

Pit Bulls - Five Part Series

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Translation by bilingual Canadian dog bite victims' advocate in British Columbia. Formatting and placing into finalized document by DogsBite.org.



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Pit bulls - PART I

WHO WANTS TO SAVE PIT BULLS?

Drafted to advise the province on the subject of its dangerous dog laws, the Association of Veterinary Doctors of Québec relayed to government “scientific and objective information.” But its report withholds large portions of crucial medical studies on the ravages of pit bulls, and puts forward studies funded by the powerful pit bull lobby. Which side does the science support?

MARIE-CLAUDE MALBOEUF
LA PRESSE



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Pit bulls - PART II

WHICH SIDE DOES THE SCIENCE SUPPORT?

MARIE-CLAUDE MALBOEUF
LA PRESSE

The studies cited by the Association of Veterinary Doctors (OMVQ, l'Ordre des médecins vétérinaires du Québec) which they deem to be "scientific" are, in fact, the work of militants funded by the heavily financed pro-pit bull lobby, *La Presse* discovered. A conflict of interest exists, which is nowhere mentioned in the report, given by the OMVQ to the ministerial committee tasked with helping the government protect the people of Québec against canine attacks.

The OMVQ report also cites a lot of other studies, four of which are recent medical studies, but fails to mention the unequivocal statements of their authors—who conclude unanimously that pit bulls, on the whole, pose an excessive risk.

On Sunday, *La Presse Canadienne* (The Canadian Press) reported that the veterinarians' report convinced the ministerial committee to rule out all legislative measures targeting certain dog breeds. News which stunned the relatives and friends of dog bite victims.

A NEW TOBACCO LOBBY

In the U.S. for years, the victims of pit bull attacks have vociferously complained that pit bull advocates, including those mentioned by the OMVQ, commissioned the studies in order to skew science, as well as misrepresent and confuse the issues.

Considering the importance of the debate—which galvanized Québec all summer—a professor emeritus at McGill University agreed to look into the file for *La Presse*. Educated at Harvard, Dr. Barry Pless is one of the leading experts in Pediatric Trauma, Epidemiology and Biostatistics. He led the research clinic at the Montréal Children's Hospital. In addition to founding and editing the international scholarly journal *Injury Prevention*, affiliated with the prestigious *BMJ* (formerly, *British Medical Journal*)

“To conduct studies, which aim first of all to prevent laws from being adopted and not declare these conflicts of interest, is the strategy employed by the weapons lobby and the tobacco lobby.”

—Dr. Barry Pless, M.D., Professor Emeritus McGill University

UNRECOGNIZABLE STUDY

Since 2011, a half-dozen medical studies have been published on the subject. “That they concluded, one after another, that pit bulls are overrepresented among the dogs responsible for injuries, seems to me very persuasive,” said the independent expert. “The publications in which they are published are not elite journals, but they are good journals, neutral.”

The report of the OMVQ cites four relevant studies, but does it only half way. The 2011 study—which covers 15 years of serious cases treated in a Texas hospital—becomes quasi-contradictory.

Its authors, surgeons, clearly state that pit bulls have proven to have more dog bite-related fatalities (DBRF) than other dogs; causing more heavy or deep comas. And they send victims for longer stays in intensive care units (ICU).

“Regulating pit bulls could substantially reduce the number of dog bite-related fatalities,” concluded the researchers.

All the aforementioned information has been ignored by the veterinarians. In their interpretations of the same study, they have claimed that the proportion of victims

having required surgery, that is a third, was identical no matter what the breed of dog, pit bull or other breed.

“We didn’t have sufficient time to complete a genuine study as well as a careful and complete analysis. We had one month less than anticipated; half of the experts were on vacation. It is preliminary.”

—Dr. Michel Pépin, spokesperson for the OMVQ and signatory of the report

On the subject of the conflicts of interest, discovered by *La Presse* (detailed below) he added, “Since we didn’t have time, we weren’t able to sift through it all in detail, but we have to look at the report in its entirety.”

Yesterday *La Presse* listed the recommendations of the OMVQ to the government, among which was the requirement to report dog bites to the police.

The president of the OMVQ, Dr. Joël Bergeron, said that the dog bite victims advocates are also biased. “We always find ourselves having to go from one extreme to another. So, you have to look at everything to untangle the whole picture.”

The report which Dr. Bergeron has presented, emphasizes that the records of dog bites, made by the victims, show “serious statistical gaps.” But it accepts without reservation the studies tied to the pro-pit bull lobby, writing that they “demonstrate and prove” that the identification of the dog as a pit bull is often wrong. And that the credibility of the media on this subject is “weak”.

