. *Off the Chain* gives an unbiased

description of the world of underground dogfighting. This documentary features footage of dog training, Pit Bull fights, and police raids.

*Ghetto Dawg* (2002) and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) are both fictitious films which explore the subculture of dogfighting. While dogfighting is a sub-plot in each film, the cultural settings in which these stories are told reveal a tremendous amount of detail about how different groups of people perceive dogfighting from their perspective social locations (i.e. urban, rural, suburb). If nothing else, these films give us some aspect of how mainstream society perceives the dogfighting community.

YouTube was selected as the primary source to review shared video clips because of its status as an industry leader in online video sharing. At the beginning of my shared video search in May 2007, YouTube had very little industry competition. By the end of my shared video search in August of 2008, MySpace, Facebook, and Yahoo had entered the video sharing market, but still lagged significantly behind YouTube in the number of shared video clips available to the general public. YouTube allows people to share video clips via the Internet. Anyone with access to a computer and the Internet can view videos on YouTube and witness first-hand accounts on a myriad of activities, including dogfighting. Because of the illegal and highly offensive nature of dogfighting YouTube videos which display authentic clips, explanations, or tolerance for dogfighting are systematically removed from the YouTube Website. Conversely, individuals constantly (e.g. previous offenders under a new alias) upload new

videos on an almost daily basis. During the first 3 months of the review, I searched YouTube four or five days a week for an hour or two each session. Beyond the initial three month review, I searched YouTube twice a week for about an hour for the remaining 12 months.

The raw footage which can be discovered on YouTube is very similar to the video footage which was included in the *Off the Chain* documentary. Thus, *Off the Chain* and the YouTube videos are complimentary to each other and add validity to this research project while simultaneously providing deeper understanding of the dogfighting subculture. *Ghetto Dawg* and *Ghetto Dawg II* provide a mainstream portrayal of how the underground subculture of dogfighting is perceived.

The search terms that I began with to locate YouTube video-clips were general terms mainstream society uses to reference Pit Bulls and dogfighting. I also searched terms that I found on websites which appeared to be more specialized to the Pit Bull community. Searching the following words and terms: dogfighting (27,700 hits), dog fight (38,700 hits), Pit Bull (55,600 hits), Pit Bull Fights (3,220 hits), yielded thousands of videos. Very few of the video clips showed continued dogfighting footage beyond 10 or 15 seconds. Occasionally, I did find some clips which had extended scenes of a dogfight, however, YouTube promptly (often in less than 24 hours) removed them from the site. As I combed through the numerous sites which were identified from the search, I often viewed the sites which YouTube suggested were related videos. This snowball based

approach to searching for videos yielded literally more than 125,000 primary video clips. While the YouTube video clips were informative as to how individuals perceive dogfighting, dog fight, Pit Bull, and Pit Bull Fighting, the Internet videos I discovered on mainstream sites such as CNN, New York Times, Humane Society of the United States, and NPR were also informative about the national and international phenomenon of dogfighting. Not only were these sights informative, they also provided graphic detail. These videos were found using YouTube's parent company Google's search function. In addition to the search terms I mention above, I also searched game-bred pit bulls, dead-game, and dogfighting matches to find additional dogfighting information.

Concretely determining the demographics of handlers at a dogfight based solely on the YouTube clips and the mainstream news websites is difficult because the frames are often focused on the dogs and not the handlers. However, in every video clip where the handler was identifiable, the handler was male. Several clips showed women as spectators and care givers, but never women handling the dogs during a match. The race/ethnicity of dog handlers and referees were diverse. Asians, Blacks, Latinos, and Whites can all be seen participating in dogfighting. The videos from outside of the U.S. showed predominately white participants. There were also dogfighting videos specific to the U.K., Afghanistan, Russia, China, and Singapore. The age of the dogfighting participants was also varied. While the YouTube clips tended to show younger males engaging in the activity, the news clips showed age much more evenly

distributed. There was also a divergence in region between the videos which focused on the U.S. and those videos which focused outside of the U.S. The U.S. focused videos showed clips from all over the country, which included urban, suburban, and rural settings. Conversely, the videos which were based outside of the U.S. were focused almost exclusively on rural settings.

Determining the dog of choice among dogfighting participants from the YouTube and news sites was very easy to conclude. The Pit Bull was overwhelmingly the dog featured in sites and videos dedicated to dogfighting. In fact, the Central Asian Wolf Dog (Russia), Kangal Dog (Afghanistan), and the Tosa Inu (Japan) were the only three other breeds which were the focus of news stories. The Pit Bull was repeatedly revered as the undisputed king of dogfighting.

*Ghetto Dawg* (2002) and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) are both urban docudramas directed by Jeff Cook which features dogfighting as a normal activity in urban settings. Neither film is centrally focused on dogfighting, but rather is focused on inner city residents struggling to escape impoverished and dangerous living conditions, and dogfighting happens to be a part of their communities.

In *Ghetto Dawg* (2002) the central character is Tariq, played by J. King. Tariq is an African-American male in his late twenties. Although Tariq has a college degree he finds himself working as a mechanic in a small garage. To earn extra money, Tariq also earns works as a high-tech car thief for a local gangster named Gresh, played by Lawrence Winslow. While dogfighting is a

subplot to *Ghetto Dawg*, it is not the central theme of the movie, rather, the movie is themed around the idea that denied legitimate opportunity and excessive access to deviant actives traps even the brightest inner-city residents. Although Tariq desires to leave the illegal and underground economy of drugs, auto theft, and dogfighting, he finds leaving the underground economy has greater perils than remaining.

The docudrama *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) centers around the life struggles of a young, inner-city, African-American male name Donte, played by Daniel Outlaw. Donte is in his mid-to-late teens when his older brother is killed during a gang turf war. His brother's murder leaves Donte conflicted about seeking revenge or leaving the only life he knows. After a year of inner torment, Donte chooses to avenge his brother's death by seeking to kill Angel, played by Will Sierra. However, as the opportunity arises to kill Angel at a dog fight, Donte realizes that he is not the killer type. The dogfighting venue is managed by gang leader Big Daddy, played by Lou Torres, who also manages contract killings. Ultimately, the director Jeff Cook is trying to convey to the audience that life in the ghetto can closely mimic the life of a Pit Bull dogfighter; there are very few choices, and almost none which are good. Like *Ghetto Dawg* (2002) limited legitimate opportunity and excessive access to deviant actives indoctrinates and traps inner-city youth so that their perspectives are singularly focused, surviving in the ghetto.

## Results

*Ghetto Dawg* (2002) and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) strongly suggest that dogfighting in the U.S. is primarily urban, male dominated, and largely operated by racial/ethnic minorities. *Ghetto Dawg* (2002) and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) also suggest that the counterculture of dogfighting is the periphery to other illegal engagements and not necessarily a standalone operation with regimented rules and standard operating procedures. The docudramas further imply that the dogfighting participants are also closely linked to other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, auto theft, and gambling. *Ghetto Dawg* (2002) does suggest that middle, and upper class individuals participate in dogfighting, but only from a distance and then primarily as financers and logisticians. The docudrama frees these middle and upper class individuals from the daily responsibilities associated with fighting dogs, as well as the danger that is perceived to be inherent with the underground culture of dogfighting.

However, *Ghetto Dawg* (2002) and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) also render a few positive aspects to dogfighting. For instance, in both movies, dogfighting helped establish community solidarity by providing a common venue for residents to enjoy entertainment in a “safe” environment. The gangs provide policing to participants and spectators, thus allowing everyone in the venue to safely enjoy the competition, or the security of the setting. Also common to both movies is the idea that dogfighting creates alternative opportunities for marginalized individuals to generate cultural and economic capital. At some point in each movie,

individuals utilized dogfighting to lessen their dejected status in the ghetto. Finally, *Ghetto Dawg* (2002) and *Ghetto Dawg II* (2005) showed how dogmen can and do love their dogs. While their love may be exhibited in a different fashion than mainstream society would deem appropriate; the love they show for their dogs in many cases reflects the only love they have ever received, something else with which mainstream society has little familiarity.

The video clips from YouTube as well as the mainstream media outlets offer a more robust perspective of dogfighting. While the docudrama strongly suggests that dogfighting in the U.S. is primarily urban, male dominated, and largely operated by racial/ethnic minorities, the video clips suggest a different reality. Like the docudramas, the video clips portray the dogfighting counterculture as overwhelmingly operated by males, but several video clips suggest that dogfighting is neither regional nor localized. To the contrary, one New York Times video clip says that dogfighting is a global phenomenon operated by a diverse body of constituents. This is supported by videos from the BBC, HSUS, and CNN. While the docudramas presented dogfighting as primarily an African-American activity, another video clip from BBC on Google showed a much more diverse body of participants and spectators. While the news outlets in the U.S. (CNN, HSUS, and Chicago Tribune) often showed video clips of African-Americans getting arrested in connection with dogfighting, African-Americans were scarcely interviewed as high level participants and were not represented as participating in dogfighting on the global scale. Also contrary

to the docudrama's portrayal of dogfighting is the representation of dogfighting simply as an auxiliary operation to other illegal activities. BBC, and several other video clips (New York Times, HSUS, and Chicago Tribune) present dogfighting as highly organized stand along operations, complete with publications, rules, and governing officials. Like the docudramas, several clips from the HSUS and New York Times imply that the dogfighting participants are often closely linked to other criminal activities, but these clips also show the variance within the dogfighting community and that those individuals who operate at a high level in the dogfighting community are less likely to be connected to other serious felonies with the exception of gambling. These video clips also insinuate that dogfighting participants comes from a wide cross section of society regarding socioeconomic index.

Whereas the docudramas presented a few positive aspects of dogfighting (community solidarity, capital generation, and canine husbandry), community solidarity was the only positive characteristic easily identifiable in any of the video clips. However, community solidarity in one BBC video clip has a much more heightened sense than in the docudramas. The BBC video clip has a dogman discussing dogfighting in terms of kinship and family traditions, where insiders to the phenomenon are treated more like family, than family members who are outside of dogfighting practice. One YouTube video clip from Afghanistan discusses dogfighting with terms of the utmost endearment. The dogmen

describes dogfighting as a community practice which continues despite the collapse of their government and war all around them.

