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RESERVOIR DOGS

Greyhound Racing, Mimesis and Sports-Related Violence

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Abstract Sociologists have been slow to turn their attention to ‘blood sports’ involving animals or activities where animals suffer neglect and abuse. Although there seems to be a heightened sense of public contempt in many countries toward the outwardly cruel treatment of animals such as dogs, and toward the place of animals in ‘sport’ per se, the ways in which racing greyhounds may be enmeshed in wider formations of sports-related abuse and violence continues to be ignored. In this article, data gathered on greyhound abuse in the North American racing figuration are examined in the process of understanding the social chains of interdependence necessary to perpetuate ‘tolerable’ deviance against the dogs. Using central tenets of figurational sociology, patterns of neglect and abuse are discussed and conceptual typologies of the main ‘players’ in the greyhound figuration are outlined.

Key words • animal abuse • figurational sociology • greyhound racing • mimesis • sports-related violence

The Ancient Egyptians, Romans and Greeks revered the greyhound, the world’s oldest purebred dog, as a companion, hunter and religious icon (Barnes, 1994; Branigan, 1997); and such reverence seems to have lasted through the Middle Ages (Baker, 1996). By the turn of the 18th century, colonial expansion led to transformations in the ‘distinguished’ cultural status of the greyhound. Greyhounds were used less for hunting game and more for ‘taming’ colonized peoples of the ‘New World’. For example, greyhounds were employed by British and French explorers to aid in the slaughter of native populations in the Caribbean and, soon after, throughout the southern Americas. Relatively shortly thereafter, however, greyhounds were transported to North America for more ‘civilized’ purposes (Armstrong and Botzler, 2003; Finch and Nash, 2001; Sullivan, 2000).

English aristocrats introduced greyhound ‘coursing’ — a baiting contest in which two dogs chased and sought to kill a hare in an open meadow — to North America (circa 1840s), and exposed ‘popular’ audiences to the breed through dog shows (Branigan, 1997). By the mid-1800s, a strong tradition of coursing had emerged on the United States plains. With more access to the dogs via expanding

breeding networks in the US, working classes established their own tradition of coursing in the 1920s that would eventually supersede the dogs' use for show purposes or for traditional coursing contests (Finch and Nash, 2001; Jones, 1997). After a series of failed attempts to create a bloodier coursing culture, Owen Patrick Smith helped establish the first modern greyhound 'racetrack' in 1910 in Oakland, California. Smith, an engineer, developed the electronic lure — a device he called the 'Inanimate Hare Conveyor' — to 'pacify' the event (Samuels, 1999). By the 1930s, working-class crowds flocked to makeshift race-tracks across the southern US where sports betting was legal. Races were billed as humane versions of traditional coursing, and as more culturally and economically accessible events than upper-class horse racing (Branigan, 1997). Until the 1990s, greyhound racing served as a staple of American sports-betting culture, ranking as the sixth most popular spectator sport during the period (see www.greyhoundracingsucks.com).

Although academic attention is limited, the long-term transformation of greyhounds from revered companions to sporting commodities has not escaped public scrutiny. Indeed, modern greyhound racing is beleaguered by spectator dissatisfaction and social protest, perhaps partly as an outcome of increasing social, and particularly youth, sensibilities to questions of animal stewardship in the modern era (DeRose, 1997; Munro, 2001). With ethical concerns raised by groups such as the 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (SPCA), 'People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' (PETA), and the 'Animal Liberation Front' (ALF), greyhound racing has fallen into moderate disrepute in North America. Since 1993, dozens of tracks have closed in the 16 US states still permitting greyhound racing, although these have been primarily business decisions in response to rapidly declining profits.

In this connection, the economy of dog racing has negatively impacted treatment practices. Amid widespread industry decline, accounts of animal abuse and neglect in the surviving racing figuration have expanded. Consequently, US adoption and rescue agencies such as 'Wings for Greyhounds', 'Second Chance for Greyhounds', 'Operation Greyhound' and the 'Greyhound Protection League' have helped place retired racers in private homes, and militant anti-racing groups continue to call for the outright termination of the sport. A dominant discourse surrounding contemporary greyhound racing challenges the alleged pervasiveness of the violence, abuse and neglect some dogs suffer, but few sociologists have empirically interrogated these claims, or how abusive practices are rationalized within this 'sport-entertainment' culture.

According to the National Greyhound Association (NGA), there are, on average, approximately 34,000 racing greyhounds born in the US each year, and 28,000 registered to race every year. Estimates suggest that approximately 50,000–60,000 greyhounds are used as racers in the US annually. At the time of writing, 46 tracks were in operation in 16 US states, generating over US\$100 million in revenue per year. In the past 10 years, many of the racetracks have expanded their operations to include races 'simulcast' over the Internet in order to reach gaming populations around the world. However, there are other, more sobering, racing statistics. For instance, estimates published by the Greyhound Protection League suggest that nearly 30,000 young greyhounds are killed in North America

every year when they are no longer able to win or 'place'. Approximately 5000–7000 farm puppies are 'culled' annually, and more simply 'go missing' without being registered to an owner (www.greyhoundracingsucks.com).

The sheer number of greyhounds killed in the industry (either as a result of early identification as 'unsuitable' racers, or through lacklustre results on the track) represents only the end result of abuse and violence in the sport, just as only some of the food products ending up in the supermarket are merely the final stage of tolerated and sanctioned 'violence' against farm-raised livestock (DeGrazia, 2002). Clearly, closer inspection of the varied forms of 'violence' against greyhounds is required. In particular, we argue that four major types of violence are faced by some racing greyhounds in North America: breeding violence; training violence; housing violence; and, disposal violence. All require closer scrutiny.

In this article, then, greyhound racing is examined as a type of 'blood sport'. In making this case, we are not suggesting that the kinds of graphic and intentional cruelty associated with 'baiting', 'pit' and 'fighting' animal sports (Cashmore, 2000) characterize greyhound racing. Nor are we suggesting that the entire racing figuration engages violence and cruelty toward greyhounds. Indeed, members of the North American figuration regularly suggest that violence and neglect are anomalies in the sport rather than the rule. There is ample empirical evidence indicating that dogs at many North American tracks are prized and handled carefully as legitimate 'athletes'. Still, we are interested in placing greyhound racing along a broad continuum of potentially harmful animal sports which, while clearly distinct from, for example, cock-fighting and bear-baiting in its intent and inevitably severe outcomes, nevertheless *systematically* produces abuse, neglect and harm in its animal participants.