“NONSENSE”

This last conclusion is taken from a study by the National Canine Research Council (NCRC), owned by the lobby group Animal Farm Foundation, which is dedicated completely to pit bull advocacy.

The director of the NCRC, Karen Delise, reviewed all the fatal dog attacks from 2000 to 2009. According to her summary, the media identified the same breed of dog (sometimes crosses) as authorities in 83% to 89% of cases. In spite of this, she concluded that they were correct 18% of the time.

The veterinary technician has no proof that the media are mistaken. But for her, it doesn’t matter who the identification is coming from—including their owners—because no dog can be considered a pit bull, German Shepherd, etc., unless it’s purebred and officially registered with a kennel club.

“These distinctions with respect to the purity of the breed, they’re nonsense!” comments Professor Barry Pless.

“If the dog looks like a pit bull, if it behaves like a pit bull and people recognize it as a pit bull, that’s enough to say that you’re dealing with a pit bull.”

—Dr. Barry Pless, Professor Emeritus at McGill University

From the United States to Ontario, courts ruling on the question have concluded that the visual identification of dogs is within the ability of a person of “ordinary intelligence.”

In an interview, Karen Delise maintained that people are mistaken about breed, “especially if their dog comes from a shelter or casual breeder.” For this reason, she doesn’t contact owners, she says, adding that, “they’re biased, because it’s in their own interest to say that their dog has never bitten anyone.”

On the subject of her own lack of neutrality, never acknowledged in her studies, “No one in the world pursues a goal without having a desired outcome,” she says in her own defense. “When I became interested in this subject, I worked in a prison with murderers. Then, a dog killed a child in the area and the debate became poisonous. Why the outrage, when we don’t become similarly indignant on account of other horrible things? We demand much more of dogs than of humans...”

“I ended up choosing the side that struck me as the most logical and by questioning what else is going on in the lives of dogs aside from their breed. When there is an attack, there’s never a single cause, but at least three or four.”

“Plenty of things are hard to control! There will always be delinquents and human errors, always negligent owners and negligent parents,” protests the American Jeff Borchardt, whose baby Daxton was killed by pit bulls in 2013. It was him and the Dogsbite victim group who exposed the conflicts of interest of the lobby, denouncing them with supporting documents.

CALMING THE POPULACE

Who is right? If we’re to believe the report of the OMVQ, it’s clear. Targeting a breed or breeds will do nothing other than “calming the populace” and would be “contrary to the scientific and demographic studies carried out in recent years.”

But the Irish author of a study cited in their report—a psychology student—loves Rottweilers to the point of having founded the lobby group Unmuzzle Ireland, a conflict of interest he was forced to declare after the fact, under questioning from a journalist from *The Sunday Times*.

In his introduction, the young man also supports the position that banning breeds “lacks scientific basis,” citing only the research of the lobby.

Two studies prior to his own—in 2010 and 2013—and judged very solid by Dr. Pless, nevertheless demonstrate the opposite, namely, that breed bans reduced the number of hospitalizations from dog bites in Catalonia (-38%) and in Manitoba (-18%).

“It was my own journal, *Injury Prevention*, that published them, but it’s objectively a highly respected and neutral journal, in which it’s much more difficult to get published than in industry journals,” the McGill professor emphasizes.

The Manitoba study covers more than two decades. “This study is crème de la crème,” Dr. Pless judges.

When researchers compared Manitoba communities against each other, they noticed that they were too small and hospitalizations for dog bites too rare for the effect of the disappearance of pit bulls to be easily detected. But by taking a large enough sample—all communities that banned pit bulls—the decline in hospitalizations was very significant. All the more so given that the number of dogs would have increased in Manitoba in 23 years, as elsewhere in (North) America.

Of note: After having heard from the experts from both camps for the past 10 years, even before the publication of the recent medical studies, courts have concluded that the Ontario law banning pit bulls was not “arbitrary” since there existed “a reasonable apprehension of harm” that was sufficient.

“When the issue is public safety, the legislator is free to choose the most prudent approach,” wrote the Appeals Court. This is particularly true when the magnitude of the risk or the efficacy of the law “are difficult or impossible to measure in a scientific manner.”

BIG COSTS

Quite a few veterinarians admit to being shaken by the controversy and don’t know which side to come down on, according to their spokesperson, Michel Pépin.

But they are concerned that a new law would force them to euthanize healthy dogs and make their job difficult, the report says. Their clients are already asking them to falsify their dog’s records to conceal if it’s a pit bull. Others want non-dangerousness certified—a near impossibility, even if only a minority of pit bulls will inflict serious bites.