The original goal of this project was to provide insight into the social world of dogmen and dogfighting and perhaps along the way identify what societal factors prompt individuals to become dogmen and connect with Pit Bulls. The data suggests that the accumulation of economic and cultural capital is critical to what attracts people to the dogfighting subculture. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) use of economic and cultural capital appears to represent a modern day socioeconomic index. However the great distinction between a modern day socioeconomic index and Bourdieu's matrix is Bourdieu's use of capital scales. Bourdieu's capitals are used to determine the distance between two positions and how these distances can be increased or at least maintained. Economic capital is most easily defined as the monetary assessment of an item. For dogmen, economic capital is represented by the vast amounts of money that can be earned for winning a fight, gambling, stud fees of a game dog, the price of puppies, and the value of equipment. Economic capital often transcends localities, which serves only to make the capital more tangible. In the game, the process and policies are almost uniform regardless of region. According to *Off the Chain* and a BBC Special Report on dogfighting the videos suggest that there are variations in contest rules; however, the operations run almost congruently from location to location. Once dogs reach the status of Grand Champion (winners of five consecutive matches, and no recorded loses), their value is often

preserved and generically recognized (i.e. standardized stud fees and minimum cost of puppies).

Cultural capital is most simply equated with the contextual prestige associated with a practice. Cultural capital is the set of informal social skills, persona, demeanor, habits, and language patterns that individuals use to connect with usually similarly circumstanced people (Carter, 2005; Cureton 2008; Anderson, 1999 and 1990; Goffman, 1959). Cultural capital is used to both inform and alert a distinct audience to the familiar or unfamiliar presence of a stranger. Cultural capital is enhanced by contextual experiences and ability to negotiate the nuances of a specific culture. Contextual learning and development of skill sets are products of experiences with intimate personal groups, circumstances or events that provide definitive clues for social survival (Carter, 2005, Anderson 1999 and 1990). For instance, when you attend an organized dogfight, dogmen and their guest(s) know they must place a wager (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg* 2001; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005). Individuals outside of this social sphere may not realize the importance of placing a bet, which could result in ostracism or even physical harm because they are acting as outsiders. The preparation of guests is the responsibility of the hosting dogman, which means that he is most likely responsible for the socialization of his company. Spectators understand what they are there for and should act accordingly. Dogmen, who elect to have guests respect the code enough to not jeopardize the game or disrespect the sport by opening the venue up to the scrutiny of an uninitiated

civilian who may be borderline curious and easily horrified (Off the Chain, 2004; Ghetto Dawg, 2005).

Successful dogmen often gain acclaim in their social circles (Williams, 2004; *Off the Chain, 2004*). Dogfighting venues often change, but the participants and spectators remain relatively constant, much like a softball league or bingo association (Williams, 2004; *Off the Chain, 2004*). Dogmen often build a reputation that precedes them, and that reputation is often more pronounced than the individual. Dedicated dogmen seek to build their reputations as dogmen, as well as the reputation of their kennel, dog's bloodlines, methodology of training, and overall reputation of hardness (the ability to withstand and recover from internal and external pressure) (Williams, 2004; *Off the Chain, 2004*). Finally, experienced and successful dogmen are often valiant supporters of the game itself (Semencic, 1990; Faron, 1995; Williams, 2004; *Off the Chain, 2004*; Shakur 1993). They defend the game by strategically attacking or neutralizing detractors. These defensive stands against detractors or society at-large ultimately add to a dogmen's cultural capital, economic opportunities, and material acquisitions, which in effect permit improved life course conditions.

#### YouTube Presentation of Dog Training and Dogfighting

An example of the typical game-bred American Pit Bull terrier depicts an exceptionally conditioned and extremely confident dog. The dog's conditioning comes from exercising with his handler, as well as his self-driven obsessions, such as exercising on a spring pole. A spring pole is an exercise device, which

holds a piece of tug material (e.g. jute, rubber, or rope) suspended in the air (e.g. 5 to 7 feet) by a spring. The spring gives a little as the dog tugs, eliciting a prey-drive bite reflex, creating an intensive tug-of-war game for the dog. Game-bred dogs tend to weigh between 35 and 55 pounds and between 14 to 16 inches. Many people unfamiliar with dogfighting tend to believe that dogs of such small stature could not possibly do much damage in a dog fight. However, dogs within this range have an ideal physique and weight for dogfighting because they do not have any excess fat or excessive muscle bulk which would tire them in a fight. While muscle tone is important, jaw strength, endurance, and tenacity wins fights.

The image I had engrained in my mind of fighting Pit Bulls was that of large (approximately 18-22" inches) heavily muscled gladiators (approximately 75 to 90 lbs). In a hypothetical fight between dogs of equal talent and conditioning, with one possessing the physique of the game-bred Pit Bull, and the other the physique of my fictional canine warrior, experienced dogmen would almost universally wager on the game-bred dog (Semencic, 1990). While the game-bred dog might get dominated during the early minutes of the match (assuming the other dog was willing to engage in a fight), the heavier dog's additional weight, which might have initially given it some advantage in the early minutes of the match, would ultimately cause it to tire more quickly and eventually succumb to the smaller dog. Successful fighting Pit Bulls rarely weigh more than 55 lbs (Semencic, 1990).

Experienced game-bred dogs tend to be riddled with scars (battle trophies). One YouTube account retells the story of a dog which had its face partially torn off during a match, exposing quite a bit of bone and cartilage. This is particularly problematic because veterinarians nearly always advise pet owners that their injured dog may react viciously towards anyone who tries to touch the wounded area, including the owner or any other well-meaning attendant. Remarkably, the dog went on to win the match because he allowed his owner to stitch the wounds in the pit. This feat speaks volumes about the game-bred dog's temperament, disposition, and pain threshold. This exploit cannot be overemphasized. I have witnessed several German Shepherds Dogs, Belgian Malinois, and Dutch Shepherds suffer far less painful injuries during training for Schutzhund trials. Invariably, these animals almost always require a muzzle and some form of anesthesia to be treated.

#### Veterinary Attention in the Pit Bull Subculture

In the Pit Bull subculture, dogmen utilize two types of medical care for their animals. First, most dogmen are adept at first-aid and treatment of routine canine ailments which include broken bones, lacerations and infections (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Faron, 1995). The longer the dogman has been in the game, the more knowledgeable he becomes about various medical conditions. However, some situations arise that require advanced clinical expertise or, more importantly, atypical medical equipment. In these instances, well-connected

dogmen take their animals to licensed doctors of veterinary medicine (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

The reasons that licensed veterinarians lend their services to the dogfighting community differ with each individual veterinarian; however the reasons can be grouped into three broad categories (*Off the Chain*, 2004). First, there is an inordinate amount of untapped profit residing in the illicit veterinary community. For those veterinarians who have proven their trustworthiness to the dogfighting community, and know the intricacies of the game well enough, there is almost limitless opportunity to generate profit. Most state laws require veterinarians to report incidents that may be related to dogfighting, thus, to provide services to the dogfighting community the veterinarians must blatantly deny the signs of dogfighting. Unless the veterinarians can generate a large dogfighting clientele, most veterinarians are unwilling to risk their practice to provide medical services to this community (Appendix B-39, 40). The second reason veterinarians participate in the game is because they have lost their license to practice medicine. These veterinarians often seek to maintain their financial and entrepreneurial autonomy by legitimating their business through the sale of medical equipment, medicine, and advice (Appendix B-39, 40). What they really offer is their medical expertise and use of equipment for a nominal fee. The last group of veterinarians that serves the dogfighting community does so because of their fears that these dogs would not receive appropriate care otherwise. This group of veterinarians is least likely to be used by experienced

dogmen, due to the high probability that these veterinarians may expose the dogfighting operation to authorities (Appendix B-39, 40).

It may sound strange to utilize bureaucratic terms such as veterinarian, breeder, and organizer, when referring to an illegal activity, but the dogfighting subculture is a multimillion-dollar operation, and as a result, is organized as bureaucratically as would be any other multimillion-dollar cartel. According to CNN correspondents, the demographics of the game resemble an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, meaning, you never know who may participate (Appendix B-1, 2, 8, 9, 11, 12).

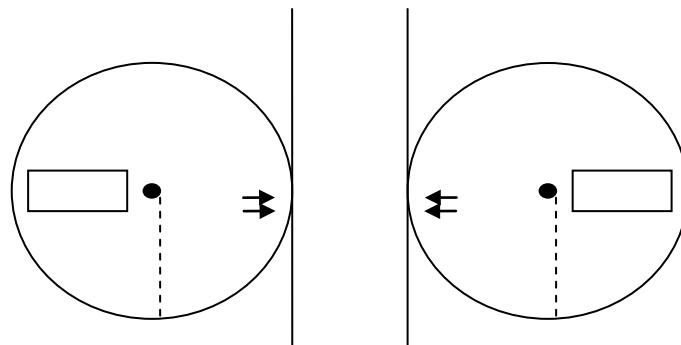
#### Pit Bull Kennels

A generalized description of a modern Pit Bull kennel is difficult to synthesize primarily because kennel design is directly correlated with function and purpose. However, a generic description may help individuals get a better sense of the dog's socialization and perspective of the world in which the dog lives.

Pit Bull kennels are functionally different than most other mainstream breeding kennels due to the history of the breed and the disposition of the dogs. Pit Bull kennels tend to be located on or near farms. The dogs on the yard are usually separated from each other by only a couple of feet (rather than a chain linked fence). Fences are not used because Pit Bulls are renowned for the ability to climb trees and scale fences. On the kennel yard, each dog owns a plot of land about 50 feet in circumference. Enclosed within each circle is an elevated

barrel (which served as their primary shelter from the weather), a heavy duty chain (about eight feet in length), and food & water buckets on a stake. The number of dogs at a kennel can vary from a few individuals to 80 or 100 dogs. Dogs are usually kept with about six to ten feet between the tangent lines of each circle. Figure 1 details a popular kennel design which can be replicated to accommodate a large number of dogs. Through close proximity, this design encourages the dogs to compete over food, as well, habituating the dogs to dog-on-dog aggression.

Figure 1.0—Generalized Pit Bull Kennel (*Off the Chain*, 2004)



A BBC video clips suggests kennels (particularly, those situated within a community setting) offer a window of opportunity for wealthier, seemingly conventional individuals to participate in dogfighting. In fact the data suggests that wealthier people who participate in dogfighting are also more likely to own or be affiliated with registered kennels (see Appendix B-41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 for potential examples). These kennels primarily concentrate on the sale and distribution of game-bred Pit Bull puppies. These very same kennels may also

participate in legitimate operations such as conformation shows (e.g. AKC Eukanuba Nationals or Westminster Kennel Club), weight pulling, agility competitions, and even therapy work, albeit utilizing completely different sets of animals.

