

Anonymous Student
 Professor Riseley
 Writing 121
 November 14, 2011

Pit Bulls: Both Sides of the Fence

The crazed conversation surrounding Pit Bull bans is one that almost always starts with a reference to a toddler who has had her face torn off by a pit bull (Watts), or it begins with a reference to yet another of these fearsome pets who had to be gunned down in the street by local police (Bulwa). For people who are sympathetic to victims of these pit bull attacks, pit bull bans seem like one of the biggest “no-brainers” in the history of mankind. Pit bull bans make it against the law to own a pit bull within the city limits, and there are literally hundreds of cities across the U.S. and Canada where pit bull bans exist (“Punish the Deed”). For a crash course in one side of this conversation, a simple three word long key-word search at Youtube.com will help get you up to speed with the attack-victim side. Search *pit bull attack* at Youtube.com and you will be shown literally over 22,000 videos that have something to do with pit bull attacks. Some people might believe that that’s the end of the story, but that’s only the beginning of a very long conversation between advocates for victims and the people who love these wonderful but often misunderstood and frequently mistreated canines.

Malcolm Gladwell’s lengthy and thorough 2006 New Yorker essay entitled simply “Troublemakers” attempts to offer a logical perspective on the controversy surrounding pit bulls. He begins his essay by sharing about Jayden Clairoux, a two-and-a-half year-old who was attacked by three pit bulls in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Jayden survived the attack, but it was so brutal that three people needed to be taken to the hospital. Gladwell mentions that as a result of this attack, “Five days later, the Ontario legislature banned the ownership of pit bulls.” The theme running through Gladwell’s essay has to do with “what pit bulls can teach us about profiling,” or generalizing about an entire group of people based on the actions of a tiny minority of that group. His point in much of the essay has to do with the fact that it is only a very small minority of pit bulls that actually ever attack people. He devotes later paragraphs in the essay to reminding readers that pit bulls are not the only dangerous dogs on the planet:

Meanwhile, Dobermans and Great Danes and German shepherds and Rottweilers are frequent biters as well, and the dog that recently mauled a French woman so

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 2:10 PM

Comment [1]: INTRODUCTION offers readers a clear sense of what this conversation focuses on and gives readers some idea of who the participants in this conversation are and why they care.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 1:57 PM

Comment [2]: I like that there is an adjective describing the conversation, but is “crazed” too charged a word? Should a more neutral word be chosen?

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 2:01 PM

Comment [3]: <http://news.sky.com/home/world-news/article/15669946>

This is a good source, but are you misrepresenting the content? Yes, a toddler was killed by five pit bulls, but this version of the article that I found using your Works Cited entry does not mention his face being torn off. I think it is a safe bet it was. I notice the date on the article differs from your date in the Works Cited. It’s possible you found another version? Either way, the citation works well for our purposes.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 2:58 PM

Comment [4]: Define the terms related to the conversation you are looking at. You will need to cite the source of your definition.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 2:59 PM

Comment [5]: Try to conclude your introduction with a thesis statement that invites readers into the conversation by reminding them again about what’s at stake in this conversation and who the participants are.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:03 PM

Comment [6]: Anchor article is summarized in such a way that readers get a clear sense of the conversation.

badly that she was given the world's first face transplant was, of all things, a Labrador retriever.

His point throughout much of the essay is to remind people who are in favor of pit bull bans that “stereotypes are usually not considered desirable dimensions of our decision-making lives.” Gladwell encourages his readers to think logically about how silly generalizing and stereotyping pit bulls is when he reminds us that pit bulls are not all exactly the same breed.

The name refers to dogs belonging to a number of related breeds, such as the American Staffordshire terrier, the Staffordshire bull terrier, and the American pit bull terrier—all of which share a square and muscular body, a short snout, and a sleek, short-haired coat.

After reminding us that we should not stereotype pit bulls because there really isn't simply one kind of pit bull, Gladwell then mentions a “standardized drill” that has tested thousands of pit bulls to learn about how docile or aggressive they can be. He writes that “Eighty-four per cent of the pit bulls that have been given the test have passed.” Gladwell concludes his long essay for the *New Yorker* by mentioning that there are many other “dangerous breeds” of dogs out there, like the Doberman, Rottweiler, and the Chow. He then mentions that most attacks are specific to the situation and involve variables like bad training, that the dog might be hungry, and he even goes so far as to mention that little Jayden called to the pit bulls that leaped over fence to attack him by saying, “Puppies, puppies.” Gladwell leaves readers with the sense that it is not so much pit bulls that are at fault for the hundreds of people they have killed, but it is bad owners of pit bulls who train them to be aggressive or neglect and brutalize them.

So at the end of the day, Gladwell comes down as a voice completely opposed to pit bull bans.

Voices a little closer to the middle of this conversation belong to the trained professionals whose job it is to make parks safe and accessible for all kinds of people, including dog lovers of every stripe. Clare Leschin-Hoar, who wrote the essay “Showing Their Teeth” for the journal called *Parks & Recreation*, found that even the managers of parks are also struggling with this difficult topic. Her article points out that park managers have a responsibility to keep all people in parks, especially dog friendly parks, safe. One solution that park managers have discovered instead of banning pit bulls is to segregate different types of dogs into different areas of the park so that parents with small children can easily avoid areas where pit bulls and other dangerous

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:04 PM

Comment [7]: Key supporting points of your main source are highlighted.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:05 PM

Comment [8]: Block quotes should be used for longer quotes that will fill four lines of text when they are indented.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:06 PM

Comment [9]: Frequent use of clear signal phrases help readers know which writer or expert is being quoted or paraphrased.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:07 PM