Although generally disregarded as a legitimate subject of sociological inquiry, our view is that animal abuse, exploitation and victimization in 'mainstream' western sports/leisure pastimes warrants far more serious sociological investigation than it has received to date. Following Young's (2000, 2001) call to conceptually expand our understanding of forms of 'sports-related violence' (SRV) — as 'potentially harmful acts that cannot easily be separated from the sports process and that only begin to make sense when the socially, culturally and historically embedded character of sport is closely scrutinized' (2001: 4) — this article employs aspects of figurational sociology (Elias, 1978, 1994) to interpret certain social constructions of, and rationalizations offered about, both demonstrated and alleged cases of greyhound abuse at North American racetracks. Attention is directed to how the treatment of greyhounds in breeding, training, housing and disposal practices may be framed by centrally positioned stakeholders within the dog racing figuration (e.g. breeders, dog owners, track operators and fans) as legitimate, tolerable, or accidental SRV. By exploring selected accounts of greyhound mistreatment at US racetracks, it is argued that the 'mimetic' potential and exciting significance of greyhound racing as a spectator sport masks the physical pain and trauma many greyhounds experience in racing environments.

Greyhound Racing as Sports-Related Violence

Although much has been written about abusive and victimizing forms of violence in mainstream sports, violence against animals is, at best, haphazardly inserted into analyses of violence *occurring in and around* the sports field. Identified by Young (2001) as a 'blood sport' in his matrix of sports-related violence, contests pitting animals against one another in a combative manner, or involving potentially harmful animal pursuits for the entertainment of participants or spectators, may be linked, in both ideology and practice, to more mainstream sport and SRV activities (see Dunning, 1999; Malcolmson, 1973). Since greyhound athletic contests, first through coursing and then through formalized racing, symbolically resemble 'killing-based' competitions, they represent a clear example of exciting significance for audiences. Greyhound racing involves the cultural quest for contests representing blood-letting in a controlled manner, and does so in a way which effectively exploits the participants. In Stebbins's (1997) terms, the sport is, in these respects, a clear form of 'tolerable' deviance.

Although research on animals and animal abuse in sports is considerably under-developed by sociologists, figurationalists such as Dunning (1999) and Sheard (1999) have illustrated how sports involving animals in the UK have become less violent over the course of civilizing processes (Cunningham, 1980; Holt, 1990). Sports involving animals are understood as forms of 'killing (or hurting) by proxy', wherein social desires to witness, and indeed actively participate in, violent forms of hunting may be explored. In considering the social history of greyhound hunting and coursing, figurational sociology offers considerable insight into how the greyhound has featured in 'civilizing' events and practices.

Empirical accounts of animal abuse in North America and continental European sport (i.e. outside of the UK) typically take a radically different tack than figurational studies. Analyses of dog-fighting (Forsyth and Evans, 1998), cock-fighting (Darden and Worden, 1996; Hawley, 1993), rodeo (Rollin, 2001), and bull-fighting (Mitchell, 1991), for instance, give less conceptual attention to the *systematic process* of violence in animal sports, or the centrality of violence in western cultures more broadly. Instead, authors tend to examine *individualistic or situational* constructions of animal abuse in deviant sport subcultures. Rationalizations of and subcultural perspectives toward animal abuse are interrogated, and detailed descriptions of violence are offered. Rarely, however, is more than one interpretive standpoint introduced into these under-theorized analyses. Grounded conceptualizations of animal abuse/violence in sport are thus developed from rather limited perspectives.

In addition to these research trends, empirical investigations of animal blood sports have been tied only loosely to emerging academic and political discourses on the ethical and moral treatment of animals. As Regan (1983) noted some time ago, the exploitation of animals in a full range of social spheres should be comparatively analyzed in order to grasp how their mistreatment figures into 'everyday' human group life. This study of greyhound racing is, then, an attempt to highlight how sociological theory and analysis may help advance a case for heightened ethical standards in sports figurations for animal participants; *and*, to

build conceptual links between animal blood sport violence and the suffering of animals in other spheres, as well as SRV more generally.

By building on figurational sociology, and incorporating Young's (2001) figurationally sensitive conceptualization of violence in sport, greyhound racing is examined as an historically produced and highly contested form of SRV. The brands of sports-related violence embedded in certain greyhound racing cultures are conceptualized as hyper-versions of the 'mimetic' violence found in other sports cultures (Elias and Dunning, 1986), and extreme outcomes of the objectification of animals. In the process of understanding how violence against animals may be explained as mimesis, we suggest that the racing figuration represents a complex web of social interdependencies involving 'players' located at a number of levels. In its most basic mode, the racing figuration is held together on an ongoing basis through the notion of mimetic violence. Rather than naively assuming that violence occurs only situationally at the hands of those directly administering dogs at the track, or as a product of only a handful of individuals involved in the sport, we conceive of contributors operating at various levels of the racing figuration, including spectators who may or may not fully comprehend the ways dogs are 'prepared' and treated before and after their track performances, as complicit in its maintenance.

We contend that in order to understand the social processes involved in greyhound racing as SRV, we must examine: i) how greyhound racing is managed as a form of mimesis; ii) how greyhound racing emerges as SRV; iii) the contexts, conditions and ideologies of violence against greyhounds in creating 'exciting significance' in the sport; and, iv) the current trends in greyhound racing, including several indicators suggesting the demise of the sport in North America.

Research Approach

Ethnographic field research commenced following our personal involvement with greyhound adoption and rescue advocates in Canada, and with one of the research team fostering greyhounds.¹ Local fund-raising events for ex-racers and their adopted 'families' were attended during the early stages of field research. Spurred on by media commentaries of animal neglect in the figuration, research commenced with the intent of decoding the processes of abuse in greyhound racing and understanding the perspectives toward animal care held by various 'insiders', including breeders, trainers, track owners and audience members.

As with most studies of social deviancy, and particularly those involving esoteric and guarded communities, access to insider information in greyhound racing is difficult. Extant research on animal blood sports (cf. Forsyth and Evans, 1998; Hawley, 1993) indicates that participants are typically wary of sharing their trade secrets and personal reflections because they fear both public exposure and reprisal. As a result, we reviewed policy positions on animal treatment in the legal race industries and nationally recognized greyhound racing associations (readily available on-line) and their public responses to stories of abuse. In practically every case, private tracks and national/state associations aggressively promote health and welfare ideologies regarding animal treatment, and ascribe isolated

cases of abuse to the 'radical fringe' of the figuration (www.greyhoundpets.org and www.agota.com). Following this, we interviewed members of rescue organizations in Canada who we met at local fund-raising events and adoption information sessions held in parks or at local shopping malls, contacted by phone or over the Internet. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews with rescue volunteers in three Canadian provinces were conducted. Twelve of the participants were women, 11 were from middle-class backgrounds, and all were married. Two-children families were modal, and respondents held at least high school education (four had at least one year of university training). Respondent mean age was 36.

Participants were asked about their knowledge of greyhound abuse or neglect, and for any social contacts they may have at racetracks who would be able to share information. Data from these interviews provided information on the historical significance of greyhound racing in North America, perspectives about the adoption process and, of course, accounts of both documented and alleged abuse in the sport. Information on 'documented' abuse provided by participants was cross-checked against the on-line files of the National Greyhound Association, American Greyhound Council, Greyhound Pets of America, Greyhound Racing Info and the American Track Operator's Association, and case studies compiled by anti-racing groups such as 'USA Defenders of Greyhounds', 'Skinny Dog', 'Grey2KUSA', and 'Save the Greyhound Dogs'.