The ownership of such a kennel operation is a two-edged sword. On the negative side, the kennel draws unwanted attention to the potential dogfighting participants simply because of its visibility in the community. However, in the event that the kennel's covert and illegal activities are discovered they have a legitimate kennel and thus a reason to possess so many animals and equipment.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS

#### Keeping the Counter-Culture Exclusive

Generally speaking, dogmen can be divided into two categories: professionals and amateurs. The normative behaviors of both professional dogmen and amateurs are geared towards self-preservation in a society that is hostile towards their chosen activity. If we reflect back to DMX's lyrics, they seem to suggest a common philosophy; “*don't really trust humans that much these days; Hmm shit, fact of the matter is, [they] trust dogs more than [they] trust humans.*” This statement seems to denote a degree of distrust the dogfighting community holds for humanity at large. Conversely, the disdain which the American public holds for dogfighting rises to a level that mainstream American conventionalism fails to recognize dogfighting as a sport; instead it is seen as a subculture of phony masculinity, couched in the inhumanity forcing dogs to participate in a non-sanctioned blood sport.

When attempting to enter the professional world of dogfighting or any criminal element, it is imperative that the stranger makes an impression of controlled strength (Cureton, 2008; Williams, 2004; Shakur, 1993). They must emanate power, yet show the ability to harness and direct that energy. They have to have the ability to withstand the ritualized hazing from dogmen, as well

as the reproach of society. Curs simply are not allowed. When speaking about their surreptitious activities dogmen uniformly present a strong and intimidating personality, a persona that cannot be backed down, a character that is willing to endure the ridicule and persecution that society administers with undying fervor (Cureton, 2008; *Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg* 2001; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005; Williams, 2004). No dogman can be permitted to be “curred” out by anyone. The terminology “cur” refers to any dog that refuses to scratch (refusing to fight), jumps the pit (afraid to fight), or simply an inferior dog. The terminology cur is normally reserved for dogs, but here the definition is being expanded to also describe people (Semencic, 1990; Faron, 1995).

Human curs are a direct reflection of the cluster from which they emerged. The term cluster is being used primarily because one of the dogmen referred to his extended group of dogmen as a cluster (*Off the Chain*, 2004). However, for the sake of consistency, cluster will be defined as a group of individuals who maintain consistent levels of social interaction due to similar interest or some degree of interdependence (Johnson, 2000; Durkheim, 1933). Thus the term group and cluster are synonymous and interchangeable, where the group is maintained through a universal thread of belonging (Johnson, 2000). Groups can have varying degrees of connectedness spanning from intense involvement with a strong sense of identity to low levels of involvement with no sense of belonging. The cohesion of the cluster has a very close association with the level of group interdependence (Durkheim, 1933). Any participant in the game or

cluster that is considered weak or feminine must also be culled. Their presence jeopardizes the entire operation because they may not have the ability to fend off critics and detractors (Shakur, 1993; Williams, 2004). The game cannot allow the weak, dog or man, to partake. Weak civilians (dogmen terminology for non-dogmen) are not invited or accepted into the elusive society (Cureton, 2008; *Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005).

In rare instances where weak civilians manage to enter the game, when they are uncovered they are always blacklisted. In addition, depending upon the circle of clusters, the weak civilian may be physically assaulted as a stern reminder to stay away, and not to talk (*Ghetto Dawg*, 2005). In fact, strong civilians are often tested physically to see if they can handle themselves in the sometimes hostile dogfighting environment (Cureton, 2008).

As it has already been mentioned, there are many barriers to defend the game against civilian penetration. Blatant ignoring, a menacing persona, and physically assaulting someone all serve as deterrents to the less-than seriously interested civilian. However, if the civilian is able to endure these initial barriers and is, in fact, accepted as a prospect (civilian seeking to become a dogman), they are always subjected to hazing (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Cureton, 2008; Williams, 2004; Shakur, 1993).

In its most elementary form, dogmen haze prospects by systematically denying them opportunities to learn the game. This denial of opportunity tests the prospect's desire as well as their willingness to persevere. Prospects are

often asked to clean kennels and, under scrutinizing supervision, prepare food for the dogs (*Off the Chain*, 2004). As prospects earn trust, they are then permitted to interact at some capacity with a few low-level or “roll” dogs (*Off the Chain*, 2004). “Roll” dogs are animals whose only purpose is to spar and practice with competition animals (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2001; *Ghetto Dawg 2*, 2005; Faron, 1995). Roll dogs may be game or cur. However, roll dogs are never used for recognized matches; they simply lack the quality to win. Prospects have limited to no contact with top fighting combatant dogs.

Top fighting dogs are rarely controlled by anyone other than their handler. The handler may or may not be the dog’s legal owner(s). This handling restriction helps the animal to bond closely with the person who will be with them in the pit. In the pit, the handler becomes the one calming source for the animal in the midst of chaos.

Once a prospect has attained enough trust and respect from the cluster to feed and exercise dogs, as well as attend matches, the prospect will be expected to become more engaged with an animal of their own (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg 2*, 2005; Faron, 1995). Prospects can expect to pay premium prices (\$1,500 to \$4,000) for a sub-par game dog (an 18 month old male). Paralleling the sport of Schutzhund, serious participants learn that puppies are extremely risky investments, and the gratification of competition is severely delayed; therefore serious Schutzhund exhibitors purchase young dogs (6 to 18 months old) rather than puppies. As well, new Schutzhund exhibitors are almost

never sold championship quality dogs because the exhibitors lack the wisdom and experience to help the dog fulfill its potential. Likewise, dogmen contend that prospects must be willing to make the financial investment into the operation, however, dogmen are not willing to entrust a potential grand champion in the hands of an inexperienced trainer or prospect.

Once the prospect acquires a dog, the dogmen then take the time to educate the prospect on the history of the breed, paying particular attention to lineage, and what the prospect's dog may be genetically capable of doing in a match (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2001; *Ghetto Dawg 2*, 2005; Semencic, 1990; Faron, 1995). Prospects are also taught various training & conditioning methodologies. Roll matches are often set up for the prospect as well as their dogs. In a roll match, the prospect's dog is slightly overmatched with a superior dog (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

There are three object lessons for the prospect in a roll match. The first lesson is how the prospect has learned to prepare his dog for the match. The second lesson is determining the critical point of stopping the match. And the third and final point of a roll match is how the prospect cares for the animal after the match, as well as when he rolls his dog again (*Off the Chain*, 2004). As a dog trainer, I would estimate that dogmen are looking to see if their prospects have acquired the necessary medical skills to nurse their dog back to competition health. For instance, a properly conditioned dog should only lose negligible amounts of blood during a match. This lack of blood loss is accomplished by a

common conditioning practice in which the dogs are dehydrated before the match (Faron, 1995, Semencic, 1990). Dehydration causes the blood vessels to constrict which in turn restricts the amount of blood loss through wounds (Faron, 1995, Semencic, 1990). The prospect also must have the ability to restore his dog's confidence after a roll match. This concept is equally as important as the prospect's ability to physically condition the dog for the match. Ideally, the prospect realizes during the roll match that his dog is overmatched, and he will pick his dog up during a point when his dog is winning. By picking the dog up while it is winning, the dog feels a sense of gratification, as though it has won the fight, and thus the prospect has very little work to accomplish regarding confidence building after the match (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

#### Professionalism and Amateurism in Dogfighting

The realm of amateur dogfighting has a much different plight than professional dogfighting. The greatest difference between the two is that amateur dogfights lack systematic organization (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2001; *Ghetto Dawg 2*, 2005). Amateur dogfights can happen at any given moment, without planning or purpose. Amateur dogfights can occur simply because two gentlemen were walking their dogs on the same street at the same time. Amateurs consistently match their dogs based on happenstance rather than circumstance (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Professional dogmen match their dogs at certain weights in recognized matches against other professional dogmen and their dogs. Most professional dogmen operate according to Cajun rules or some

alternative version. Cajun rules are the most widely accepted, recognized, and practiced rules in dogfighting. Some parts of the country use slightly altered variations (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Semencic, 1990; Faron, 1995). On the contrary to professional practices, amateurs will match any dog against any other willing competitor. Although a chance happening can provoke a match among professional dogmen, the ensuing fight would never occur, unless it could be legitimately organized and, more importantly, recognized by the dogfighting governing body (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Semencic, 1990).

Another pronounced difference between professional dogmen and amateurs is the “honor amongst thieves” principle. Professional dogmen participate in the sport not only for the money, but also for the heritage and pride that adheres closely to the practice (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Semencic, 1990). The heritage and pride associated with dogfighting explains the frequency with which stories of generations of dogmen are told (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Although the accuracy of the stories is impossible to validate, what is important to note is that elders have often passed on to their sons or other young male relatives training techniques as well as the canine bloodlines. This type of history is almost nonexistent among amateurs. Dogmen recant historic matches with great passion and nostalgia. They tell their life stories with pride. Their greatest desire is to produce an animal that rivals the dogs in the legends their fathers once told (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

Unfortunately, the gradient between professional dogmen and amateurs is not as rigidly defined as in other sports. Mainstream society sees all people who advocate for letting their dogs fight as dogfighters. This is a gross overstatement. According to dogmen, amateurs are far more likely to abuse their animals. Dogmen contend that amateurs simply have not learned or acquired the appropriate skills to train dogs to combat effectively in the pit. Dogmen further contend that “you have to love each and every one of your animals;” even though expression of love may variable (*Off the Chain*, 2004). For instance, a common technique to conditioning a dog for a match is to walk or run it. It is far easier to put the dog on a treadmill rather than take them out for walks, but to put the dog on a treadmill circumvents the bonding process between the dog and the handler. Some professional dogmen argue that the only time it is acceptable to use a treadmill is during the off-season.

May through September is considered the off-season in the northern hemisphere because the higher daily temperatures complicate training & conditioning. These complications are primarily due to increased disease spread through wounds and the prevalence of insects during these warmer months (Semencic, 1990; Faron, 1995). Again, similar to Schutzhund, to condition for optimum competition, exhibitors have to personally exercise their animals. Getting out with the dog is not solely about exercise, it is also about bonding. The dog has to know that you are going to be there irrespective of the situation. High-end dogmen may also utilize swimming pools, whirlpools, chiropractic

adjustments, and steroids to exercise their dogs (*Off the Chain*, 2004). These luxuries are often too expensive for the less than serious and financially successful enthusiasts.