As for shelters, they’re concerned for “their structure and already precarious financial health” if they see a “dramatic increase in the number of abandoned dogs,” states the report, which emphasizes the cost of the measures to come.

Dr. Pless hopes the government will not forget to factor in the cost of surgeries required to save the faces, hands—and sometimes the lives—of bite victims. “This is without even considering indirect costs”, he argues. “How much is a lost eye or a torn face worth? Paying for prevention is nothing compared to what it saves.”

THEY KILL MORE NORTH AMERICANS

Of all the Americans killed by dogs from 2005 to 2015, 66% were victims of pit bulls.
Source: Dogsbite.org.

To determine whether the dog is a pit bull, this victims' group consults a combination of media outlets, animal control organizations and the veterinarians on record, judicial documents and social media, where the fatally attacking dogs had often been displayed and identified by their owners.

THEY ARE THE SUBJECT OF A LARGE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS

48%: Proportion of pit bulls responsible for dog bites reported in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve from 2011 to 2015

60% Proportion of pit bulls responsible dog bites reported in 9 districts

28% Average proportion of pit bulls responsible for dog bites reported on Plateau Mont-Royal

Last year, pit bulls also inflicted:

69% of the bites reported in Rosemont

32% of those reported in Rivière-des-Prairies-Pointe-aux-Trembles (where Christiane Vadnais was killed)

Source: Statistics of incidents reported to police and animal control organizations, obtained by *La Presse* through access to information laws. Some districts did not have figures for the breeds responsible.

IT'S ALSO TRUE WHEN THE DOG IS PUREBRED

32% of fatally attacking purebred dogs that killed an American from 2009 to 2011 were pit bulls (6 American Pit Bulls and 1 Staffordshire Terrier)

Fatally attacking purebred dogs that killed an American from 2009 to 2011:

Pit bull types: 7

Rottweilers: 4

American Bulldogs (cousin of pit bulls): 2

Boxer: 2

Husky: 2

German Shepherd: 1

Cane Corso (war dogs): 1

Doberman: 1

Great Dane: 1

Wolf hybrid: 1
TOTAL: 22

Source: Investigative Reports of Dog Bite-Related Fatalities, 2009, 2010 and 2011 from the NCRC. Its director states that specifics are not available for subsequent years, or for the 9 previous years.

THEY ATTACK MORE OFTEN IN AN ABNORMAL WAY

52% Proportion of pit bulls among the 44 dogs who bit that were required to be evaluated on the order of municipal authorities by the veterinary behaviorist Diane Frank.

76% Proportion of pit bulls among the 21 dogs assessed as dangerous enough for euthanasia to be required in Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve from 2011 to 2015.

Additional sources referenced:

Mortality, Mauling, and Maiming by Vicious Dogs, by John K. Bini, MD, Stephen M. Cohn, MD, Shirley M. Acosta, RN, Marilyn J. McFarland, RN, MS, Mark T. Muir, MD and Joel E. Michalek, PhD; for the TRISAT Clinical Trials Group, *Annals of Surgery*, April 2011 - Volume 253 - Issue 4 - p 791-797