Members of rescue groups provided names and phone numbers of race workers in the US, who were 'cold called' over the span of one month. Although we made 63 contacts in the US racing figuration (e.g. greyhound trainers, breeders, and 'handlers' of varying kinds), only nine agreed to be interviewed over the telephone or via email. Eight of the nine interviewed were former members of the figuration. As Shaffir and Kleinknecht (2002) observe, since 'ex-members' of a figuration often have less to lose professionally or personally through the disclosure of privileged information, they are typically more willing participants in social research.

Of the nine respondents interviewed, all were male, Caucasian, claimed working-class backgrounds, had a mean age of 41, were raised in one of the southern US states, and had worked in the figuration in at least four states. Participation in the figuration ranged from 6–21 years. Each had seen, or participated in, at least one of the acts of violence or abuse as defined in this article. However, most had witnessed many such acts and, for eight of those interviewed, a refusal to participate in them any longer (for reasons of personal disapproval or in fear of exposure and arrest) motivated their exit from the figuration. At the time of writing this article, none had been arrested, convicted, or fined for animal abuse, or any felony.

To supplement the emerging interview data, we conducted an examination of on-line narratives about greyhound abuse posted on 'anti-racing' websites ($n = 27$) such as www.usadog.com, www.greyhoundracingsucks.com, www.skinny-dog.net and www.savethegreyhoundogs.com. Although one must systematically question the reliability and validity of on-line information, conceptual types of abuse and various statistical data about the number of greyhounds 'disposed' in the business on a yearly basis matched narrative accounts obtained during interviews. Additionally, 39 newspaper articles related to greyhound racing in North

America, located via the Canadian Periodical Index, were analyzed. Websites of greyhound 'societies' in North America, such as the National Greyhound Association, were also examined for 'official' information regarding the socio-genesis of racing on the continent.

In sum, data and analysis are presented in this article with the caveat that while we remain confident about the scope, breadth, and accuracy of information offered, these data are clearly not generalizable to the entire figuration in the North America or the global racing figuration. Furthermore, given the non-probability nature of the sampling process and degree to which the data were collected from (mainly) 'former' members of the figuration, our empirical claims and theoretical arguments offered in the article must be qualified as preliminary.

Greyhound Racing as Mimesis

An undercurrent in Elias's work (e.g. 1994, 1996) on long-term civilizing processes is that modern western figurations have produced relatively 'unexciting' social environments. The general pacification of figurations over time resulted in a collective need to devise and institutionalize cultural activities that strike a balance between personal pleasure and restraint. As outward displays of emotion are largely pushed behind the scenes of social life in many cultures, individuals learn to pursue a range of activities that elicit exciting significance under highly controlled circumstances.

Elias and Dunning (1986) note that sport provides an interactive context within which a moderate degree of violence is both permissible and encouraged, allowing individuals to participate in activity which is less condoned or, indeed, strictly taboo in other social settings (Dunning, 1999). Sport, for example, is predominantly a social institution rationalized in terms of the virtues of competition and physicality (i.e. as part of 'character building'), while providing a source of temporary liberation from diffuse social codes curtailing violence and uncontrolled affective outburst. In figurational terms, sports contests provide an interactive opportunity which allows a 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls' among participants and spectators (Elias and Dunning, 1986).

Elias and Dunning (1986) and Dunning and Rojek (1992) further suggest that one of sport's primary roles within complex figurations is to 'de-routinize' social life. Constrained by dense chains of interdependency, individuals are socially expected to engage in (and learn to internalize the merits of) predictable and emotionally restrained behaviour. Sport is a social theatre in which spectators are deliberately aroused by the tension-balances (Dunning, 1999; Elias and Dunning, 1986; Maguire, 1999) created through athletic contests. For example, former track worker Darren described a greyhound race as follows:

They [the dogs] come off the last turn sometimes, and there's four or five just neck and neck, frothing and spitting out dirt behind them. People come to their feet, fists in the air, screaming for their hound to make the last push . . . Then at the [finish] line people hold their breath, the flash goes off, and the eyes look to the [race] board. When the winner number flashes, you hear everything from the worst cursing to shouts of joy . . . To this day, some races give me the chills.

Sports like greyhound racing may be considered mimetic because they deliberately resemble war-like competition. They are socially and emotionally significant to individuals because they elicit a level of excitement, while structured by an understanding that the outcome of the 'battle' is not as perilous to the participants as a genuine war. As Maguire notes:

Mimetic activities vary considerably across the globe, both in terms of their intensity and style, but [the] basic structural characteristic [they have] in common . . . [is] a 'make-believe' setting which allows emotions to flow more easily, and which elicits excitement of some kind in imitating that produced by 'real life situations,' yet without their dangers or risks. (1999: 71)

Hence, sport spectators are excited by the often rough and violent competitive exchange between the participants, yet feel neither guilt nor repugnance in watching the battles since they are not perceived as 'real'.

The social history of greyhounds exemplifies how animals have been inserted into the mimetic sporting pastimes of westerners. From early coursing to later racing traditions, greyhounds have been prized for their ability to hunt one form of 'game' or another. The long-term custom among European and North American upper classes of using the hounds to track game as recreation unintentionally made them ideal animals for 'violent-looking' forms of dog racing in the US among the working and lower middle classes. Aligned with broader civilizing processes, 'athletic' contests involving greyhounds came to symbolize a diffuse habitus categorized by affective restraint, and the pursuit of exciting ('mock' violent) social activities. Concretely, through the formation of the International Greyhound Association in 1926, racing developed a sporting and civilized façade, as rationalized association rule structures and specified outcomes minimized, even obscured, the often harsh experience of the races. In these ways, violence is not mocked in the sport merely to provide 'bread and circuses' for spectators; rather, this mock hunt became carefully structured by codified rules of physical engagement.

Clearly, for enthusiasts and insiders, greyhound racing is also 'thrilling' given the speed of the races. The greyhound is a formidable runner, reaching speeds in excess of 45km/hour. Coupling the image of the hunt implicit in a staged race with the considerable pace at which it occurs, a greyhound race is undeniably *exciting* on a sensory basis. As former breeder, Jim remarked: 'I've been to every sport you can think of, and nothing beats the hounds. The dogs were born to race and, when you see them flying down the track, you think to yourself, this is what God intended . . . It's poetry in motion; it's grace, art, and beauty.' Yet the sport is culturally exciting on economic grounds too. Despite historical concerns regarding the 'rigging' of races in both the US and abroad (Jones, 1997), the unknown nature of race outcomes provides considerable uncertainty and excitement. Gaming culture, a central component in greyhound racing in the US, latched onto the sport early on, enhancing its meaning vis-à-vis the spectators' ability to reap financial success from the contests. With race rules in place, structured techniques for betting on the races developed. Following the formation of race 'cards', published biographies of individual racers, 'scientific' means of predicting the outcomes of races, and considerable purses at each track, the mock violence grew in social significance. It is perhaps no surprise that in an era of

North American prohibition (1920s), the popularity of this legal vice expanded considerably. Over the course of the 20th century, gambling has grown as an increasingly central part of the sport. Clearly, spectators do not attend races or closely follow television, Internet or radio broadcasts only for the mimetic excitement of watching the dogs race. Their financial investment is also central — so much so, that it is difficult to conceive of greyhound racing as a popular cultural pursuit without gambling.