Another significant difference between professional dogmen and amateurs is their use of the aforementioned roll match. For the professional, these small unrecognized matches serve several purposes. First, roll matches help to make sure the dog is game, and to ensure that he will scratch, that the dog is not a cur. Second, roll matches help dogmen determine how their dogs fight. Do their animals prefer to bite the face, ear, neck, chest, testicles, or is he a universal biter, meaning he will attack whatever area is available (*Off the Chain*, 2004; Appendix B-8). This information will be used to determine how the dog will eventually get matched up later. The third and final point of roll matches for dogmen is that they serve as opportunities for their animals to gain confidence. Although the dog is intentionally overmatched, and will suffer some tissue damage, the roll match provides the dogmen the opportunity to nurture and strengthen the bond between the dog and handler.

On the contrary, for amateurs, the end purpose of roll matches is to provide entertainment. It is not uncommon to see two amateurs “pitting” their puppies (dogs younger than 8 months) against each other, a practice professional dogmen disdain (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Pitting refers to staging two dogs to fight each other (Semencic, 1990; Faron, 1995). Professional dogmen argue that such acts are not only inhumane, but they are counterproductive (*Off*

*the Chain*, 2004). Pitting puppies could result in their spirits being broken, and consequently end in them not liking the pit. The secondary reason why amateurs roll their dogs is to provide an environment for gambling (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

Although the wagers are minuscule in comparison to those at organized and sanctioned fights which can go as high as \$500,000, wagers at roll matches range from \$5 to in excess of \$500. Roll matches can take place anywhere, garages, suburban backyards, basements, in the woods, etc.

Canine curs are badges of shame for their owners, thus when these animals are uncovered they are often eliminated (sold, traded, or killed) from the dogman's possession (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg* 2001; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005). Because of mainstream society's misrepresentation, it must be mentioned that only occasionally do dogmen destroyed their dogs because they are curs. This is because curs are simply not permitted to enter the game. By breeding from champion stock (winners of three consecutive matches), or grand champion stock (winners of five consecutive matches, and no recorded loses) the breeder can help ensure the highest quality of genetic potential for future litters (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg* 2001; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005; Faron, 1995; Stephanitz, 1925).

This breeding process combined with not selling game-puppies or trading game-dogs to non-dogmen provides assurance that the bloodlines maintain purity (Stephanitz, 1925). Non-game puppies are sold to civilians, through brokers, where the dogs normally never see the pit. Dogmen prefer to utilize

brokers so as not to damage their reputations as dogmen (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg* 2001; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005). However once a dogman's reputation is created and solidified, the dogman does not have to guard his reputation as closely (Faron, 1995). Once a dogman's reputation is solidified, many people, particularly those who are ill-informed about dogfighting, tend to believe reputation and perception more readily than reality. Continued success in the pit is often enough to fool many prospects into believing that every animal associated with a particular dogman or group is a potential grand champion.

Another breeding practice which many dogmen employ to better their breeding stock is euthanasia. Without question, there are times, for a multiplicity of reasons, that dogmen decide to euthanize their dogs. Some dogmen euthanize their dogs because the dog lost a match or several matches, and thus eradicated the possibility of Champion or Grand Champion Status and ultimately the loss of breeding royalties (i.e. stud fees or puppies) (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Sometimes the dogs are euthanized because the dogmen cannot provide the necessary medical attention required to save the dog's life (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Regardless of the reason that dogmen euthanize their animals, the practice of euthanasia is not new to the dog world or foreign to mainstream society.

Most of the forms of euthanasia dogmen choose are those which closely mimic publicly approved government issued forms of execution of humans (i.e. lethal injection, electrocution, firing squad). Euthanasia is also an incredibly common practice among animal protection agencies. The American Humane

Society reported more than 2.7 million animals in just 1,000 shelters being euthanized in 1997 (Appendix B-41). Again, while dogmen are heavily scorned by animal protection agencies, (e.g. ASPCA, PETA, and PYSETA) and mainstream society for their practice of euthanasia, it is not a new phenomenon to the dog world, and many serious dog enthusiasts still adhere to the practice today. In fact, Max Emil Frederic Captain Stephanitz, founder of the German Shepherd Dog, in 1925 described in the seminal text The German Shepherd Dog in Word and Picture, how and why lesser specimens should be destroyed (*Off the Chain*, 2004; *Ghetto Dawg* 2001; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005; Stephanitz, 1925). While euthanasia among dogmen can be humane it is not always so and thus potential dogmen with “mainstream” morals or weaker personas find a reason exit.

An interesting social fact that seems to have emerged from the data is that dogmen employ their degree of professionalism to transcend the sport and perhaps capture social prestige and status in both the dogfighting subculture and mainstream society. Moreover, for as much as dogmen have been lauded as inhumane and depraved in many respects, there does seem to be a human side to their treatment of their animals. However, because of mainstream society’s seemingly unrelenting disdain for dogmen and dogfighters, there seems to be a certain degree of biased attention on the brutality of the sport and euthanizing animals. There is very little regard or attention to the systemic process of breeding and how that reduces the number of animals that must be euthanized.

Moreover, there is even less attention given to the strict code of conduct between professionals, amateurs, handlers, and prospects and the competitive rules practiced during dogfighting matches.

Another component of dogfighting, which is often overlooked by the mainstream, involves the formalized rules of the game. It is important for supporters and critics of dogfighting to understand that the institutionalization and recognition of generalized rules indicate some higher order of organization within the practice. These rules were originally instituted into organized dogfighting to regulate the matches, as well as the environment. Attached is an appendix of rules that has an addendum that constitutes “Cajun” rules. These are the most widely accepted, recognized, and practiced rules in dogfighting. Some parts of the country use slightly altered variations (Semencic, 1990). Selection of a referee is a critical component of a recognized match. For the match to be recognized by the governing organization, both dogmen have to agree on a referee. When dogmen or *principals* select the referee, they try to select one that will favor their dog’s fighting style(s), or at least not penalize their dog for fighting in a certain manner.

Rule 1: The principals shall select a referee who is familiar with the rules and who is satisfactory to both sides. The referee will then appoint his timekeeper. Each handler will select a man to act as his chief second or cornerman, whose duties are to wash the opponent's dog, and to remain near this dog's corner as an observer.

Rule 11 and Rule 14 are critical components that are directly determined by the referee. As well between rule 13 and 14, there is a critical insertion that all organized matches abide by and all dogmen recognize. This insertion states that that "*THE REFEREE HAS FULL AUTHORITY AND HIS DECISION IS FINAL IN ALL MATTERS* (Semencic 1990:45)." With the acceptance of this insertion, dogmen pray for the neutrality and fairness of the referee. This prayer for neutrality and fairness is magnified when one of the participants is African-American, because he realizes that in the end the referee could determine the match. As well, questioning the judgment of the referee is seen as extremely disrespectful, which in turn makes it much more difficult to schedule a referee for the next match (Semencic, 1990; United Schutzhund Clubs of America, 2007).

Rule 11: The referee shall call all turns, although either handler may ask for a turn on either dog. If the referee rules there has been a turn, he will instruct the handlers to "pick up free of holds" as soon as possible, and should either dog accidentally get a hold again, the handlers shall set the dogs down immediately and make a continued effort to pick up the dogs, free of holds. When picked up, the dogs must be taken to their respective corners and faced away from their opponent. The timekeeper shall note the time and take up the count (not out loud) and also the referee shall notify the handler whose dog must scratch.

Rule 14: Fouls that will be just cause for losing a contest:

- A. To leave the pit, with or without the dog before the referee has ruled.
- B. To receive anything from outside the pit, or allow anyone outside the pit to touch or assist the dog.
- C. To push, drum, throw or spank, or in any way assist a dog across his scratch-line, except by encouraging him by voice.
- D. To step across a scratch-line before the dog has completed his scratch or the referee has ruled on it.
- E. To stomp on the pit floor or kick the pit sides, yell at or give orders to the opponent's dog, or (in the referee's opinion) do anything to distract or

interfere with either dog while scratching or fighting to affect the outcome of the contest.

F. To interfere with the opposing handler or touch either dog until the referee gives an order to handle the dogs.

G. To use a "Rub", "Poison", or "Hypo" on either dog.

Rule 15: If there should be any outside interference before the contest has been concluded, the referee has full authority to call it a "NO CONTEST" and shall name the time and place the contest is to be resumed and fought out to a referee's decision. (The same referee shall preside.) Also, the referee shall insist that the dogs be washed and weighed (in the referee's presence), and the dogs shall weigh at the weights specified in the original articles of agreement, and to do this as many times as necessary to conclude the contest.

Matches are established using quite a bit of secrecy. There may not be any preexisting evidence that a large event (30 or 40 matches) is about to happen. At high-risk events (high-risk of police infiltration) organizers may keep the exact location of the venue a secret until a couple of hours before the contest is to begin (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Depending upon the credibility of the contestants, this secret might be kept from the dogmen as well; although, some dogmen find ways around impediment.

Dogmen benefit from the intelligence provided by the law enforcement officers who actively participate in the game (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Because of this fact, dogmen are often aware when there is a high probability that police will raid a match. This inside information allows the referee to move the location of the contest or to schedule the contest for another time. Marginalized, minority, and/or fringe groups participants may be at a disadvantage relative to information concerning the potential for police crack-downs. For example, African-American dogmen or other marginalized groups may worry about conspiracies to remove

them from the game because these “outside” dogmen may not get the same privileged information that their “inside” counterparts receive. Thus if a match is raided, the marginalized dogmen are more likely to be apprehended with more contraband (i.e. dog aggressive Pit Bulls, break sticks, crates, canine first-aid kits). When the referee reschedules the match, which is often within one week (if not the same or next day), the dogmen forfeit the match if they are not available. This is true even if the forfeiture was a direct result of the dogmen being incarcerated at the time of the rescheduled match. Forfeiture of a match means the losing dog no longer has the opportunity to attain Grand Champion status.

The docudramas, and electronic video clips certainly suggest that dogmen engage in a clandestine counter culture that seems to not be completely socially disorganized. In fact, the dogfighting subculture offers opportunities for economic, social, and cultural advancement. Additionally, the dogfighting subculture represents a credible innovative way to accomplish some level of success. A close inspection reveals normative expectations, socialization, participant discipline, informal regulatory procedures clearly defining acceptable sanctioned underground matches, social hierarchy, social network agencies (veterinarian outlets and kennels that are entrenched in mainstream conventionalism) and discretionary law enforcement actions.