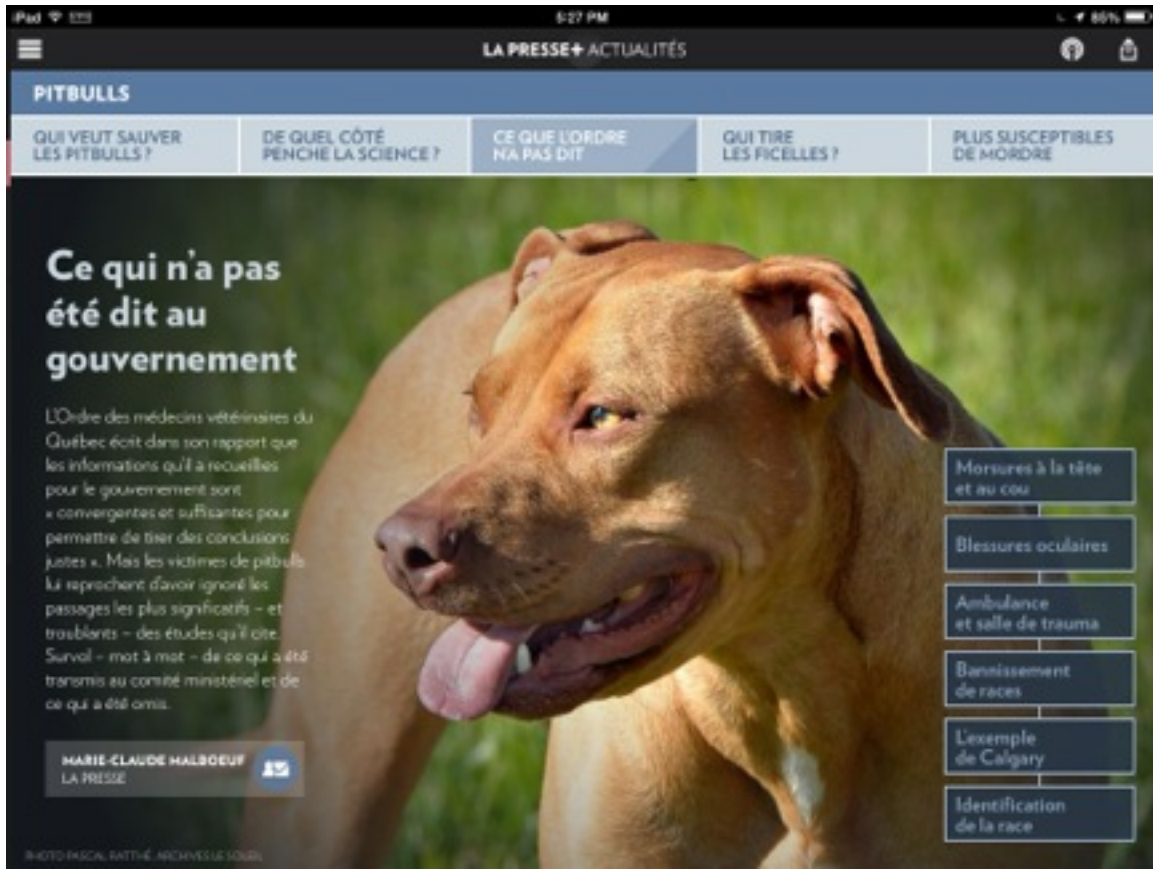
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Decline in Hospitalisations Due to Dog Bite Injuries in Catalonia, 1997-2008. An Effect of Government Regulation?, by Joan R Villalbi, Montse Cleries, Susana Bouis, Víctor Peracho, Julia Duran and Conrad Casas, *Injury Prevention*, August 2010;16:408-410

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46095573_Decline_in_hospitalisations_due_to_dog_bite_injuries_in_Catalonia_1997-2008_An_effect_of_government_regulation

Effectiveness of Breed-Specific Legislation in Decreasing the Incidence of Dog-Bite Injury Hospitalisations in People in the Canadian Province of Manitoba, by Malathi Raghavan, Patricia J Martens, Dan Chateau, and Charles Burchill, *Injury Prevention*, Published Online First, June 30, 2012

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Pit bulls - Part III

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT WASN'T TOLD

The Order of Veterinary Doctors of Québec (OMVQ) wrote in its own report that the information it collected for the government is “a consensus and adequate to permit the drawing of fair conclusions.” But pit bull victims protest that they ignored the most significant—and troubling—portions of the studies they cited. In brief—using actual text—of what they communicated to the ministerial committee and what they left out.

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HEAD AND NECK BITES (2012-2013)

What the OMVQ communicated

1. "Out of 101 cases, 57% of patient were under 10 years of age."
2. "Of patients with head and neck bites, 32% were bitten by pit bulls, and breed was not indicated in 34% of cases."
3. "The second most often implicated breed was the golden retriever."

What they didn't mention

1. Pit bull victims were five times more likely to require surgery.
2. In contrast with other dogs, pit bulls were more likely to attack strangers (+31%) and without provocation (+48%)
3. The importance of pit bulls' responsibility for bites was a key finding. It confirms and underlines the findings of other publications.

Source: Dog bites of the head and neck: an evaluation of a common pediatric trauma and associated treatment, by Daniel C. O'Brien, BS, Tyler B. Andre, MD, Aaron D. Robinson, MD, Lane D. Squires, MD and Travis T. Tollefson, MD, MPH, *American Journal of Otolaryngology*, Published Online: September 25, 2014.

[http://www.amjoto.com/article/S0196-0709\(14\)00205-1/pdf](http://www.amjoto.com/article/S0196-0709(14)00205-1/pdf)

EYE INJURIES (2003-2013)

What the OMVQ communicated

1. "Pit bulls were responsible for 25% of eye injuries."
2. "Other breeds were mixes (19%), Labrador retrievers (10%), German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, Mastiffs and Dobermans (3% each), Beagles, Boxers, Bulldogs and Australian Shepherds (2% each), Dalmatians, Great Danes, Dachshunds and Collies (1% each)."
3. "Three patients had orbital fractures (Doberman, Labrador, Husky). Another patient had a fracture of the nose (pit bull), and the fifth patient had a skull fracture (German Shepherd)."

