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Pit bulls: Dogs or monsters?

Posted by [Deb Wood](#), special to [The Oregonian](#) November 25, 2008 08:30AM

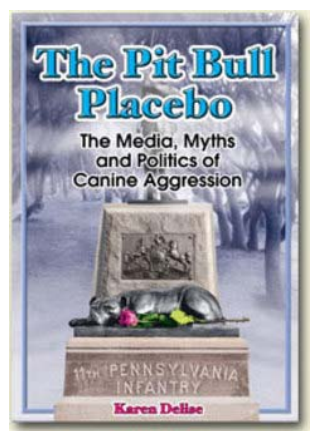
There was another report of a [pit bull attack](#) last night. That's in addition to the [Happy Valley dog](#) that bit a girl and her father last week.

I am hesitant to write about this. After all, I've written about pit bulls before. I felt I wrote all I had to say in a big piece I wrote in August of 2007. However, a lot of people have asked me to speak up -- again.

So here it is: Pit bulls are dogs. Yes, that's the news. They are dogs.

There's an extremely interesting book called [The Pit Bull Placebo](#) that explores how these dogs became such a bone of contention in the eye of the public.

Author Karen Delise points out there have always been "monster dogs" that scared the public. A hundred years ago it was bloodhounds. When I was a kid it was Doberman pinschers. Then it was Rottweilers. Now, it's pit bulls.



The [Pit Bull Placebo](#) makes thought-provoking reading. The cover photo shows a monument to a hero pit bull.



[Penelope](#), a pretty, well-socialized, pit bull puppy, is waiting for a good home through [Multnomah County Animal Services](#)

Delise points out a weird phenomenon: Every time someone writes about a "monster dog" -- the breed becomes **more popular**. No kidding. I'm willing to bet most of us don't want to live next door to the person who buys a dog with the hope it will be vicious.

Then there's the issue of which dog bites get reported, and which get the press. One woman who has two adopted pit bulls wrote to me this week, pointing out a friend's golden retriever had bitten a child who put his face in the dog's face. No one reported anything. When an identical incident happened with a pit bull, the authorities were called. That makes it look like pit bulls bite kids -- when the truth is that some dogs will bite kids in some circumstances.

When it actually is reported that a golden retriever (or a collie or a Labrador) bites a child, the headline is

never, GOLDEN RETRIEVER BITES BOY. When a pit bull bites a child, the dog's breed is always in the headline.

Often, people say that pit bulls are bred to be vicious. Weirdly, their awful background does the opposite, at least as far as people are concerned. At dog fights, the ritual is to have the owners hold the opponents' dogs. These dogs are bred to not bite people.

There can be a higher level of dog-on-dog aggression among some pit bulls because of that breeding -- and it's important to watch that on a case-by-case basis. (I have to say that the only dog that ever tried to kill one of my dogs was a Labrador retriever -- not a pit bull. That's why breed generalizations don't mean much to me.)

There is a myths that pit bull jaws have supernatural strength. Not true. Pit bulls are often powerful dogs with powerful jaws -- and so are Alaskan malamutes, mastiffs, Saint Bernards, and a host of other breeds. Pit bulls don't have a genetic difference from other dogs with powerful jaws.

Every time I say something as radical as "pit bulls are dogs," some people assume I

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own pit bulls or even breed them. Nothing could be further from the truth. I own three tiny papillon dogs. I just believe in fairness.

What keeps us safe with dogs is socializing animals, teaching children (and adults) to behave appropriately around dogs, watching each animal carefully, and reporting with and dealing with animals that behave aggressively.

Oregon law does have substantial penalties for people who have vicious dogs. The law doesn't discriminate on the basis of breed. That is as it should be.

After all, pit bulls are dogs.

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COMMENTS (14)

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Posted by **DogOwner** on [11/25/08 at 10:21AM](#)

Excellent Article and so true
My Labrador was attacked by a Labrador. this summer.
Nobody cared except my Lab and me.

My neighbor`s Sled dogs just ripped a cat apart recently.
No one cared.

Common thread to those 2 incidents.
Irresponsible owners who allowed those dogs above to be loose and be a problem.

Are all Labs vicious?
Are all Sled dogs vicious?

Why didn`t the Media care?
Lab and Sled dog doesn`t sell.
'Pit Bull' does.
It brings in the comments by the thousands.
That`s what it`s all about people.

'Pit Bull' is the dog de jour and unfortunately there are a lot of dogs that look like the 3 Breeds normally targeted by BSL so anytime anyone sees a dog that has a certain look they yell 'pit bull' whether it is or not.

Most people couldn`t identify an APBT if their life depended on it as evidenced by these outrageous reports.

<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/media1.asp>

Most people would call all these dogs 'Pit Bulls'
There is only 1 APBT in this test below
http://www.understand-a-bull.com/Findthebull/findpitbull_v4.swf

The Media has become like the little boy who cried wolf.
After a time you stop listening and taking him seriously.

If there is a serious attack and the dog is identified by real Experts and/or in Court proceedings as a Pit Bull then it`s a 'Pit Bull'

Most of the Media reports are absolute nonsense and they do a grave injustice to people who are actually injured by ANY dog of ANY Breed/type.