It could very well be that the public’s distaste for dogmen and those who engage in dogfighting is associated with lack of knowledge about the counter-culture, the Pit Bull breed and the perceived level of exploitation and harm done

to the animals that are an active part of the underground sport. Perhaps, conventional wisdom seems fixed on the notion that fighting dogs can't exercise freedom or discretion to not want to be a combatant but we find there are opportunities for dogs to back out of a match and that there is a degree of mercy shown to non-combatant dogs. Dare I say that the data does suggest that there is room for mercy on curs, unwilling participants, and losing combatant dogs. However, the most significant security blanket for protecting and enhancing dog's health is through selective, appropriate, and purposeful breeding, proper veterinarian attention, continued discipline and training of prospects, promoting healthy sanctioned matches with credible referees, and continuing to adhere to the strict criteria that governs dogmen's path from amateur to professional.

#### Theoretical Implications

Social Learning theories (e.g. neutralization theory), structural theories (e.g. anomie/strain), and cultural deviance theory (e.g. differential opportunity theory) appears to have some explanatory value for dogmen and the dogfighting phenomenon. It logically follows that the dogfighting phenomenon is a counter culture activity that serves some type of transcending benefit for its participants. Moreover, dogmen and the dogfighting phenomenon are the products of learned philosophies and learning the idiosyncratic norms required to successfully compete in the subculture of dogfighting.

In 1998 Forsythe and Evans utilized Sykes and Matza's Neutralization Theory to explain dogfighting among working class White males in Louisiana.

Neutralization Theory works well in generally explaining the Pit Bull subculture, and how deviance is permitted to transpire in various communities. Flexibility in norms ultimately serves as the basis for neutralization techniques. These techniques are justifications to render societal norms meaningless or at least less meaningful, which ultimately weakens the social actor's bond to society making deviance a viable act (Skypes and Matza, 1957). Skypes and Matza outline five techniques of neutralization that occur before the committal of a deviant action. This theory offers a basis to understand deviant behavior from the perspective of the deviant. Dogmen employ all five techniques; however, three techniques appear significant: (1) denial of Injury; (2) condemnation of the condemners; and (3) appeal to higher loyalties. Based on the films, video histories, and literature review, the "denial of responsibility" and "denial of the victim" techniques of neutralization to explain participation in dogfighting are much less effective mechanisms to render societal norms meaningless (Forsythe and Evans, 1998). Techniques of neutralization are learned and communicated in near groups of a subculture. For dogmen, near group information sessions provide opportunities for the more experienced dogmen to "school" the young, and thus strengthen and protect the fraternal group (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

Generally speaking, neutralization theory is a type of social learning theory given individuals learn techniques to neutralize their own conventional values, allowing them to drift towards engaging in deviant, criminal, and/or violent behavior. In plain terms the neutralization perspective posits that persons with

conventional values and attitudes engage in rationalization, excuses, and justifications that render neutral the expectation that they should remain conventional. Once conventionalism is rendered temporarily meaningless or reduced to unimportant, individuals will move to engage in whatever action they are convinced they will prosper from (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

The first neutralization technique, denial of responsibility suggests that individuals fail to own up to personal responsibility and blame their behavior on adverse situational circumstances out of their control (Sykes and Matza, 1957). For instance, dogmen may claim that it is not their fault they committed a certain action; rather they quickly contend that they are only a product of their environment. They may argue that if anyone is responsible, it is the legislators and big businessmen who create economically and socially deprived communities for them to live in.

Another technique of neutralization is denying that actions will lead to injury to a victim (e.g. denial of injury) (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Dogmen might claim that no one got hurt. What is the big deal? It is only a dog. Because the Pit Bull fight match itself does not involve any humans being harmed, dogmen may feel that any criticism they receive is more about exaggeration of other social problems, the revocation of personal freedoms or even public hysteria regarding a subject about which the average American knows very little.

Condemnation of conventional institutions and persons (another technique of neutralization), suggests that individuals feel as though conventional

institutions and persons are somehow impartial, unjust, and deviant themselves, thus, there are no reasonable judgments that can be levied against their personal behavior (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Dogmen argue, “the situation would not be such a big deal if the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) would get off our back... if the animals ever suffer, it is their [ASPCA] fault.” The ASPCA in conjunction with other agencies have forced the Pit Bull subculture to go underground. Pit Bulls as a breed are no different than Border Collies or German Shepherd Dogs in that they can very intense natures. Some dogmen compare dogfighting to extreme fighting or boxing with humans (*Off the Chain*, 2004).

The fourth technique of neutralization, appeal to higher loyalties suggests that bonds to social cliques, near groups and/or like circumstances peer groups outweigh the contradictory norms of society at large (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Dogmen can invoke historical reasons for continuing an illegal practice and they cite the fact that the animals were bred for the purpose of fighting, and thus, to not allow the animal to fight would be inhumane.

The final neutralization technique, denial of victim, removes the victim status from an obvious victim. Certainly this technique is hard to differentiate from denial of injury except that denial of victim implies that even if there is a victim, they somehow deserved what happened (Sykes and Matza, 1957). This is the least likely technique to be employed by dogmen because there seems to be no human victims.

Neutralization techniques are learned and shared in near groups of a given subculture. As mentioned earlier, for dogmen, these rap sessions provide opportunities for the more experienced dogmen to educate the young, and thus enable and protect the fraternal order.

Merton's Anomie Strain Theory is a macro level theory which concentrates on the modes of adaptation experienced by groups as they maneuver between systemic opportunities and goals. Merton's Anomie/Strain Theory stresses that modes of adaptation will reflect economic station and access to opportunity in a stratified society. Merton argues that we are context by structural and cultural spheres where we are confronted with differentiated opportunity structures (in the structural arena) and similar ideals of success (we adopt from cultural aspirations in the cultural arena). Merton further contends that our culture has generated a universal desire for material achievement as the ultimate measure of success. Additionally there are conventional and acceptable ways of obtaining these material possessions (Merton, 1957; Shoemaker, 2000). Merton further argues that an individual's position in society serves as indicator of how people respond to strained economic situations. Moreover, conventional and culturally approved mechanisms are not evenly distributed through society where individuals at the bottom of the hierachal strata have fewer acceptable opportunities to achieve material success. Furthermore, racial minorities in the lower strata have even fewer legitimate opportunities to success than non-racial minorities (Ward, 1994). Limited or blocked opportunity to achieve material success juxtaposed to the

universal desire for material possessions creates a strain among disparaged individuals which causes them to seek alternative and creative ways to satisfy their internalized desires. This internalized strain within the individual is reduced when material success is achieved via unconventional means. As this occurs, respect for traditionally accepted means of achieving goals begins to shift, and norms weaken to the point they no longer regulate the methods people use to obtain success (Ward, 1994).

Blocked opportunity and weakened norms within disenfranchised groups create five potential coping strategies. First, conformists accept the socially established goals and the corresponding conventional means of achieving material success, even at the expense of potential failure (Ward, 1994). Next, innovators accept cultural goals, but reject legitimate means of achieving the goals (Shoemaker, 2000). Third, ritualists discount societal goals, but maintain legitimate means of daily operations (Ward, 1994). Ritualists sometimes reject the cultural goal while simultaneously adhering rigidly to legitimated means (Shoemaker, 2000). Fourth, retreatists reject both societal goals and the conventional means (Ward, 1994). Finally, very similar to retreatist, rebels reject both socially established goals and the conventional means of achieving success; however rebels seek to replace the conventional means with alternative mechanisms (Shoemaker, 2000; Ward, 1994; Merton 1957). Ultimately groups react to strained resources in adaptive ways ranging from innovators to rebels. The evidence seems to suggest that dogmen are most likely innovators in the

sense that they employ alternate resources generated within the context of the dogfighting counter culture to achieve, and maintain cultural goals. Certainly, dogfighting is not the socially accepted institution that generates gainful participation in the so called American Dream; but being a dogman and successfully negotiating the dogfighting subculture is sufficient enough to garner some measure of economic, social, material, resource, and cultural success. Where mainstream America is far too stratified and restrictive as to be inclusive of all populations relative to economic opportunity, and life course advancement; the disadvantaged move to secure some standard of living in innovative ways that serve one purpose, survival.

Similar to Merton's Anomie Strain Theory, Cloward and Ohlin's Differential Opportunity Theory explains deviance in terms of legitimate and illegitimate opportunities in society to achieve success (Akers, 1997). Unlike Merton's theory, Cloward and Ohlin argue that societal pressure to achieve material success alone does not explain compliant or deviant behaviors; rather, criminal behaviors emerge from denied access to legitimate means (Ward, 1994). When people live in social environments which are deprived of conventional opportunities to succeed; these socially strained individuals turn to the illegitimate opportunities which exist in subcultures in their communities (Akers, 1997). However, living in economically and socially strained environments is no guarantee of success in illegitimate activities. Parallel to conventional mechanisms of success, individuals in deviant subcultures must learn the skills

associated with success in illegitimate activities. Not all economically deprived communities develop identical subcultures of deviance. Clusters develop specialized delinquent subcultures depending on the illegitimate opportunities which exist in their communities (Akers, 1997). Cloward and Ohlin identified three types of deviant subcultures to alleviate the strain associated with blocked legitimate opportunity. Criminal subcultures are created and sustained by lower class youth for the primary purpose of generating income. These subcultures are organized around stable adult criminal patterns and values (Akers, 1997). Dogmen who readily engage in criminal subcultures do so in pursuit of economic gains (*Off the Chain*, 2004). Older dogmen serve as mentors to new and inexperienced dogmen in the game. The older dogmen create opportunities for the newer dogmen to succeed both economically and culturally in the community (*Ghetto Dawg*, 2002; *Ghetto Dawg*, 2005).

Second, conflict subcultures are characterized by lower class youth who are preoccupied with maintaining a “street” or “bad” orientation (Anderson, 1999). These individuals willingly engage in violent behaviors, in almost any venue. This willingness to be violent propels their reputation in the community (Shoemaker, 2000; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). Based on research of other deviant subcultures, it may be reasonable to assume that new members to the dogfighting community constantly have to maintain an element of strength, which ultimately means a willingness to engage in physical altercations if the situation

ever arises (Cureton, 2008). Consequently, dogfighting as a subculture and practice adopts a street orientation.