What they didn't mention

1. This study is the first to establish that pit bulls cause the most eye injuries.
2. More alarmingly, that when the attacks were by unfamiliar dogs, pit bulls were responsible for more than 60% of general or eye injuries.

3. This study provides solid proof that pit bulls are aggressive, regardless of whether they're born that way or made that way, and that they're most often associated with serious eye injuries. [This should] inform public policy aimed at increasing childrens' safety.

Source: Ocular Trauma From Dog Bites: Characterization, Associations, and Treatment Patterns at a Regional Level I Trauma Center Over 11 Years, by Prendes MA, Jian-Amadi A, Chang SH and Shaftel SS, *Ophthalmic Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, June 2015 , [Epub ahead of print].

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279308237_Ocular_Trauma_From_Dog_Bites_Characterization_Associations_and_Treatment_Patterns_at_a_Regional_Level_I_Trauma_Center_Over_11_Years

CASES INVOLVING AMBULANCES AND TRAUMA SUITES (2007-2013)

What the OMVQ communicated

1. "28 breeds of dog were identified, of which the most common was pit bull (29.4%), followed by mixed breeds (14.2%). The breed was unknown in 24.5% of cases."
2. "Limitations of the study: the media having covered pit bull attacks in the region, patients and families could potentially be disposed to identify the attacking dog as a pit bull."
3. "The results of the study can't necessarily be generalized to other regions."

What they didn't mention

1. It's the largest study of serious injuries.
2. Pit bulls were responsible for 45.5% of cases involving the 11 patients with the highest AIS score (a scale of the severity of injuries).
3. They were also responsible for 38% of all injuries to the head, neck and face.
4. These results have important implications for the safety of children.

Source: Morbidity of pediatric dog bites: A case series at a level one pediatric trauma center, by Erin M. Garvey, Denice K. Twitchell, Rebecca Ragar, John C. Egan and Ramin Jamshidi, *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, February 2015, Volume 50, Issue 2:343-346

<http://www.jpedsurg.org/article/S0022-3468%2814%2900584-3/abstract>

BREED BANS

What the OMVA communicated

1. "Some countries that have adopted legislation banning certain breeds have seen a worsening of the situation (the UK and the Aragon region of Spain)."
2. "In Manitoba: 310 hospitalizations for dog bites prior to legislation; 157 since legislation."
3. "For jurisdictions that banned pit bulls: 84 hospitalizations for dog bites before legislation; 157 hospitalizations since legislation."
4. "In spite of these results, the authors conclude that breed bans can work."

What they didn't mention

- 1, The UK and Aragon continue to restrict several breeds of dog. So do regions and cities in more than 40 countries, including 700 US cities and all American military bases.
2. Following recent referendums, the citizens of Miami-Dade in Florida and of Colorado voted to retain their pit bull bans.
3. The Manitoba study shows that the total number of hospitalizations for dog bites dropped by 27% in cities that banned pit bulls in the less than 20 years since the ban. The median age of victims also shifted from 11 to 22 years.

THE CALGARY EXAMPLE

What the OMVA communicated

1. "In adopting an approach focused on responsibility of owners and a rigorous application of its municipal by-laws, Calgary gradually reduced its total dog incidents by 78%. This model merits closer study."

What they didn't mention

1. In 2014 in Calgary, 244 bites of level 3 severity or more (on a scale of 6) were registered, compared to 198 in 2013. (1)
2. "There's a reason why places like the city of Toronto have banned them outright." Setting aside whether it's needed in Calgary, more must be done to "make sure owners understand the ramifications of owning a breed that may potentially harm somebody," stated the director of animal control services last year, after a series of serious attacks.(2)

(1) CTV News

<http://calgary.ctvnews.ca/dog-attack-in-northwest-home-sends-five-year-old-boy-to-hospital-1.2543178>

(2) The Calgary Herald

<http://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/city-looks-to-boost-fines-for-pit-bull-bites-after-slew-of-attacks>

BREED IDENTIFICATION

What the OMVA communicated

1. “The scientific literature demonstrates and proves the difficulty of recognizing and distinguishing dog breed by visual identification. Visual identification of breed, which is the case for pit bulls, is less precise than DNA tests.”

2. Genetic tests are a “precise” and “objective method” of identifying breed. And their results could make it hard to enforce certain municipal regulations.

What they didn't mention

1. The authors of a similar study to the one cited by the OMVA specified that: “The sensitivity and specificity of breed genetic profiling is unknown and no test exists for the American Pit Bull Terrier, nor for pit bulls generally, since it consists of a phenotype and not a breed [...] Little data exists on the accuracy of DNA tests for determining the constituent breeds of mixed dogs.”