The focus on the financial outcomes and statistical ‘chance’ of the races added other important dimensions to modern greyhound track-racing. Rather than emphasizing the content and character of the ‘competitors’, the concern for financial gain among spectators often deflects attention away from the actual health and well-being of the dogs. While greyhound associations succumbed to social pressure and established strict standards of care at racetracks, these rules were partially developed to ensure that dogs were kept in optimal racing conditions. Where controlled aggressiveness in other sports spheres is often relished as an aspect of player ‘character-building’ and psychological ‘toughening’, the ‘benefits’ of aggression and violence in animal-based sports are largely spectator-focused; that is, the ‘mock’ aggression and the potential of violence/accident in the races are carefully staged to create a context of excitement for crowds (Wise, 2000). As Arnold, a dog breeder from Texas, observed:

People don't talk about it openly, but it's sort of understood, I guess. Kinda like when you go to the [auto] racetrack. Even though you never wanna see them crash, it sure is a sight when it happens. It's spectacular and gruesome to see them hit the dirt at high speed . . . When the dogs bump and jockey for position, all trying to nab the lure they're trying to kill, [it] stirs those sorts of hunting feelings in you. In your mind, you wish the lure was real, just so the hounds could catch it and rip it up.

As Arnold implies, mimesis occurs partly through the distancing of the audience from the competing ‘athletes’; in this case, easily facilitated by the use of animals rather than humans in the competition (see Dunning, 1999). Moreover, pseudo-scientific discourses claiming that running, hunting and killing are instinctive drives in the animals that become satisfied through racing competitions, ultimately serve to legitimize the use of greyhounds, even if they become hurt in the process of such ‘sporting’ entertainment.

Also noteworthy here, as part of the same process of rationalization, is the historically pervasive view that animals neither experience pain as humans do (i.e. reflexively or emotionally), nor should be appreciated as sentient entities with moral rights (Bermond, 1997). Indeed, western cultural habituses from the Middle Ages onward seem to routinely conceive of animals as incapable of experiencing or communicating even basic, self-reflective emotions such as anxiety and fear (DeGrazia, 2002). Consequently, some individuals in the animal sports figuration tend to adopt a ‘don't ask, don't tell’ standpoint when it comes to animal suffering; dominant views appear to adhere to the following logic: ‘we do not believe animals feel pain or should be morally protected from victimization, but neither do we wish to observe the actual violence occurring on farms, in laboratories, or in zoos’ (Lindburg, 1999: 18). Apparently, sports audiences concur that if we do not see animals being ‘openly’ victimized in sport — even though we may anticipate its occurrence in the inevitable ‘back regions’ of such

activities (Goffman, 1959) — animal sports, including the bloodiest versions, can be rationalized as simply, and tolerably, mimetic (Preece and Chamberlain, 1993).

An undercurrent of sport as mimesis has historically flourished in the greyhound racing figuration, as in other animal-oriented sports cultures (Darden and Wardon, 1996; Forsyth and Evans, 1998; Shepard, 1996), perhaps as a result of the relative lack of victim vocalization and representation within the racing community. Prior to the 1990s, few historical accounts of greyhound racing include voices of concern for the safety of the dogs. As non-human competitors (and thus, again, 'beings without emotions'), greyhounds do not possess the communicative resources to recount or oppose their experiences with pain. For this reason and others, as long as the physical trappings of rough competition (i.e. anxiety, pain and injury) are hidden from spectators, the sport is not problematized as victim-producing and thus retains its acceptability in the public sphere (Gold, 1995). Coupled with a wider cultural objectification of dogs as chattel, and 'speciesist' understandings of violence against non-human living creatures (Beirne, 1999), it is perhaps no surprise that few have historically considered greyhounds as 'victims' of anything; almost no one has considered greyhound racing as a component of a larger matrix of abusive and violent practices related to sport.

Violence and Abuse in Greyhound Racing

The contemporary greyhound racing phenomenon is formed through the interweaving of action between seemingly disparate 'players' operating at different levels of the figuration. Before discussing exactly what constitutes 'violence' in greyhound racing, it is necessary to understand something about how violence in the sport occurs through the co-operative endeavours of insider role players. Using another animal blood sport as a comparison, even though a bull dies at the hands of a single matador, the bull arrives in the ring through the cumulative efforts of numerous social actors operating at multiple levels of the bull-fighting figuration (Rollin, 2001). Simply put, many more than just the bull and matador are involved in the social organization of an event which may be perceived as exciting, sporting, and tolerable, and it is clear that considerable numbers of persons are required to support the figuration and 'stage' the bullfights. For the purposes of this article, of interest are the ways in which actors come together in the greyhound figuration to produce and rationalize abuse and violence against racing dogs. As a means of drawing the conceptual linkages between the major 'players' in the sport, Figure 1 provides an overview of the figuration.

In Figure 1, individuals are placed in one of three main categories, representing their roles in the racing figuration. 'Context players' are those responsible for establishing the supply of, and demand for, the races. These individuals aggressively normalize the sport in varied social spheres, and often act as the 'primary definers' of greyhound racing. For the most part, they are responsible for circulating the following kinds of techniques of neutralization (Sykes and Matza, 1989): 'the dogs are treated humanely'; 'racing is healthy and exciting for the dogs'; 'the sport is exhilarating for the audience'; and, 'the sport represents a suitably monitored cultural pursuit'. As dog trainer Jim explained:

'Context' players	'Conditions' players	'Regulation' players
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track owners – local and international • Track promoters, scouts and marketers • Spectators • Gamblers • Betting establishments • Betting industries and tourism services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breeders • Trainers • Dog owners • Kennel owners • Track workers • Veterinarians • For hire 'disposers' • Medical organizations • Universities and 'research' centres • Hunters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State legislators • NGA and other greyhound associations • Anti-racing groups • Animal rights' activists • Adoption and rescue agencies • Private adopters and foster families

Figure 1 The Greyhound Racing Figuration

Hey, if it wasn't for the guys breeding dogs, the organizations putting up the money for the tracks, and the thousands of people who come every night to spend their money, there'd be no need for me. I'm just an employee. They tell me what to do, what's okay, and how to treat the dogs . . . You have to understand that national, or even State, care standards are tough to enforce. There's a huge difference between what goes on at each track. I've worked at about a dozen tracks across the US, and I've seen it all . . . What is 'right' is what is right for that place, and at that time. If no one complains, then business goes on as usual. Even if people do complain, nothing really gets changed unless one of the track owners get some serious heat.