The strength of Cloward and Ohlin's Differential Opportunity Theory is that opportunity to participate successfully (accumulation of economic and cultural capital) in deviant activities is directly correlated to the blocked opportunity to participate in conventional mechanisms of achieving success and the accessibility of deviant subcultures which support learning in economically deprived communities. However, simply because the opportunity to participate in deviant activities exists in the community, does not mean the subcultures will permit access to material success for everyone in the community. Individuals have to be effectively integrated into the deviant subcultures to increase the probability of successful operation. The third subculture Cloward and Ohlin describe is the retreatist's subculture. Retreatists have given up on both mainstream goals and both legitimate and illegitimate means of attaining them (Akers, 1997; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). Retreatists are double failures in society. They have already failed in mainstream society because they were unable obtain material success via legitimate means. They have also failed in deviant societies because they could not adopt illegitimate means to gain material success. Having failed in both the legitimate and illegitimate opportunities, these individuals retreat from society (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

Cloward and Ohlin's criminal, and conflict subcultural formations seem to be applicable to dogmen and decisions to actively engage in an established

dogfighting subculture. The evidence is clear that the dogfighting counter culture is extremely complex, with normative expectations and rules of engagement that dictate that participants be socialized in a manner that produces a reasonable amount of success and continued protection of the clandestine nature of dogfighting.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

A research project devised to understand the underground subculture of dogfighting has to be approached in a manner that pays particular attention to the social conditions the dogmen emerged from, their mechanisms of normative transitioning from mainstream society to deviant activities (dogfighting, gambling, drug sales), and finally the creations and maintenance of dogfighting subcultures. The central motivation for individuals to participate in dogfighting fundamentally represents a selfish endeavor to improve upon unfavorable life conditions (Kamenka, 1983) via the accumulation of capital, both economic and cultural. Although dogmen have been socially ostracized, their ostracism has not quelled the internalized consumer fetish produced by capitalistic societies. Thus, through a process of normative transitioning, dogmen subcultures are formed as a means to satisfy these internalized desires.

Dogfighting cannot be explained in a timeless vacuum, meaning that much of today's dogfighting activity is predicated upon many historical factors. Dogfighting, like every human endeavor, owns a history. Dogfighting has to be placed in the historical period in which it exists. Everything from cultural ideas to the structural character of institutions is historically relative. The historical

conditions from which dogfighting emerged cannot be ignored (Johnson 2000:144).

Before dogmen enter into the game, many have already been labeled as deviant by mainstream society. This label of deviance may have stemmed from drug sales, violent tendencies, or their simply being a racial minority. Although our society has made racist and sexist actions illegal, other labels of discrimination have become legally institutionalized, such as convicted child pornographers not being able to become elementary school teachers. The label takes more precedent than the actual offense. Laws such as these were designed for the benefit of society as a whole; however, these same laws can be manipulated to become an alienating factor. When convicted criminals are not permitted to pursue employment in meaningful occupations (subjectively determined) they become severely alienated. This process of alienation groups several social actors together in clusters where they are free to organize in a manner that functionally benefits the outcasts.

Dogmen organize in just this fashion. Their taboo sport of choice, combined with historical and criminal alienations, coalesces to produce relatively stable clusters. These social conditions serve as a precursor to entering into the deviant subcultural activity of dogfighting. Once a dogman is labeled a criminal in society, the affixed label lasts almost into perpetuity. The label remains affixed to the individual, any *a priori* or former sanctions, even in the event that restitution or rehabilitation has been rendered. Known dogmen in society are

socially ostracized, and are often prevented from participating in society at any normal capacity. For instance, Michael Vick was dismissed from Atlanta Falcons and suspended from the NFL before he was convicted. Regardless of evidence, many dogmen are socially shunned because they are thought (real or perceived) to be violent towards animals and people alike.

Based on the documentaries and video clips, most dogmen have conventional values and norms about society. They desire the "American Dream." Generically, they want the house on the hill, their children to have the best possible education, and financial independence. Dogmen, like the "average American", seek life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Dogmen have internalized the rules of middle class society, although in many aspects, fulfillment of these middle class values is practically unattainable. Dogmen have adopted a "street" orientation. Street orientations are not quelled by the internalization of middle class social structures present in everyday activities. In fact the social structures propel many dogmen into street actions via two mechanisms. First, prospects intentionally disassociate with middle class values and their appropriate actions (Off the Chain, 2004). Prospects have to appear to hate everything that dogmen appear to hate. Prospects learn of the righteous indignation that many dogmen hold for society and then they subconsciously begin to practice and emulate this societal contempt. Second, the assemblage of prospects with established dogmen creates a hostile environment that is conducive to subcultural deviance. The two value systems juxtaposed, middle

class values versus street orientations, creates internal conflict, which can only be resolved through the production of a subservient deviant system.

Social structures are internalized by dogmen through sets of repeated actions during various stages and circumstances. Each act in a dogmen's life serves to provide a contextual frame of reference that ultimately provides an "automatic response" the next time a similar circumstance arises (Bourdieu, 2002). Additionally, there are not direct relationships between social structures and practices. Rather there are only two social realms of concern, "social space" which deals with positions of dogmen in society and "symbolic space" which concerns the practices of dogmen. For any given social space there is an accompanying symbolic space. Habitus is the process of how social and symbolic spaces (position and practice) are inextricably linked.

Habitus works as a set of loose guidelines of which actors are not necessarily aware; these dispositions are flexible, even though they are deeply rooted. Habitus refers to the relatively stable systems of dispositions that are shaped by the experiences of actors in particular positions in the social structure, which generate and organized actors in the social structure, which generate and organize practices and representations (Bourdieu, 2002).

Habitus is an ever-evolving unit of connections between positions and practice. Dogmen incorporate into their habitus whatever seems to be reasonable, as long as it does not compromise the individuals existing patterns of behavior (Bourdieu, 2002). Dogmen may very well hold a job with the sheriff's department as long as

their job (deputy sheriff) and their passion (dogfighting) are maintained in different social spaces.

The social structure of society is internal to the individual. External structures are intangible and therefore if they are to be examined they must be assessed with subjective expertise, paying close attention to histories as well as interactions between individuals. Thus, the replicating mechanism of dogfighting and subsequently all deviance is not an external social structure that oppresses, rather, the replicating mechanism is found in our habitus. This system of oppression is generated from the cultural capital we possess and the practices it entails.

Habitus refers to the physical and social characteristics of the human body. Habitus as a structure or mechanism is located in the body. Habitus refers to the way people use their bodies as a communication device and cultural symbol. Habitus is expressed in our posture, the way we eat, the words we use, the way we walk, the way dress, our skin, hair, etc. Dogmen are deliberate and unmistakable in their habitus. Dogmen have a presence, especially around dogs, that commands respect if not outright fear. Skin, hair, vocabulary, apparel, and even eating habits are all identifiable components of an individual's habitus. For instance the word "bitch" to dogmen does not have a negative connotation; it simply means a female dog. But the word "dog" could have several different meanings. Is the dog a show dog, game-bred, dead-game, working dog, cur, bait, etc? Although there are a few exceptions, dogmen cannot be identified by

their dress. Their apparel is one more of function rather than fashion; thus, an extremely successful dogmen will be dressed much like any other American within their social class. It must be noted that habitus production is a gradual process. Habitus develops over time through interactions. Our habitus is not shaped as a result of our body; rather our body is a continual reflection of our habitus. Hence, as potential dogmen's habitus develops, with respect to the social conditions they have inhabited, their consistent indoctrination to reproduce their capital creates a serious impediment for many dogmen to succeed in a conventional manner. The obstruction comes from individuals having historical states of alienation, combined with innate desires to reproduce their capital states (i.e. economic and cultural).

Dogmen realize that access to legitimate means of capital production are drastically reduced, where illegitimate means of capital production are readily available. At this juncture, conventional reward systems are not as lucrative as unconventional reward systems to alienated individuals. When prospect's conventional means of capital production are significantly diminished and what remains are ultimately unrewarding, prospects realize they have alternative ways to increase their capital statuses. Individuals who have internalized middle class values find themselves in a normative dilemma. If they maintain allegiance with conventional society they risk losing potential economic gains. If they conform to unconventional means of economic production they risk losing cultural capital. The converse is also true for middle and upper class dogmen. If they maintain

allegiance with conventional society they risk losing cultural capital. If they conform to unconventional means of economic production they risk losing economical capital. Thus, the prospects must be innovative regarding economic and cultural capital production. Bonds to society serve as deterrence from deviant acts; however societal norms are flexible, not static. This flexibility in norms ultimately serves as the basis for neutralization techniques. These techniques are justifications to render societal norms meaningless or at least less meaningful, which ultimately weakens the social actor's bond to society by making deviance a viable act.

Dogmen within a subculture usually share many cultural similarities, which include concepts and rituals that are outside the norm of mainstream society. This shared culture is characterized by almost uniform adoption of "match rules." However, the shield of a dogfighting subculture does not negate the pressures of mainstream society that pushes to get dogmen to conform and assimilate, often at the cost of the dogmen's subcultural safety net, and maybe even their heritage (Johnson, 2000). Subcultures afford dogmen the opportunity to hone their delinquent craft while simultaneously reifying and perfecting the neutralization process. The subculture and the neutralization techniques are engrossed in a reflexive duet. The subculture teaches neutralization techniques that ultimately help sustain the subculture. Dogmen subcultures (clusters), once established, generate unambiguous contests, including roll matches and sanctioned matches, which reward the normative actions of its members (Cohen, 1955). Subcultures,

or dogmen's clusters, serve as the primary centers for learning the game or how to be deviant in a middle class society.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

It is the task of sociologists to explain social phenomena in a rational and scientific way. Our subject matter ranges from the interpretation of subliminal messages to the elucidation of macro-level conflict. Often in the process of scientific investigation and the quest for the next original idea, truth and understanding are sacrificed to rigid methodological constraints. In examining an activity that violates societal norms, alternative or at least modified means of investigation have to be employed to truly encapsulate the essence of what is being studied.

This research project began as an attempt to explore and describe the socially maligned subculture that exists in the world of dogfighting, as well as the dogmen who discreetly occupy this social space. In addition to the exploration of this taboo subject matter, this research project concerns how dogmen and dogfighting is presented in cinema and video websites and identifies normative expectations, concepts, social attitudes, and common themes associated with dogmen. Further, the applicability of social learning, strain, and cultural deviance theories for dogmen and dogfighting were explored.

I entered into this arena, objective and hopeful that a scientific approach could yield a high level of descriptive and exploratory data which would lend itself

to scholarly interpretation. Indirectly, I suspect this information could be used by animal rights activists so they can better comprehend and eradicate the illegal practice of dogfighting. Dogmen and sympathizers may also find this descriptive and exploratory report useful to protect and defend their practice. Opponents of dogfighting would argue that this project contributes to the continued inhumane treatment of animals.