Source: “Inconsistent identification of pit bull-type dogs by shelter staff”; The Veterinary Journal, November 2015.

2. The company that offers the genetic test used, The Mars Wisdom Panel, warns: “Due to the genetic diversity of the group, Mars Veterinary is unable to establish a DNA profile capable of identifying genetically all the dogs that could be classified visually as pit bulls.”

3. The ASPCA, in another shelter, had the opposite result: “Staff were quite good [at visual identification of pit bulls]. They correctly identified 96% of dogs that had at least 25% of the target breeds.”

Source: Dr. Emily Weiss, ASPCA, “Bully This—The Results Are In...” September 2013, (www.aspcapro.org)

<http://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2013/09/25/bully-this%E2%80%94results-are-in%E2%80%A6>



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Pit bulls - Part VI

LIKE DOGS AND CATS

The two camps—pro and anti-pit bulls—don't join battle merely in a war of studies. In 2010, pit bull promoters turned to hijacking website names resembling the [dogbite] victims site Dogsbite.org, buying similar domains (Dogsbite.com and Dogsbite.net). Brutal denunciations and innuendoes rain down in social media and blogs, each side displaying its contempt for the other camp. Jeff Borchardt, who saw his baby killed by pit bulls, saves Twitter screen shots about him saying [things like]: "He is like a fart in a storm. Nobody hears him or cares about him." Like other victims, he receives death threats. For her part, the founder of Dogsbite saves emails of a former leader of the lobby with a criminal past. He threatens [Dogsbite] with lawsuits, writing that he has sent her personal information to the FBI because she could be "a terrorist", and that her movement "fabricates attacks and deliberately sets pit bulls loose at large." On their side, pit bull owners report being brutally denounced and sometimes insulted when they are peacefully walking their dogs.

And the director of NCRC tells *La Presse* of receiving “disgusting things” and of being photographed in the streets.

MARIE-CLAUDE MALBOEUF
LA PRESSE

WHO IS PULLING THE STRINGS?

The US pet industry is worth 16 billion dollars. Without pit bulls to sell, to rescue, to rehabilitate, to care for and to feed, a lot of people would see their revenues plunge, denounced Jeffrey Borchardt, who lost his baby when he was torn from the arms of his babysitter by two pit bulls. Since this tragedy, the American DJ and other victims have worked to expose the gears of the powerful pit bull promotion lobby. Who pulls the strings? Portrait of a tightly woven network.

Level one: Financing source

ANIMAL FARM FOUNDATION

Run by an American millionaire, Animal Farm Foundation has for its motto: “Equality for pit bulls.” The pressure group devotes itself entirely to combatting against any regulation targeting its dogs.

After inheriting a fortune from her father, Jane Berkey, who also owns a literary agency, turned over at least \$6 million to her group, \$2.85 million in 2013, according to government records. She pays 9 employees (one of whom, the director, makes more than \$100,000 a year) and finances numerous groups that share her philosophy.

Level two: the researchers

NATIONAL CANINE RESEARCH COUNCIL (NCRC)

To produce studies, AFF bought a private research body in 2007. The acquisition was kept secret until the victims’ group Dogsbite discovered this during litigation.

The National Canine Research Council (NCRC) was created by a veterinary technician, Karen Delise. Neither an academic researcher nor a veterinarian, she self proclaims as the “greatest national expert on deaths caused by dog bites.”

An “action fund” permits the organization to engage in lobbying, according to a government registration.

The NCRC is linked to several advisors and consultants. This is the case for Gary Patronek, the veterinarian who co-signs (NCRC) studies, and in the case of the

former chief animal control officer of Calgary, Bill Bruce, who was still employed in that civil service job at the time he accepted his association with NCRC.

The agency already had consultant Glen Bui on board, whose heavy criminal record can be found online (illegal weapon possession, obstruction of justice, domestic violence and harassment).

Still, thanks to millions from Animal Farm, the NCRC finances like-minded researchers—notably on the issue of identification of pit bulls, information available on their website.

Level 3: Publication

JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (JAVMA)

The American Veterinary Medical Association publishes NCRC studies in its journal. On its own website it proposes sample letters [for readers to write] contesting any law aimed at pit bulls. Moreover, its site has a link to AFF.

The Association added the following introduction to a famous 2000 study: “In contrast to what has been reported in the news media, the data contained within this report CANNOT be used to infer any breed-specific risk for dog bite fatalities. [To reach that conclusion] it would be necessary to know the numbers of each breed currently residing in the United States. Such information is not available.”