Through such processes of covert facilitation and rationalization, context players form the basis of the greyhound racing economy, supplying the structural resources (i.e. tracks and promotional industries) and financial resources (i.e. breeding and wagering monies) needed to fuel the industry. Crucially, context players may rarely, if ever, come into contact with the greyhounds involved in racing. For them, the dogs are commodities to be bought and sold or bet upon; it is in this connection that we should understand their affective detachment from the racers.

By contrast, 'conditions players' are more directly involved in actual physical harm to the dogs. From breeders to trainers to medical organizations who experiment on ex-racers, conditions players represent the 'unseen' members of the figuration. They operate very much in Goffman's 'back regions', overseeing the daily 'care' and handling of the racers. A striking parallel may be found in circus/carnival cultures. Here, there is also a contrast between what is seen in the 'front stage' of an animal showcase, and the type and degree of 'care' occurring in the 'backstage' by handlers and trainers after the audience has gone (Wise, 2000). As demonstrated below, conditions players are also complicit in the abuse of dogs, when it occurs.

'Regulation players' comprise the members of the figuration responsible for policing any alleged abuse against racers. From State regulators (who establish

gaming laws and animal abuse codes) to police to national greyhound associations (such as the American Greyhound Council) to animal rights advocates, these individuals/groups pursue a mandate to regulate and control 'unwanted' forms of abuse in the sport. Historically speaking, it is clear that this mandate has been exercised somewhat passively, at least in the US racing figuration.

Violence against Greyhounds

Our research inquiries convince us that it is almost impossible to ignore how some racing greyhounds endure entire lives of pain and abuse. For the dogs themselves, their suffering is not physically 'mimetic' or rational; rather, it is real, and 'put there' by human actors who are all too aware of the painful outcomes of neglect and abuse, and who choose to rationalize them in terms of the aforementioned principles of financial motives, exciting significance or tolerated customs. We outline four principal ways in which a greyhound might suffer through involvement in the business of racing.

1. Breeding Greyhounds encountering abuse as part of their racing careers typically do so at an early stage. Among other forms of neglect, breeders may kill or simply abandon puppies they deem to be unsuitable for racing, or dogs that 'wash out' after failing to succeed in events at local racing schools — estimates received from informants place this number at approximately one in 10 dogs bred every year. This process is referred to in the industry as 'farm culling':

Culling happens, it really does. As a breeder, one of the skills you acquire is the ability to look at a pup and watch its gait for potential. Dogs who don't have the instinct [to chase] or the tools to be a consistent winner, well, a good handler can spot it a mile away. From time to time, a pup might have poor eyesight or be born blind, and that's the worst . . . When a dog has no place in the business at all, you face an ugly task. We won't risk letting the puppy go to a pet store or family, because they might breed it and get a champion from one of the litters. So, to save time and money on a dog, it, and any of its siblings in a similar condition, are culled . . . Most of the time, I'd drown the pups or, towards my last few years breeding them, I'd go to a local vet. No one I know tortures the dogs or neglects them, though. There's no need for it. (Ernie, dog breeder)

In addition to such justificatory accounts clearly motivated by the business of the greyhound marketplace, Ernie also informed us that 'successful' dogs are typically isolated from human contact during training, and kept in cramped pens with other greyhounds. Reports of improper, suspect or flagrantly inhumane housing facilities abound in the southern US (i.e. the location of some of the most financially unstable tracks in the entire US racing industry), with dogs reportedly being left chained outdoors or to roam without proper feeding or care. As part of the breeding process, in some rare cases, the dogs are trained using live animals such as hares as bait (an illegal practice in all states sanctioning greyhound racing). Transportation of the dogs from breeders to their eventual owners (kennel owners at tracks or other private owners/syndicates) may also prove perilous. Over a dozen cases of transportation-related deaths have been reported since 1993 by greyhound advocacy groups (see www.gpl.com). Deaths may occur when greyhounds are left unattended in small caravans or wagons in

extreme heat conditions. In such cases, the dogs die of either heat exhaustion or dehydration. Dogs placed in these positions tend not to be the most 'successful' in the figuration, yield few pay-offs for owners, and are not identified as desirable breeding stock; thus, they are funnelled out of the contexts of best care in the figuration. While these cases may seem 'minor' or statistically small in number given the thousands of dogs at work in the industry, they are legitimate indicators of how the dogs are viewed as expendable commodities and not as sentient beings with their own pain barriers and rights.

For the most part, information on farm culling rarely surfaces in contemporary racing discourses. Context players, especially those policing the lower-rung tracks, far too infrequently question how greyhounds arrive at the tracks, or interrogate the conditions in which they have lived:

At first, I gave it a thought or two, you know. Like is this really the best way to store the dogs. But with time, and people above me assuring me that this is the way it works, you sorta put it out of your head. I used to stack and cram dogs into mini-vans for [inter-state] transport in the middle of the summer and the backs [of the vans] were cooking, you know. I heard about a couple that died from [the] track this way, heat exhaustion, I think. But they were old racers and not too healthy . . . I mean, maybe you can buy a few new air conditioned luxury vans, but they're like fifty grand a piece . . . Maybe it's a risk, but the likelihood of death is so low. (Jim, track worker)

Regulation players do intervene on occasion to sanction repeat offenders, but typically with a tokenistic temporary license suspension or a written warning (see *The Humane Society of the United States*, 2002). As in so many other deviancy contexts, offenders are constructed as isolated 'bad apples', and as unrepresentative of the industry as a whole. Regulation players, in this process, adopt the role of primary public definer of greyhound neglect by promoting the perspective of 'rarity'. Furthermore, members of the most respected tracks in the US often discredit the publicly identified deviants in the business, and pejoratively label them as 'bottom feeders'. Yet others prefer to 'turn a blind eye' and continue to work within the system, rather than against it. These people are more concerned with taking care of the animals after they emerge from the track, and often realize that they have little agency to meaningfully contest apparent problems in the industry. As rescue advocate Sheila contended:

I don't know what the dogs go through when they're young or as racers, and I don't want to. My concern is giving them a home after they're done racing. Certainly, I hope no greyhound ever suffers, but I sincerely think stories of abuse are overblown by animal rights' whackos who give us all a bad name . . . Most of the people I've met [in the racing figuration] tell me nothing other than how well the hounds are treated. I tend to believe them over outsiders.

As a result of such interpretive positions, allegations of greyhound abuse are maintained in the back regions of the figuration, or disregarded in more public venues as merely atypical or exaggerated versions of rather less sensational truth.