The ultimate purpose was to describe and explore a virtually unknown social arena. This project reveals there is significant learning in the familiarities of oddities. Restated, many of the cultural tendencies which are found in the world of dogfighting are replicated in mainstream society. Dogfighting, as a subculture, is a pure reflection of society. PETA and other similar agencies argue that dogfighting is inhumane and barbaric. They assert that dogmen are morally reprehensible. However, many of the processes by which dogmen operate model many of the pluralistic societal processes we unquestionably accept, such as federal courtrooms, elementary school play yards, urban corners, and corporate boardrooms. This means that dogmen play by the rules and boundaries of the social arena in which they exist. Here are a few examples of how dogmen and their dogs model several mainstream processes:

- Sometimes dogs of equal quality are matched, and because of one animal's pre-match conditioning and in-match handling, one dog emerges victorious (i.e. attorneys in a courtroom).
- At other times the stronger dog completely dominates a match, regardless of their competitor's gameness (i.e. children on a school play yard).

- Occasionally dogs become dogfighters because of the environment they were born in, not necessarily their natural ability alone (i.e. urban youth joining neighborhood gangs).
- Dogmen's social connections and their control of resources ultimately determine an outcome of a match rather than the dogs' match performance (i.e. corporate boardrooms).
- Dogmen would never intentionally allow their dog to get killed in the pit. However, the type of training, conditioning, and treatment a dog receives largely depends upon a dogmen's access to resources. Dogmen with the most access to resources have dogs that are best prepared and rehabilitated, thus avoiding defeat.
- Finally the world of dogfighting has a bureaucratic structure which emulates many governmental agencies, where red tape abounds and success is predicated upon knowing the rules—both formal and informal.

Elijah Anderson (1999) that decent families learn the importance of code switching to negotiate a dual social reality of existing in an integrated conventional society while having to contend with the realities of street ethics that they continue to confront. The ability to code switch (transition into conflict resolution and gravitate towards suppressing social conflict with equitable force) is critical when negotiating alternate and often times contradictory social worlds. Dogmen have learned how to actively and seamlessly switch between mainstream conformity and subcultural deviance. In the world of dogfighting this ability to switch is a core mechanism of survival.

While most of mainstream society believes dogmen are bad dog-owners, this opinion is subjective and may not be accurate. For instance, in the documentary *Off the Chain*, dogmen "Tucson & Gip" both would be considered by many mainstream individuals to be menaces to society because of their participation in the game. However, listening to the information they share about

caring and keeping their dogs, it would be easy to categorize them as far-better-than average dog owners. They spend vast amounts of time with their animals, providing exercise, discipline, and affection. In fact, during the interview, Tucson's bitch is loose and exploring the interviewer, camera man, crew, and equipment. When his bitch begins exploring, she does so with a completely submissive yet strong presence. The energy this dog displays, dog trainers would call calm submissive energy (Millian, 2006). This is the type of energy most dogs need to exhibit to live happy and fulfilled lives; yet far too many dogs have not been given the human leadership they need to achieve this state of existence.

No Curs Allowed: Exploring The Subculture of Dogmen begins filling the gap on a clandestine phenomenon, and provides some insight concerning how the dogfighting community develops, sustains and prophecies itself. Given the vast media attention given to Michael Vick and his indictment regarding dogfighting, this project also begins to produce an objective view of dogfighting for pop culture review. While dogmen are considered by many mainstream individuals to be bizarre, eccentric, and even abominable people; I believe dogmen would agree that in some aspects, they are drastically different than the average person. However, I also contend that dogmen would argue that any person who is serious about their endeavor, be it crocheting or dogfighting, has routines, and practices that may seem extraordinary or in some cases drastic to the average American.

The subculture of dogfighting has evolved into a phenomenon which is larger than the practice itself. Restated, the subculture of dogfighting would continue to exist even if all of its current participants decided to abandon the endeavor. The subculture and its lures of increased individual economic and/or cultural capital would eventually entice new participants and convert them into full fledged dogmen.

Many major theories of deviance imply that deviant subcultures persist almost solely because of the culture of the lower class residents which is often exemplified by limited legitimate opportunities and increased exposure to deviance. As prudent sociologists, we must remember that our theoretical paradigms are based on sets of assumptions which ultimately guide our thinking and research; assumptions which we must be willing to challenge. Our theories allow us to make general statements about how some parts of the world interact. They do not allow us to make definitive statements about the universe. Our research either supports or nullifies our theories.

Dogfighting much like drug trafficking is often labeled, treated, and presented as a lower class problem. However both endeavors require at least nominal support from individuals in middle and upper classes. For instance, if the average price of a game-bred eight week old Pit Bull puppy is more than \$1500 dollars and it takes at 18 months before the dog will be ready to compete or breed, and even then with absolutely no guarantee return on investment, it is

logical to assume that the poverty stricken largely forego endeavors with this type of delayed gratification.

The next logical step in the scholarly investigation into dogfighting would be an ethnographic approach with the idea of investigating whether YouTube and cinema productions offer a measure of authenticity concerning the true realities of dogmen and dogfighting. Specifically, the next project should seek to decisively define which societal factors, other than constrained economic opportunities, prompt dogmen to participate in dogfighting. This project's contribution is that examined second hand data and provided some insight concerning the nature of dogmen and dogfighting. At worst, this project represents a fundamental look at a clandestine subculture in a manner that is filtered by the various media outlets used here. At best, this project provides a spring board to propel us into a further investigation using a more direct method of analysis whereby the filter is removed and the researcher has the luxury of a firsthand account.

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## APPENDIX A—DOGFIGHTING STATE STATUTES

### State of North Carolina statute regarding dogfighting

#### *§ 14-362.2. Dogfighting and baiting.*

- (a) A person who instigates, promotes, conducts, is employed at, provides a dog for, allows property under his ownership or control to be used for, gambles on, or profits from an exhibition featuring the fighting or baiting of a dog is guilty of a Class H felony. A lease of property that is used or is intended to be used for an exhibition featuring the fighting or baiting of a dog is void, and a lesser who knows this use is made or is intended to be made of his property is under a duty to evict the lessee immediately.
- (b) A person who owns, possesses, or trains a dog with the intent that the dog be used in an exhibition featuring the fighting or baiting of that dog is guilty of a Class H felony.
- (c) A person who participates as a spectator at an exhibition featuring the fighting or baiting of a dog is guilty of a Class H felony. (1997-78, s. 1.)

### State of Virginia statute regarding dogfighting

#### *§ 3.1-796.124. Dogfighting; penalty.*

- A. No person shall knowingly do any of the following: 1. Promote, engage in, or be employed in the fighting of dogs for amusement, sport or gain; 2. Wager money or anything of value on the result of such fighting; 3. Receive money or anything of value for the admission of another person to a place for dogfighting; 4. Possess, own, train, transport, or sell any dog with the intent that such dog engage in an exhibition of fighting with another dog; or 5. Permit any act described in subdivisions 1 through 4 of this subsection on any premises under his charge or control, or aid or abet any such act.
- B. Any animal control officer, as defined in § 3.1-796.66, shall confiscate any dogs that have been, are, or are intended to be used in dogfighting and any equipment used in training such dogs or used in dogfighting.

- C. Any person convicted of violating this section may be prohibited by the court from possession or ownership of other companion animals.
- D. Any person who violates any provision of this section shall be guilty of a Class 6 felony.
- E. In addition to any other fines and costs, any person who is convicted of a violation of this section shall pay all reasonable costs incurred in housing or euthanizing any confiscated dogs. (1985, c. 408, § 29-213.92:1; 1987, c. 488; 1998, c. 817; 1999, c. 113; 2003, c. 857.)

## APPENDIX B—REVIEWED REVIEWED

NPR

<sup>1</sup><http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12104472>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12098479>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=13754875>

CNN

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/07/18/dog.fighting/#cnnSTCVideo>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/07/18/dog.fighting/#cnnSTCText>

<sup>6</sup><http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D0DE3DC1339F93BA25751C0A960958260>

New York Times

<sup>7</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/18/sports/football/18vick.html>

<sup>8</sup>[http://video.on.nytimes.com/?fr\\_story=FEEDROOM197138](http://video.on.nytimes.com/?fr_story=FEEDROOM197138)

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/09/world/europe/09dogfight.html?\\_r=1&oref=slorigin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/09/world/europe/09dogfight.html?_r=1&oref=slorigin)

<sup>10</sup><http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/15/sports/football/15vick.html>

BBC

<sup>11</sup><http://www.breitbart.tv/html/5069.html>

<sup>12</sup>[http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8RBK6MO1&show\\_article=1](http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8RBK6MO1&show_article=1)

<sup>13</sup><http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6960788.stm>

<sup>14</sup><http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3175698126741936720>

Chicago Tribune

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chidogsfire\\_webjan18,0,4859278,print.story?coll=chi\\_tab01\\_layout](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chidogsfire_webjan18,0,4859278,print.story?coll=chi_tab01_layout)

<sup>16</sup><http://www.gadzoo.com/ChicagoTribune/PetsLinkView.aspx?LinkId=1316&GroupID=201>

Baltimore Sun

<sup>17</sup>[http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/baltimore/dogfighting0601,0,7756103.story?coll=bal\\_tab01\\_layout](http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/baltimore/dogfighting0601,0,7756103.story?coll=bal_tab01_layout)

<sup>18</sup><http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/specials/baltimore/dogfighting,0,7201099.storygallery>

USA Today

<sup>19</sup>[http://www.usatoday.com/sports/football/nfl/falcons/2007-07-18-vick-cover\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/sports/football/nfl/falcons/2007-07-18-vick-cover_N.htm)

<sup>20</sup>[http://usatoday.feedroom.com/index.jsp?fr\\_story=f0a0735da8c305c952d50bc8c20f9afa9b31a3e2](http://usatoday.feedroom.com/index.jsp?fr_story=f0a0735da8c305c952d50bc8c20f9afa9b31a3e2)

Time

<sup>21</sup><http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,965065,00.html>

<sup>22</sup><http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,962005,00.html>

The Washington Post

<sup>23</sup>[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/21/AR2007082101997\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/21/AR2007082101997_pf.html)

<sup>24</sup><http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/18/AR2007081800565.html>

Various Newspapers & Magazines

<sup>25</sup><http://www.newsweek.com/id/32932>

<sup>26</sup><http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=2940065>

<sup>27</sup>[http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/columns/story?columnist=munson\\_lester&id=2979011](http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/columns/story?columnist=munson_lester&id=2979011)