Even if they are opposed to a breed ban, for practical reasons amongst others, the authors of the study—seasoned in the ministry for Health and government institutions—nevertheless concluded: “In spite of potential bias and the lack of data on the canine population, pit bulls seem to be implicated in 42% of fatal tragedies. We do not believe that in the United States, the proportion of pit bulls amongst the dog population even comes near to approaching 42%. We therefore believe that the disproportion of deaths associated with pit bulls is real and escalating.”

Level 4: The political lobby

BEST FRIENDS ANIMAL SOCIETY

The studies of the AFF network allow [lobby] groups to put pressure on politicians. They propose regulations [they favor] and try to overturn those they dislike. Sometimes with success.

The central facts about Best Friends Animal Society are that it manages \$60 million and has for its motto: “Save them all,” for it is opposed to all euthanizing of animals. Its senior advocate, Ledy VanKavage sits on the board of AFF. The website of Best Friends Animal Society indicates that she paid an ex-economist from the tobacco

industry, John Dunham, to create a fiscal calculation scheme designed to advise governments on the cost of breed banning.

[Dunham's] calculations were attacked in the *Texas Tribune* in 2011. The following year, before a referendum on pit bulls in Miami-Dade, a government committee discovered that the real costs incurred in targeting dogs was 65 times lower than those claimed by Dunham.

“With all its money, the lobby [can afford to] finance lawyers and harass elected officials. And if it doesn't get what it wants, it threatens to finance the campaign of their political opponents!” denounces Angela Provo, whose son Beau Rutledge was killed by a family pit bull.

Level 5: The distributors

THE ANIMAL CARE INDUSTRY

All the lobby studies are abundantly distributed by animal-based companies like shelters, breeders, trainers, etc. In Montreal, they are [distributed] by, amongst others, the SPCA, whose mission is to avoid euthanizing dogs and whose two most senior executives are themselves owners of pit bulls.

On social media, pit bull owners deploy these studies relentlessly and accuse all their opponents of ignorance. Certain more aggressive ones have even threatened the mayor of Quebec City with death.

Unfortunately, some militant activists have come to a tragic end, killed by their own fighting dogs—notably Darla Napora, at the time 8 months pregnant (California, 2011) and Rebecca Carey (Georgia, 2012).



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Pit bulls - Part V

MAXIMUM LEVEL OF AGGRESSION REACHED BY VARIOUS LARGE DOGS IN A TEMPERAMENT TEST

MARIE-CLAUDE MALBOEUF
LA PRESSE

The dog bit or attacked (Level 5)

- Golden Retriever 2%
- Bull Terrier 3%
- Rottweiler 4%
- Doberman 6%
- American Staffordshire Terrier 13%
- Other Pit bulls 13%

The dog bit, showed teeth or bit in the air (snapped?) (Level 3 or 4)

Golden Retriever 1%
Bull Terrier 2%
Rottweiler 2%
Doberman 6%
American Staffordshire Terrier 5%
Other Pit bulls 18%

Sources: Is breed-specific legislation justified? Study of the results of the temperament test of Lower Saxony (Germany) and Is there a difference? Comparison of golden retrievers and dogs affected by breed-specific legislation regarding aggressive behaviour, Journal of Veterinary Behaviour, 2008

[http://www.journalvetbehavior.com/article/S1558-7878\(07\)00236-5/abstract](http://www.journalvetbehavior.com/article/S1558-7878(07)00236-5/abstract)

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A BREED OR NOT?

Defenders of pit bulls insist that they're not a breed, but a catchall designation wrongly used to talk about different dogs.

Even today, the same pit bull can be registered as two different "breeds" at the same time, according to different official clubs. For the simple reason that all pit bulls share common ancestors.

200 years ago, probably in the Staffordshire region, the English started crossing large, powerful bulldogs (and sometimes mastiffs) with terriers—smaller, but tenacious and agile—to create fighting dogs. The fiercest and most impervious to pain were cross-bred to produce "dead game" pit bulls, those willing to fight to the death.

Colonists brought the dogfighting tradition to America, but also used the dogs to guard livestock and protect their families.

Although dogfighting had been legal in the US, it was frowned-on, so the American Kennel Club (AKC) had refused to register pit bulls as a dog breed. Admirers of the dogs responded by founding a rival club, the United Kennel Club (UKC), who bestowed the name "American Pit Bull Terrier" ("pit" referring to the dogfighting ring, and "bull" as a diminutive of bulldog). At the time, around 1898, only dogs who had logged victories in dogfights could be registered.

Almost 40 years later, after dogfighting had been outlawed, the AKC finally accepted the same pit bull dogs, but renamed "Staffordshire terrier" preferring a name evoking the region of origin rather than their gladiator past.