2. Training and Racing The on-track training and racing of greyhounds may also lead to significant physical abuse and harm. While it is commonly suggested by trainers, and indeed set as precedent through the racing of the dogs over time, that each dog should be raced two or three times per week, track averages can

reach up to six or seven times per week, and vary enormously. Information provided by former track workers and other insiders (verified by actual racing cards posted) indicate that some dogs may be raced up to three times the recommended level:

About 75% percent of my dogs used to be able to race five or six times a week. Industry recommendations are one thing, but the guys like me who handled the dogs can tell you a different story. They're [the dogs] tough little bastards. Their physical recovery time is amazing and if you mix in the right high protein food and supplements, they can go forever. (Tim, trainer)

From 'overuse' and the intensity of the races themselves, pain and injury inevitably occur. As with human athletes, some greyhounds live through pain on a daily basis — broken bones, torn ligaments or muscles, back and neck injuries, lacerations, and facial abrasions caused by muzzling are common. Here, the question might be raised as to why owners and operators would allow their investments to be injured or placed in harm's way. In practice, there is a simple economic equation in place. Treatment of the animals often proceeds on a cost-benefit basis; if a successful racer is injured, and the injury is 'economically minor' (as assessed against what a successful racer may yield on a yearly basis), medical intervention will result. But since many dogs 'crash out' after two or three years of racing and there is a surplus of younger dogs to promote to regular racing tracks, owners may find it more economical to run an injured racer until it can no longer perform, after which it is relegated to a lower grade track where it will likely finish its career.

There is, however, a counterpoint to this cynical approach to greyhound health. Demonstrating that care and compassion can exist in the world of dog racing, Janet, a greyhound 'foster mom' in Canada, remarked:

One in three dogs I foster comes to me with a history of injury. That's why they are out of the racing stream . . . The oldest dog I own can barely get up in the morning. Her poor little body aches from head to toe. She went through five corrective surgeries in the first three years we had her. The thought of her in agony, with poorly treated injuries, tears at my heart.

Since racing greyhounds may receive no exercise other than competing at tracks, injuries may fail to heal or are aggravated over time. In efforts to reduce 'overhead' costs at the tracks, injuries may be left untreated or attended to in only the most tokenistic, cost-efficient manner. This is, again, especially the case in lower grade tracks that face economic instability, or those 'lower stakes' tracks that run hounds at the end of their careers. Since acquiring a new dog may be more economically viable than treating the dogs medically, elite-level track owners simply 'send down' the injured animals to the less illustrious venues.

As part of their daily training, greyhounds require a substantial amount of food. Rather than feeding the dogs a high calibre diet, some low budget tracks utilize what has been termed '4-D' (dead, dying, downed, diseased) meat to minimally sustain the greyhounds' nutritional requirements and athletic bodies. Such meat is often rife with E-coli toxins and may not be sold commercially according to USDA standards. It is illegally purchased for pennies per pound, and its consumption may lead to a skin condition in the dogs referred to disconcertingly by handlers as 'Alabama rot' (a condition featuring open lesions and ulcers)

or an intestinal problem referred to as ‘blow-out’ (which includes chronic vomiting and diarrhea leading to death from dehydration). Insider estimates suggest that from 15–20 percent of racing greyhounds have consumed 4-D meat at some point in their careers. In Ernie’s words: ‘You know that saying, “not even fit for a dog.” Well the food we used to give them takes that saying to a whole new level. The so-called 4-D meat is disgusting, for sure, but [Alabama] “rot” is the worst thing I’ve even seen in an animal.’

Other greyhounds are allegedly injected with anabolic steroids such as methyl testosterone to improve their on-track performance. Further still, and as indicated by recent allegations against greyhound tracks in Florida (e.g. Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track in Bonita Springs — ‘State Records Show 21 Cases of Positive Cocaine Tests at Dog Track,’ www.naplesnews.com/.../article/0,2071,NPDN_14894_2957413,00.html), some greyhounds are also injected with cocaine as a performance-enhancer or pain-killing agent (Zeitlin, 2004). Dogs may not be neutered or spayed in order to maintain a high level of energy and their potential as breeding dogs. Yet, to curb the sexual activities of some dogs, they may also be chained in pens away from one another, or metal devices may be inserted into their genitalia to prevent ‘energy wasting’ coitus.

Again, these sorts of practices, pushed behind the scenes of everyday life in the greyhound figuration, provide evidence of how greyhounds in contexts of economic and social neglect may be treated. As part of the mimetic process, this backstage behaviour is undertaken to lower the overhead costs of the races, and is hidden from public view to avoid scandal and critical inquiry. This is especially evident at the poorer tracks, and in regions where the business has been threatened by other gaming industries. As track worker Carl explained:

News stories about violence against the dogs are more common but they’re only half the story. Like I said, you shouldn’t think the whole business is unethical, cause it ain’t. But when shit happens, it ain’t pretty . . . People in the business know not to tell anything at all, good or bad, about the dogs. If you’ve got a great racer, keep your secret, if you need to get rid of four or five, keep that secret too. When you need to get rid of one, it’s for a couple of reasons, and both of them are about the bottom line. The dog is either sick and too expensive to cure, or no one is betting on it. Either way, it’s a check mark in the loss column and has to go . . . we used to employ a bunch of local hicks to make the dogs ‘go away’. I knew they took them out to a field and shot them or hung them or, well, anything really.

Conditions players, including track handlers and workers, certainly witness the type of treatment described here, but often fear reprisal from track owners or trainers if they voice concern. Thus, containment of these insider power tensions seems to be quite normative in the industry. In the process, the focus of greyhound-related discourses is shifted to the front stage excitement of the races, and away from the often dubious, and occasionally shocking, treatment the dogs may receive behind closed doors.

3. Housing The housing of greyhounds at racetracks often reflects a similar cost-cutting, low overhead mentality and, in terms of the use of sometimes brutally inhumane care methods, further objectifies the dogs. At any given time, a greyhound track may house up to 1000 dogs in a complex of kennels. A kennel operator is in charge of all dogs in a specific kennel (anywhere from 10–100-plus

dogs). The dogs are often kept in rows of stacked cages, for space considerations (sometimes, a cage may be only 24 inches in width), and may be housed and/or muzzled for up to 22 hours per day (see www.grey2kusa.org). Also, the more dogs that can be squeezed into cramped kennel spaces, the more races can be run every day, thus increasing track efficiency and revenue. Without opportunity to adequately socialize, the dogs are literally 'left alone together'. They are 'turned out' several (1–4) times per day to urinate/defecate, and usually once to eat and receive water. Due to this stacking approach to kennelling, the wire mesh structure of the kennels, and lack of proper flooring in each, greyhounds at the bottom rows are showered with the waste of others. At some of the more disreputable tracks, music is blasted in the kennels to drown out the incessant barking or whining of the dogs. None of this happens accidentally. As Leo, an ex-track worker, told us:

Nope, we'd never listen to them howling on end for hours. All you can do is close the doors, turn the radio up, and walk away. At first we turned it to 'lite music' stations cause we thought it might calm them down a bit. But that only seemed to make them madder. We tried heavy metal, classic rock, and even Latin, and nothing worked . . . Rap is about the only kind of music louder and more obnoxious than barking!

