

A Collection of Excerpts From:

Dog Bite Prevention for Law Enforcement and Other First Responders

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[Quotes transcribed from video]

(Disk 1) Segment about pit bulls and people

"Now, but I also think that it is shortsighted and not biologically or ecologically accurate to deny the fact that dog breed effects behavior and the potential for aggression. Setters "set" because we bred them to do that. Pointers "point" because we bred them to do that. Retrievers "retrieve" because we bred them to do that. Fighting dogs "fight" and guarding dogs "guard," and attack dogs "attack" because we bred them to do that. And to say that all pit bulls are voracious killers because that's how they were bred is certainly inaccurate. To say that it's all up to the people -- the only bad ones are the ones people abused or are trained to be bad -- that's also untrue.

We have to recognize as in most things, in nature and nurture combining, that genetics can load the gun and interactions is what pulls the trigger.

How you use the raw material you are given, and the application you will make of that individual's abilities, it's like, "How are you going to use a chainsaw? Are you going to use it to carve a totem pole or to carve up a co-ed in a horror movie?"

[Next segment]

"We have to recognize that many of the fighting breeds do have a genetic and evolutionary history that predisposes them to certain kinds of problems specifically relevant to what we were talking about this morning of their ability to accurately communicate mood and intention. And their ability to accurately respond to normal situations."

(Disk 1) Segment about fighting dogs, should they be adopted out?

"Our recommendation from the Humane Society is that animals that we know have been actively bred or trained for fighting should never be considered prospects for placement. There's always a risk with these animals of animal-to-animal aggression. And one of the problems even if the animal is not aggressive, or instinctively aggressive toward humans, there are problems with socialization and problems with the upbringing of the animals. I've seen many instances in investigating fatal dog attacks from pit bulls that were bred for the fight trade, that these were animals that simply had never learned to distinguish between another dog and a small human being. And the injuries that I've seen and some of the autopsies that I've assisted in, were of children who were essentially treated by these dogs as another dog would be treated."

[Next segment]

"One of the things that does get a community concerned is the connection between biting dogs and fighting dogs. That although dogfighters are the first to tell you that their dogs have been bred for centuries to not be aggressive to people, that really doesn't seem to be that true anymore. We were hearing 10 and 15 years ago cases of dogs jumping out of the pit and attacking spectators. We hear that quite often now. So the existence of fighting dogs and the violent people that own and breed and train them I think is a real threat in a community, a real destabilizing force. The fact that there are violent young men barely controlling potentially dangerous dogs on the streets in that community, where there are children playing, where there are kids in the households, that's very scary for a lot of members of the community."

(Disk 2) Fighting breeds fail to communicate their intention

"We can also make changes in the dog's ability to communicate intention through selection. The main selective pressure for impeding a dog's ability to communicate mood and intention is breeding them for fighting or garden attack work. Because if you are a fighting dog, primarily, the best strategy if you are a fighter, is not communicate your intention ...

That is why when you see the true fighting dogs with other dogs they are just so stoic. And why we so often hear of attacks from fighting breeds described as "attacking without warning." Meaning there was no growl, there was no bark, there was no direct stare, the dog just got from point A to point B and did what he wanted to do. Was looking for that opening.

Likewise, they are disrespectful of the traditional signs of submission and appeasement. When your German shepherd fights with your Lab, in a play fight or even a serious fight and one of the dogs goes belly up that is a cut off signal. It is an infantile, juvenile signal and wolves were wired up to say, "When I see someone roll over like a puppy does, I don't want to hurt my own puppies, I better stop showing aggression." So most dogs are hardwired to respond to a display of submission by cutting off aggression -- by stopping -- because it means you have won...

But if you are a fighting dog and the objective is to cause the most harm possible, [a submissive gesture] is just a new opening. I started hearing back in the early 1980's from humane societies that first started getting in fighting dogs (and did not know what they were getting). They would put that fighting dog into a pen with a German shepherd, and the German shepherd speaks "dog," and they play by wolf rules, and the German shepherd would go belly up, and the pit bull would just disembowel him ... They don't speak that language. They ignore that signal.

And that's one of the most devastating things we have done to fighting dogs. We've destroyed their ability to speak wolf or speak good dog. And they've taken it even one step further. The truly sinister communicator not only doesn't tell you what he feels or what he is going to do next. He lies to you...

Fighting dogs lie all the time. I experienced it first hand when I was investigating three pit bulls that killed a little boy in Georgia. When I went up to do an initial evaluation of the dog's behavior. The dog came up to the front of the fence, gave me a nice little tail wag and a "play bow" -- a little solicitation, a little greeting. As I got closer, he lunged for my face.

It was one of those "Ah ha" experiences. Yeah, that would really work. That would really work in a dog pit. Because 99% of dogs are going to read that as "Oh boy I am your friend, let's play" -- and there's my opening. I said, "How evil is that? That we have been able to create a dog that can do something like that?"



Expert Randall Lockwood

Randall Lockwood has degrees in psychology and biology from Wesleyan University and a doctorate in comparative and physiological psychology from Washington University. He served as vice president for research and educational outreach for the Humane Society of the United States until 2005, when he became the ASPCA's Senior Vice President for Anti-Cruelty Initiatives and Training. For more than 25 years, Lockwood has worked closely with humane societies, animal control agencies and law enforcement, serving as an expert on wolf and dog behavior, dog aggression, dog bite prevention and illegal dogfighting. He has been an advisor on animal-related issues to the Centers for Disease Control and the United States Postal Service.