This is why BSL is nonsense.

Irresponsible owners own ALL sorts of dogs as evidenced by the Labrador who attacked my dog.
If you ban 'Pit Bulls' they get Labs.
If you ban Labs they get Dobes.....

Owners must be targeted NOT dogs.

Let`s all think for ourselves.
The Media has made a decision to attack these dogs.
Next year they may decide to attack German Shepherds.

I also recommend that people read Pit Bull Placebo

The first official Breed Ban anywhere was against German Shepherds in Australia from 1939-1974
They used to be the evil "demon" dogs!

From Pit Bull Placebo

"Australia has banned the German Police Dog and has ordered all in the

Country to be sterilized,due to the fact that this dog is not a Shepherd dog,but a killer.
The Police dog is little less than a wolf"

Sound familiar?
The Media needs to back off.

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Posted by **markle** on [11/25/08 at 11:09AM](#)

i agree, they are just dogs.

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Posted by **taobowwow** on [11/25/08 at 11:41AM](#)

Just a little clarification for people following the comment thread:

BSL stands for "Breed Specific Legislation" which may ban a specific breed or breeds.

APBT is short for "American Pit Bull Terrier."

Deb Wood

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Posted by **CeasarsMom** on [11/25/08 at 11:59AM](#)

Pardon the pun, but BULLY for you!!! Love the article. There is not nearly enough positive press regarding the good Pit Bulls. You don't hear much about the Pit Bull that is a service dog for hospital bound cancer patients, or the one that prevented a criminal from harming it's family.

Keep up the good work! We, as bully advocates, appreciate it!

Liz
Mom to Ceasar: a 5 yr old rescued ABPT

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Posted by **KilosMom** on [11/25/08 at 1:06PM](#)

Thank you Deb Wood.

It is unfortunate that the media classes any dog that looks a certain way as a 'pit bull.' If the people reading these sensatinalized stories knew a whit about breeds, maybe more logical heads would prevail.

I find in very interesting that in many cases, what is intially reported as a 'pit' in the 'attack' article is subsequently found to be another breed, only the reporting agency does not seem to come back and clarify, so the reader is left with inaccurate info in which to form an even more inaccurate opinion on.

I have to say, though, that veterinarian's should get on the bandwagon and stop labeling dogs as a 'pit mix.' When I brought my Kilo into the vet I was very adamant that he not be listed as a 'pit mix' as the term 'pit bull' is inaccurate, and I did not want him licensed in that manner. I would have thought they, of anyone, would not continue this stereotype.

The term 'pit bull' is no longer accurate, and that should be banned, not the breed.

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Posted by **14freelove** on [11/25/08 at 1:35PM](#)

"dogs or monsters" is a classic straw man argument. it's easy to show that all canines are, in fact, dogs. "monster" requires an organism

unknown to conventional science, e.g., godzilla, or the presence of evil, and only humans can be evil.

the best lawful ways to curb dangerous dogs are legislation and the refusal on the part of insurance companies to insure homes with pit bulls. i support the progressive, safety-oriented, right-thinking insurance companies which refuse to issue such coverage. when your pit bull mauls a child, you will have to face plaintiff's counsel all by yourself. your wages will be garnished, your property will be levied upon and you will be financially broken, all because your desire to own a dangerous dog trumped your solicitude for the safety of children in your neighborhood.

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Posted by **Laetitia** on [11/25/08 at 1:35PM](#)

Thank You so much for writing what a lot of us Staffordshire Terrier (I prefer this term, as our dogs will never see a fighting pit) owners already know. I have one bully mix and one pure bully and they are the most slobbering love bugs ever. Both are adopted, one at 8 month the other at 9 weeks. They are both neutered/spayed and chipped; although I never let them out of my sight for their safety. They are now 4 and 1 1/2 years old and even love our cats; well, actually they are a little afraid of them because one of my cats keeps trying to bite the 4 year old in the butt whenever he walks by.

We also spoke with the animal control officer in our town regarding our dogs since we are concerned about a breed ban.

He assured us that only dogs that have proven to be vicious will be removed from the owners and breed has nothing to do with it.

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Posted by **xIntzee56** on [11/25/08 at 1:44PM](#)

Good article. And I must say, I didn't notice a lot of uproar over the lab that "shot" his owner this week.

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Posted by **petstalk** on [11/25/08 at 1:45PM](#)

I agree that the vilification of pit bulls needs to stop. It's silly, especially when there are a lot of aggressive dogs of all breeds out there.

Having said that, the level of dog-dog and/or dog-people violence seems out of hand.

It's not right to have a society where dogs attack people (or vice versa). What are ways that we can get rid of the violence we have now, regardless of what breed does it?