Under such conditions, some greyhound kennels become infested with fleas and ticks. As a result, greyhounds from particular tracks carry skin, blood, heart and respiratory diseases such as canine ehrlichiosis, *Ehrlichia equi*, canine babesiosis and Rocky Mountain spotted fever:

At first, we wouldn't take dogs into our organization with backgrounds of illness. But then, it came to be that if we didn't the tracks wouldn't give us any more dogs. You spend a bit more to heal them properly, but they would die otherwise . . . Many tracks have a 'M.A.S.H' philosophy for treatment — do enough to keep them running for a while, but don't invest too heavily . . . But it's not rocket science, de-lousing the goddamn kennels every month would fix the problem. (Paul, greyhound foster)

Furthermore, due to poor sanitary conditions at the low-budget tracks, greyhounds may suffer from hookworm, tapeworm, whipworm and giardia. In the past six years, outbreaks of 'kennel cough' at several American racetracks have killed several dozen greyhounds (see www.grey2kusa.org). On-track conditions, however, may be no kinder to the dogs. Many die each year from on-track collisions and falls (often, smaller females are trampled in races with large males), or are electrocuted by electrical lure systems.

4. Release Recently circulated stories of 'release' or the 'retirement' of racers have prompted close scrutiny of the racing industry in the US and other countries (e.g. Ireland, the UK and Spain). When racers no longer win, they are downwardly discarded through the racing system (i.e. at tracks of lower status and grade). When they have finally reached the end of this career spiral, and are no longer financially worthy of housing at any racing level, they must be replaced and disposed of. In track worker Darren's words: 'I think racers know their time is up. They won't "bring it" to the races any more and act uninterested. Shortly after, they'll start to lose at every track, and then they're done for good.' While increasing numbers of greyhounds are now 'fostered out' through developing greyhound

adoption agencies such as 'Wings for Greyhounds', thousands of racing hounds are also 'euthanized' annually. Once again, and reflective of the profit-based culture of greyhound racing, their disposal may be brutal and painful.

Disposal of the dogs varies considerably, but two noticeable trends (other than adoption) are evident in 'dumping' processes. First, greyhounds may be individually killed following their retirement as racers. Colloquially referred to as 'going back to the farm', a greyhound's life may be ended in a rather unceremonious manner:

Do the numbers. Despite what the national associations or the tracks tell you, there's a big gap between the dogs registered each year, the ones racing, and the ones leaving. I've read about numbers, in the thousands, of missing greyhounds . . . They're euthanized by a vet, or shot, or starved, or even worse. Even if 'going back to the farm' is a humane and quick procedure, why lie about where the dogs go? (Gail, rescue worker)

Although such disposal methods are clearly not industry standard, racing greyhounds in the US may be bludgeoned, hanged, starved to death, abandoned in a field or woods, decapitated, electrocuted (this is known as a 'Tijuana hotplate'), sold to local fishermen (to be used, for example, as shark chum) or a local hunter, or sold to a medical laboratory for research purposes. Reports of tracks employing the services of a 'for hire' killer, who will terminate the life of a greyhound for a small fee, are not uncommon. Further, and again disconcertingly, since race hounds are tattooed upon registration, their left ears may be removed to prevent identification:

I knew a guy who made a hundred bucks a month to take care of the dogs. He'd show up at this one track, not the one I worked for, and had this grey truck. They'd tie the dogs together, herd them into the flatbed, and whoosh, they disappeared for good . . . I'm betting his name didn't appear on any financial statements. (Mark, trainer)

While some may claim that in other mainstream 'pet cultures' animals are routinely put to death at an 'early' age (i.e. due to illness, changing social circumstances of care for the owners, or simply because the pet is no longer wanted), it is the serial use of greyhounds for economic purposes and their subsequent replacement by more lucrative counterparts (as part of a 'civilized sporting culture') that is distinctive in the greyhound figuration. While farm animals are also slaughtered for economic purposes to produce the food we eat and are also quickly replaced, the euthanizing of family pets does not occur under such rational-economic circumstances or in order to help reproduce a branch of the entertainment industry.

An even more disturbing micro-trend is the mass killing of racing hounds. Since the mid-1990s, anti-racing organizations have reported the discovery of so-called 'killing fields' of dog carcasses in the US and Europe (especially Spain). Greyhounds have been found dead in rural grasslands, tied to railway tracks, or stacked in local dumpsters (www.peta.org). Medical laboratories and a handful of US universities have been identified as 'mass murderers' of greyhounds, and the entire racing industry has been labelled by groups like PETA as abusive and inhumane in its treatment methods in these respects.

In light of such evidence, it is clear that episodes of abuse in the greyhound

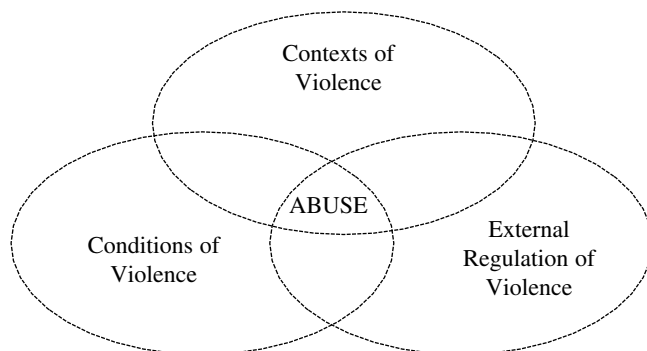


Figure 2 Abuse and Interdependence in Greyhound Racing

figuration occur through a multi-layered constellation of actors' efforts. While one individual may starve a dog, fail to treat a racer's wounds, feed it spoiled food, or euthanize it inhumanely, numerous others are complicit in these acts through conscious acquiescence or simply 'turning a blind eye'. Each of the (contexts, conditions and regulation) players performs a contributory role, although clearly a different role, in the process of greyhound abuse, with physical acts of neglect and violence as the end result of their actions. Animal abuse is not unique to the world of greyhound racing but, rather, representative of numerous contexts in which animals suffer from selective mistreatment in the name of 'sport'. Figure 2 represents this network of relationships culminating in abusive possibilities.