To this day, a dog registered as an American Staffordshire Terrier can be simultaneously registered as an American Pit Bull Terrier, according to the American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA).

In the United Kingdom, the descendants of the original pit bulls bear yet another name, that of Staffordshire Bull Terrier, chosen by the British Kennel Club. Having evolved a little differently from those on the other continent, these pit bulls are on average smaller, but have the same ancestors as their American cousins.

So it's a matter of three very closely related breeds.

If the pit bull family is so vast, it's because some have been crossed with guard dogs or other molossers. And because their breeders have gone on to create variants, such as the shorter-legged American Bully.

In its report, the Veterinarians Orders has stated that this dog is not a pit bull. But for years, the American Bully could be registered as an American Pit Bull Terrier with the UKC. It has been registered under its own name, in separate registries, only since 2013. Owners who had formerly registered their American Bully as an American Pit Bull Terrier can make an application to have the name automatically changed in the registry.

NINE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO BITE THAN GOLDEN RETRIEVERS

Are pit bulls more likely to show aggression than other dogs? Yes, according to a German study, which was nonetheless cited by the SPCA to make the opposite claim.

In the region studied by researchers, Lower Saxony, a half-dozen breeds of dog considered dangerous were apprehended from 2000 to 2002. An exemption was allowed for individuals who could provide proof of no "inappropriate aggression" on a test reproducing 36 situations: loud noise, cyclist, opening an umbrella, a barking dog, person approaching with a stick or bat, etc.

This allowed researchers to analyze the maximum level of aggression displayed by the breeds studied. In a complementary study, they analyzed the levels of golden retrievers, thanks to the participation of their owners. The two studies were published in 2008 in the same issue of the *Journal of Veterinary Behaviour*.

The gulf between pit bull-type dogs and golden retrievers was amply demonstrated. Approximately 13% of the 224 pit bulls tested went as far as to bite, against just one of the goldens tested, for 1.4%.

The pit bulls also demonstrated a greater tendency to bite than other dogs considered dangerous, namely Bull Terriers and even Rottweilers (see table).

TWO CATEGORIES

Researchers explained that the dogs who bit divided up about equally between two categories. In one, 5% of all the dogs—including the one aggressive golden—had bitten in situations judged “inappropriate”. In the other, 4% of all the dogs had bitten in a threatening situation.

The authors imparted no more precise data on the performance of pit bulls specifically, in spite of several requests (which also sought clarification of an apparent numerical error, still unexplained).

In their view, what’s most important is to consider the context of bites and not to worry about whether they would be considered appropriate. They conclude that if only 5% of dogs considered dangerous reacted in an inappropriate way, targeting them isn’t justified.

That would be unfair to the great majority of owners of dogs who cause fear, but which would never attack.

TOO POWERFUL

“When the consequences are so serious, the small number doesn’t matter. A company like GM recalls 1.37 million vehicles because a defective ignition killed 13 people in 10 years. But, dog attacks have killed twice as many people every year,” countered public safety expert Alan Beck, who teaches at the University of Purdue, in his court testimony in favor of the Ontario ban.

In his view, the strength and tenacity of pit bulls makes their risk unmanageable. It’s not enough to keep them on a leash or in a fenced yard, he says, given that even the ASPCA has written that these dogs “will chew on stainless steel bowls, destroy copper pipes and conventional cages, and attack other animals through wire mesh fencing.”

In Montréal a few years ago, a woman who rescued abandoned animals and complained of being “harassed by the dogcatcher” was unable to control a 3-year old pit bull she wanted to rehome with a new family. “Suddenly, Tyson launched himself at a border collie being walked on-leash by a neighbor. Very quickly, he had the dog by the throat. Madame is a very small woman and she was literally dragged by Tyson”, summarized the judge charged with deciding whether the city could order euthanasia at that point.

Notable fact: The decision gave the detail that the Montréal woman initially tried to convince the dog’s original family to keep the dog, attempting to “reason” with the wife “who was pregnant and didn’t want a pit bull in the home, out of concern for the baby.”

THE STORY OF ALEXANDRIA GRIFFIN-HEADY

In California, the young Alexandria Griffin-Heady left her 9-year old brother sleeping with her three pit bulls—who the boy adored—while she went to work for several hours. When she returned he was dead.

Not long before, she had posted online the above video, in which the three animals lick her relentlessly. Pit bull advocates often say the dogs “will lick you to death.” Attacks by pit bulls in shelters or recently adopted, are the subject of news headlines with increasing frequency in the past few years.

Related video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwIeMe5qMRM>