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Posted by **joshuajeju123** on [11/25/08 at 1:50PM](#)

I will definitely agree with you on that they are dogs. very simple but let me tell you what it feels like to be eleven years old and be attacked by a pitbull while at the park awaiting to enjoy an ice cream. It was the worse day of my life I was supposed to be eating an ice cream, instead I had a pitbull eating my leg. It took a 5 inch piece of meat out of my leg and I have to carry a scars for the rest of my life. Don't get me wrong I still love animals but pitbulls are a mistake because they are a mixed of breeds or I should call it a human mistake. They underestimated they creation and they got this beautiful beast out of it. Now I see a dog on the street and all I want to do is run to the other side of the street and you are telling me that I should live my life like this, pitbulls are not family dogs and be careful with them since they tend to loose their memory and can end up attacking their owners. Now do yourself a favor and get a suit that can protect you from the bites and let a pitbull attack you. That could give you an idea of what an eleven year old boy felt as a piece of his let was being ripped off . good luck.

they should be preserved by government officials not at home.

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Posted by **DogOwner** on [11/25/08 at 2:15PM](#)

Here is a perfect example of the Media initially reporting an attack as a 'Pit Bull' attack.

<http://www.wpxi.com/news/16983248/detail.html>

This is one of the very few which was retracted but you`ll notice it`s not in the headline.

[quote]Investigators said an American bulldog, not a pit bull as originally believed, mauled Rocco Doman Saturday.[/quote]

This case was widely reported around the World.

The retraction was not!

Here`s another one courtesy of NCRC

<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/media1.asp>

[quote]Everything is a Pit bull, whether it is or not: Again

On June 4, 2008, at least 29 news articles were run on a story about a Los Angeles boy "mauled by a Pit bull." Some of the headlines were:

*

"LA toddler hospitalized after being mauled by Pit bulls" - Fresno Bee

*

"2-year-old stable after pit bull bites his face" - LA Times

The Mercury News even reported that two Pit bulls attacked the child. Another article described the dog as the "family Pit bull." The Los Angeles Times reported the boy in "critical condition after he was bitten by a pit bull."

Perhaps the media should not bear the brunt for this serious error, as the source of the breed mis-identification was found to have originated from the Los Angeles Police Department.

The LAPD should not attempt to identify breeds of dogs or comment on canine behavior. The average police officer is no more skilled in breed identification than is the average reporter. Perhaps in the realization of this, the LAPD later referred all inquiries on the dog involved in this incident to the city's animal services department.

The Los Angeles Department of Animal Services released a statement declaring the dog involved in the attack on the boy was "in fact a shepherd mix."

Note: Acknowledgement is given to the Los Angeles Times for printing a "For the Record" remark on the erroneous breed identification of the dog in this incident. On June 7th the LA Times printed the following: "An article in Thursday's California section about a boy attacked by his family's dog quoted authorities as saying the dog was a pit bull. The Los Angeles Department of Animal Services said Friday that the animal that bit the toddler was a shepherd mix."

However, this small retraction cannot possibly undo the damage that was done by the media. All the headlines run by the LA Times which initially identified this dog to be a Pit bull have not been pulled and can still be found in the LA Times archives.

*****Additionally, more than one attorney website and dog bite "advocacy" website has picked up this "Pit bull attack" story and posted it on their website as additional "evidence" of the nature of Pit bulls. [/quote]*****

The Media cannot be believed when it comes to 'Pit Bulls' They are not in a position to accurately identify dogs,nor do they wish to accurately identify dogs because they want that 'Pit Bull' headline.

And the damage done by the Media cannot be undone by a simple retraction even if it`s issued.

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Posted by **Laetitia** on [11/25/08 at 2:36PM](#)

The owner of a kennel where I occasionally board my bullies was seriously attacked by an Akita. During the attack the Akita did severe

damage to her arms while trying to get her down onto the ground. She told me she was sure that if she had not gotten out of the enclosure (difficult with two badly injured arms) and had the Akita succeeded in getting her down she would have been killed. She later found out that the dog had been abused by its owners.

Nowhere did this near deadly attack by an Akita make national news. Had this been a bullie everybody would have been screaming to get rid of the breed.

She still operates the kennel and I still take my bullies there.

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Posted by **KilosMom** on [11/25/08 at 3:01PM](#)

To joshuaeju123: It is unfotunate that you were bitten by a dog and I am sorry that happened to you. However, it would be more accurate to blame the owner for not having the animal leashed than the dog. In addition, I would make very sure that the dog you are laying blame to was one of the following: American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, or Staffordshire Bull Terrier; otherwise the slang 'pit bull' does not apply. Finally, there are many other dog breeds incorrectly classified as 'pits.' These are: Perro de Presa Canario, Cane Corso, Dogo Argentino, Alano Espanol, Japanese Tosa, Dogue de Bordeaux, Cordoba Fighting Dog, Alapaha Blue Blood Bulldog, American Bulldog, Boxer, Valley Bulldog, Olde English Bulldog, Renascence Bulldog, and Banter Bulldog. I am a proud owner of an Alano Espanol and am very frustrated in having to defend my dog from people that do not know the difference. I would suggest learning all you can about dogs and breeds, so that maybe you can be less fearful.

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Posted by **DogOwner** on [11/25/08 at 3:22PM](#)

[quote]Having said that, the level of dog-dog and/or dog-people violence seems out of hand. [/quote]

"Seems" is key

An "Epidemic" of Dog Bites?

<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/historicCases.asp>

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