Discussion: Challenge and Change in the Greyhound Figuration

Recently, scores of adoption agencies have brokered the placement of greyhounds in family homes across North America and Europe. Once a fledging movement, like-minded individuals have collectively placed an estimated 80,000 dogs in private residences away from the track (www.gpl.com). Despite widespread stories of physical and psychological abuse, the accounts of adopters suggest that, once nurtured and cared for, ex-racing greyhounds may become placid family pets. Staunch anti-racing critics, however, question the long-term merit of the adoption movement, claiming that such involvement in the figuration, while well intended, inadvertently helps reproduce the racing industry. With new 'outlets' for the disposal of dogs, it is argued, the racing figuration will continue to produce and abuse a new *reservoir* of racers each year. Furthermore, the adoption movement, which must by necessity be part of the racing figuration (and only rarely voices concerns about the treatment of dogs), may act as an abuse-facilitator by downplaying rumours/images of brutality and inhumanity surrounding other segments of the figuration. Indeed, most Web pages maintained by US racetracks promote the adoption movement as a fully integrated wing of the industry.

In North America at least, greyhound racing appears to be in decline.

Decreases in profit and the inability to maintain a stable patron base have seriously threatened the sport's economic infrastructure. While racing is still a marginally profitable business in the southern US, insiders are predicting the gradual 'phasing out' of the industry in all but a few markets in North America. While European greyhound racing cultures experience ebbs and flows of economic success, and are replete with similar allegations of animal abuse, the industries there do not seem to be in such a state of financial and social uncertainty. There are several reasons for this predicted demise.

First, the boom in casino gambling in the United States has partly 'muscle out' the racing industry in stronghold states such as Florida and Alabama (Samuels, 1999). At the same time, the ascendance of casino, on-line, and other video forms of gambling has sliced into greyhound racing profits. Indeed, the exponential expansion of 'poker cultures' (especially 'Texas Hold Em' poker cultures) in the United States has challenged the profitability of many gaming industries such as greyhound racing. With a greater variety of gaming possibilities, vacation packages, climate-controlled facilities, and free alcohol along with other incentives at many venues, casino gambling offers much in the way of 'exciting significance'. Recognizing such alternatives, greyhound racing advocates have attempted to become incorporated into casino gambling rather than resisting the trend. A key example is that track owners have systematically lobbied casino owners to run live racing 'feeds' on their premises, and/or have established casino-sponsored Internet broadcasts of the races.

Second, animal advocacy and 'vegan' lifestyle groups such as PETA have attained increasing media attention and public legitimacy over the past 10 years (Dillard, 2002). As a result, public discourses are replete with situated accounts of greyhound abuse. While clearly not generalizable to all tracks or all participants in the industry, anti-racing groups have attempted to label public perception of the racing figuration as expressly abusive. Still, unlike anti-hunting groups in the UK which have lobbied for the end of animal blood sports with a certain measure of success, it is difficult at the present time to assess whether animal advocacy groups in North America have significantly impacted either public policy or popular thinking on the involvement of animals in popular cultural games of chance.

Third, and reflective of ongoing civilizing processes in western cultures of which the rise of animal rights groups is a component (Dunning, 1999), it can be argued that many North Americans are increasingly concerned with animal cruelty — especially through seemingly 'trivial' sports contents (notwithstanding the active hunting and horse racing cultures that continue to thrive on the continent). Even in local fishing and angling cultures, a 'catch and release' (that is to say, a respectful and minimal harm) ethos tends to prevail among enthusiasts and has been incorporated into the traditions and codified rules of such activities. From a figurational point of view, animal cruelty becomes an affront to the collective self-restraint we are expected to uphold in our stewardship over other creatures of the earth. In particular, the youngest generation of North Americans are raised in social spaces with new, more compassionate habituses regarding animal cruelty (see Armstrong and Botzler, 2003). Along with other factors, this may explain why so few young spectators frequent greyhound racing tracks.

Finally, the demise of greyhound racing may occur simultaneously with the ongoing legitimization of SRV in other sports spheres. As Young (2000, 2001) suggests, there are other forms of 'mimetic' sports violence available, many apparently more palatable to western audiences than animal competitions — such as may be found in mainstream contact, collision or otherwise high-risk sports, or sports involving, for example, vehicles driven at high speeds. Since these have respectively attained entrenched positions as cultural pastimes within western figurations since the early 1900s, and are adopted as identity symbols of a vast array of social groups and cultural traditions, some see little need for forms of 'uncivilized' animal racing in mainstream sports preferences.

Despite the noticeable decline in the US greyhound industry and progressive attempts to 'remedy' abuse/violence issues in it (American Greyhound Council, 2004), lines of comparison between neglect in greyhound racing and the systematic mistreatment of animals in other settings such as laboratories (for experimentation), zoos (for gaze), factory farms (for mass consumption), pet stores (for companionship), and hunting fields (for sport killing) can be drawn. For instance, the conceptual 'figuration' of actors described in this article may be compared with a plethora of other contexts where animals are subject to neglect, abuse or violence (see Shepard, 1996). Each contains its own indigenous *context*, *conditions* and *regulations players*, performing various roles in the abuse/violence process. In some cases, figurations appear to be comprised of a modest number of actors participating individually or in small groups (such as in hunting cultures), while others (such as bull-fighting or rodeo) more expansively include larger and more complex chains of participants who directly and indirectly contribute to harm against animals which also becomes rationalized and normalized. Significantly, and as with the US greyhound figuration, while women continue to slowly change the face of context, condition and regulation player spheres in these animal sport arenas, they remain, for the most part, strongly gendered and specifically masculinist social settings.

Sociologists of sport have significantly increased our understanding of the meaning of human sports participation and the way it may intersect with forms of harm, abuse, and victimization, but they have not paid attention to the meaning of animal participation and its potentially abusive outcomes. While the extent, form and meaning of abuse and violence in the sport is hotly contested within the racing figuration, and while not everyone in the figuration is indifferent to or a violator of animal rights, that new stories of abuse surface on a regular basis cannot be denied. In this connection, the racing industry must confront and more publicly account for its treatment of animals if it wishes to hold on to a share of the gaming/sports market and contemporary sports culture more generally. Policy positions released by groups such as the National Greyhound Racing Association indicate that the racing figuration is consciously striving to rid the industry of any abusive practices and admonish serious offenders in the sport (see American Greyhound Council, 2004). As part of this accountability process, sociological interrogations of violence against animals in sport, and its subsequent social construction, should be extended. We must break free of the rather simplistic notion that on-track action involving greyhounds is the only context of risk in the sport, and move toward a line of inquiry acknowledging how risk during races may

co-exist with neglect and violence occurring in the 'back regions' (Goffman, 1959) of the sport. In this regard, it also seems sociologically prudent to continue to explore the ways in which little known or seldom seriously considered abusive animal practices that, again, cannot be separated from the sports entertainment business (such as abuse in greyhound racing), interface with more familiar articulations of sports-related violence.

Note

1. While we openly acknowledge our ideological position as supporters of animal rights in general, and while proximity to the raising of dogs on both our parts (again, in one of our cases, directly with greyhounds) has sensitized us to the nuances of animal cruelty, we write here as sociologists. Our interests in this connection lie in using an explanatory approach to mimetic activity and a conceptual understanding of aspects of sports-related violence to throw light on a body of empirical data on an under-researched topic.

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