<sup>28</sup><http://www.star-telegram.com/news/story/271752.html>

<sup>29</sup><http://www.unchainyourdog.org/Dogfight.htm>

<sup>30</sup><http://idahofallz.com/2007/07/19/are-there-dog-fights-in-southeast-idaho/>

<sup>31</sup><http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4136229804908540735>

<sup>32</sup><http://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/story?id=3390721>

<sup>33</sup><http://spiritofchicago.blogspot.com/2007/07/dogfighting.html>

<sup>34</sup><http://www.suffredin.org/news/newsitem.asp?language=english&newsitemid=955>

<sup>35</sup><http://www.gadzoo.com/latimes/PetsLinkView.aspx?LinkId=1850&GroupId=303>

<sup>36</sup>[http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues\\_affecting\\_our\\_pets/dog\\_eat\\_dog\\_the\\_bloodthirsty\\_underworld\\_of\\_dogfighting.html](http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/dog_eat_dog_the_bloodthirsty_underworld_of_dogfighting.html)

<sup>37</sup>[http://www.hsus.org/hsus\\_field/first\\_strike\\_the\\_connection\\_between\\_animal\\_cruelty\\_and\\_human\\_violence/animal\\_cruelty\\_and\\_family\\_violence\\_making\\_the\\_connection/](http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/first_strike_the_connection_between_animal_cruelty_and_human_violence/animal_cruelty_and_family_violence_making_the_connection/)

<sup>38</sup><http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3087763/>

<sup>39</sup>[http://www.animallaw.info/statutes/stusilstch\\_720\\_5\\_26\\_5.htm](http://www.animallaw.info/statutes/stusilstch_720_5_26_5.htm)

<sup>40</sup><http://www.pet-abuse.com/cases/2810/WA/US/>

<sup>41</sup>[http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nr\\_fact\\_sheets\\_animal\\_euthanasia](http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nr_fact_sheets_animal_euthanasia)

#### Web Sites about Game-bred Pit Bulls

<sup>42</sup><http://www.workingpitbull.com/dogfighting.htm>

<sup>43</sup><http://www.sporting-dog.com/>

<sup>44</sup><http://www.viperkennels.com/>

<sup>45</sup><http://shadowsfallkennels.com/>

<sup>46</sup><http://www.game-dog.com/>

<sup>47</sup><http://www.realpitbull.com/fight.html>

<sup>48</sup><http://www.richardfstratton.com/main.htm>

<sup>49</sup><http://www.pitbullsontheweb.com/index.html>

## APPENDIX C—ORGANIZED DOGFIGHTING PIT RULES

*From The World of Fighting Dogs by Carl Semencic*

### ORGANIZED DOGFIGHTING PIT RULES (CAJUN RULES)

Rule 1: The principals shall select a referee who is familiar with the rules and who is satisfactory to both sides. The referee will then appoint his timekeeper. Each handler will select a man to act as his chief second or cornerman, whose duties are to wash the opponent's dog, and to remain near this dog's corner as an observer.

Rule 2: Each handler is to furnish two clean towels and a suitable blanket, to be used by his opponent. Either handler may demand that the opposing handler and his cornerman bare their arms to the elbows; also the handler may taste his opponent's dog's water before or after the contest (up until the referee has rendered his decision on the contest).

Rule 3: No water, sponges, towels or any other accessories are allowed in the pit at any time, except the referee who shall have in his possession an adequate breaking stick and a pencil; also a copy of these rules. The pit shall not be less than 16 feet each way, whenever possible, with a canvas-covered floor, upon which has been painted or chalked on, 12.5 feet apart, and with a center-line half way between the scratch-lines.

Rule 4: The referee shall toss a coin to be called by the handlers. The winner of the toss shall decide which dog shall be washed first and also have the choice of corners.

Rule 5: The dogs shall be washed at pit-side in warm in water and some approved washing powders and then rinsed. The first dog to be washed shall be brought in and held in the tub by his handler and washed by the opposing cornerman. When pronounced clean by the referee, the dog shall be rinsed clean in a separate tub of warm water and towed dry as possible, then wrapped in the blanket provided and carried to his appointed corner by his handler and accompanied by the man who washed him. These are the only two persons allowed near this dog until the dogs are let go. The other dog shall now be brought in and held in the tub by his handler and washed (in the same water) by the opposing cornerman. When this dog is pronounced clean by the referee and rinsed clean and towed dry, he shall then be carried to his corner by his handler and accompanied by the man who washed him.

Rule 6: The referee shall now ask "Are both corners ready?" If so, "Cornermen, out of the pit"..."Face your dogs"... "Let Go" The timekeeper shall note the time and write it down for future reference.

Rule 7: Any dog who jumps the pit is automatically the loser of the contest and no scratches are necessary, and no dog is required or allowed to scratch to a dead dog. The live dog is the winner.

Rule 8: Should either dog become fanged, the referee shall instruct the handlers to take hold of their dogs and try to hold them still so the handler can try to unfang his dog. If this isn't possible, the referee shall separate the dogs with the proper breaking stick and then unfang the dog using a pencil. The referee will then order the handlers to set their dogs down near the center of the Pit and approximately two feet apart. The referee will then order "Let Go" This in no way constitutes a turn or a handle and has no bearing of the future scratches.

Rule 9: This is to be a fair scratch-in-turn contest until the dogs quit fighting, then Rule 13 shall take over. The first dog to turn must scratch first; thereafter they are to scratch alternately (regardless of which dog turns) until one dog fails to scratch and thereby loses the contest.

Rule 10: To be a fair turn, the dog accused of turning must turn his head and shoulders and his front feet away from the opponent and regardless of whether or not the dogs are otherwise touching.

Rule 11: The referee shall call all turns, although either handler may ask for a turn on either dog. If the referee rules there has been a turn, he will instruct the handlers to "pick up free of holds" as soon as possible, and should either dog accidentally get a hold again, the handlers shall set the dogs down immediately and make a continued effort to pick up the dogs, free of holds. When picked up, the dogs must be taken to their respective corners and faced away from their opponent. The timekeeper shall note the time and take up the count (not out loud) and also the referee shall notify the handler whose dog must scratch.

Rule 12: At 25 seconds, the timekeeper shall call out "Get Ready" At these instructions each handler must toe his scratch-line and face his dog toward his opponent with his dog's head and shoulders showing fair from between his handler's legs, and the dog's four feet on the canvas floor. At the 30 seconds, the timekeeper calls out "Let Go" and the handler whose dog must scratch must instantly take his hands away from all contact with his dog and also release all leg pressure from against the dog's body. And the dog must instantly start across and the handler must remain behind his scratch-line until his dog has completed his scratch or the referee has ruled upon it. There is no time limit on the time required to complete this scratch. But, when released at the words "Let Go" the

dog must start across at his opponent. He may waver from direct line, fall down, crawl...drag or push himself across, so long as he makes a continued effort and DOES NOT HESITATE OR STOP until he has reached out and touched his opponent. The opposing handler may release his dog any time he sees fit after the order to "Let Go" however, he must do so as soon as the dogs have touched each other.

Rule 12A: This is an alternate rule for those handlers who wish to have their dogs counted out in the corner. It is the same in all respects as Rule 12, except that after 30 seconds, when the timekeeper calls out "Let Go" the referee shall count our loud, at as near one-second intervals as possible, ONE...TWO...TIME (three seconds), and the dog must be out of his corner and on his way before the referee calls "time" or lose.

Rule 13: If the dogs have apparently quit fighting, whether they are helpless, tired out or curred out, and regardless of whether both dogs are down or one dog is down and the other dog is standing over him, but neither dog has a hold, the referee shall ask if they are willing to scratch-it-out to a win or not. If so, they shall proceed to do so, but if either handler is unwilling, then the referee shall instruct the timekeeper to note the time and call time in two minutes. If either dog breaks time, then nothing has changed, but if, at the end of the two minutes, the dogs are in the same relative positions and neither dog has a hold, the referee shall order the handlers to handle (PICK UP FREE OF HOLDS) their dogs. When picked up, the dogs shall be taken to their corners and the corner procedure is the same as in a normally called turn and handle. If there have been no previous turns or handles to establish the order of scratching, the dog who has been the longest without a hold (usually the down dog) to be scratched first, then, as soon as free of holds, the dogs shall be picked up and the other dog scratched. Should one dog fail or refuse his scratch, then the dog who failed shall lose the contest. If both dogs fail to scratch, the referee shall call it a no contest, but should both dogs make their initial scratches, the handlers by mutual agreement may ask the referee for a draw decision. The referee will then rule it a draw. Otherwise the contest shall continue, but in this manner: any time the dogs are not in holds and not fighting, the referee shall order the dogs to be handled and scratched alternately until one dog fails to scratch and thereby loses. No attention is paid to turns (after Rule 13 is invoked) except as a possible chance to handle.

THE REFEREE HAS FULL AUTHORITY AND HIS DECISION IS FINAL IN ALL MATTERS.

Rule 14: Fouls that will be just cause for losing a contest:

- A. To leave the pit, with or without the dog before the referee has ruled.

- B. To receive anything from outside the pit, or allow anyone outside the pit to touch or assist the dog.
- C. To push, drum, throw or spank, or in any way assist a dog across his scratch-line, except by encouraging him by voice.
- D. To step across a scratch-line before the dog has completed his scratch or the referee has ruled on it.
- E. To stomp on the pit floor or kick the pit sides, yell at or give orders to the opponent's dog, or (in the referee's opinion) do anything to distract or interfere with either dog while scratching or fighting to affect the outcome of the contest.
- F. To interfere with the opposing handler or touch either dog until the referee gives an order to handle the dogs.
- G. To use a "Rub", "Poison", or "Hypo" on either dog.

Rule 15: If there should be any outside interference before the contest has been concluded, the referee has full authority to call it a "NO CONTEST" and shall name the time and place the contest is to be resumed and fought out to a referee's decision. (The same referee shall preside.) Also, the referee shall insist that the dogs be washed and weighed (in the referee's presence), and the dogs shall weigh at the weights specified in the original articles of agreement, and to do this as many times as necessary to conclude the contest.

#### CAJUN RULES VARIATIONS

Instead of Rule 12A in which a dog has three seconds to leave his corner, he is usually given ten seconds to cross to the other dog. A 30-second out-of-hold count is generally used, and the down dog must always scratch first (unless both dogs are down with neither in a position of advantage). The pit may be covered with carpeting rather than canvas (Rule 3), the scratch lines may consist of some of the modern tapes, and the central line between the scratch line is often omitted.