Comment [10]: Some signal phrases can also be used as transitional phrases allowing the summary paragraphs to flow more smoothly.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:18 PM

Comment [11]: You might show your expertise with the conversation by inserting your own evaluation about the sources. Understanding bias is important.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:20 PM

Comment [12]: This writer is organizing her paper by discussing the CON side first, then the MIDDLE side, and then the PRO side of the conversation.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:53 PM

Comment [13]: The MLA chapter of our handbook asks us to place the titles of “small things” within quotation marks. Articles, poems, and news stories are small things.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:46 PM

Comment [14]: A second article can be thoughtfully summarized.

breeds might be encountered. Leschin-Hoar quotes William Zardus, who is a dog expert and editor of the online *Dog Park National News*, "When there's a death at a dogpark, it's almost always a large dog killing a small dog. This design with three enclosures gives people a way to settle disputes. It doesn't matter what the breed is, there are going to be disputes at dog parks." Zardus is in favor of this solution that allows people who are comfortable with pit bulls to be near them if they choose to be, but it also allows people who are uncomfortable with the breed the ability to avoid being near it. Leschin-Hoar also quotes Adam Goldfarb, who works for the Humane Society and is an expert on dangerous breeds, "There are a number of factors that contribute to a dog's temperament, and breed is one, but there are so many others that are important." Goldfarb's point is that breed alone does not necessarily mean that a particular dog will become aggressive and kill a child. The final voice in the article "Showing Their Teeth" comes from Kansas City Dog Advocates legislative chair Brent Toellner, who believes that the segregated areas of dog parks are serving a higher purpose than just allowing people an option to avoid pit bulls, "Being able to create a lot of socialized dogs is ideal, but banning any breed from the dog park means they're not as socialized as they should be, which is simply extending the problem." Toellner's point here is that pit bull owners need to be provided a safe place to allow their dogs to become accustomed to meeting other people and dogs so that they can become friendly members of the community.

We've heard the voices of experts who are strongly opposed to pit bull bans, and the voices of people who, while still opposed to pit bull bans, are willing to at least segregate pit bulls from other smaller dogs and small people, but we haven't yet heard the voices of people who are in favor of pit bull bans. It should be no surprise to anyone that the biggest supporters of pit bull bans are the hundreds of people who have been attacked by pit bulls or had a loved one killed by a pit bull ("Pit bull attacks"). Their stories are scattered across the Internet in news story after news story ("Young girl"). There are a number of pro-pit-bull ban websites that collect the stories of victims and gather them in a single place. Perhaps the most well known of these kinds of websites is Dogsbite.org. Is this a reliable source? Yes and no. It is reliable because it does cite actual information that really can be verified in mainstream news sites and in government documents. But, while very professional looking and well researched, the site is the product of a Texas native Colleen Lynn who was herself the victim of a brutal pit bull attack. For this reason the site is very biased. The fact that the site presents an obvious bias does not

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:50 PM

Comment [15]: This is how to cite an expert who is quoted within an article.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:51 PM

Comment [16]: The MLA chapter of our handbook asks us to place titles of "big things" like Newspapers, Magazines, Books, and Feature Motion Pictures in italics.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:56 PM

Comment [17]: Remember to always include information about why readers should believe an expert.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 3:57 PM

Comment [18]: You are welcome to help your readers understand a quote by explaining it for them in your own words.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 8:42 PM

Comment [19]: This transition reminds readers of the structure of the paper and guides readers into the third section. Remember, the structure of this paper was anti, neutral, and then pro. Your informative paper may only include anti and pro voices.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 8:46 PM

Comment [20]: This citation references one such story but does not actually mention the many other stories scattered across the Internet.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 8:53 PM

Comment [21]: This paper invites you to share you expertise on the topic by showcasing your understanding of which sources are reliable and which sources are questionable.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 8:56 PM

Comment [22]: It is appropriate to express a judgment about the validity of a source but you should not share an opinion about the topic if the conversation.

mean that the sources she sites for her information are factually incorrect or unreliable, but the information is presented in an obviously emotionally manipulative manner that attempts to move viewers to feeling sympathy for the disfigured victims of pit bull attacks.

Dogsbite.org's opening page features links to stories about the brutal pit bull attacks that killed or mauled the following children: Justin Clinton, age 10, Natylee Murphy, age 3, Kyle Holland, age 5, Shaylee Crosson, age 3, Daniel Decembre, age 8. The researchers at Dogsbite.org have documented eighty-eight fatal dog attacks in the United States between January 2006 and December 2009. They describe the methodology of their research and include links to mainstream news websites and mainstream news videos to show that the research is accurate. Pit bull type dogs were responsible for 59% of these deaths.

Malcolm Gladwell's article against pit bull bans contains some of the same information that can be found at Dogsbite.org. Both lovers and haters of pit bull bans agree that pit bulls fall into several different categories and so are hard to generalize about. Both articles agree that there are several different types of breeds of dog that kill people. Both articles agree that pit bull type dogs are responsible for over half of the fatal dog attacks that happen. Dogsbite.org differs from the Gladwell article in where the blame lies for the hundreds and hundreds of killings and attacks against humans that pit bulls are responsible for. Gladwell wants to place the blame for these deaths on the owners of pit bulls who have trained pit bulls to make them aggressive and out of control. Dogsbite.org shows the pictures of the bloody faces and limbs that were torn to shreds by the sharp teeth of out of control pit bulls and places the blame on the pit bulls themselves. The Gladwell article actually seems to imply that two-and-a-half-year-old Jayden Clairoux was partly responsible for enticing the pit bulls to attack him by calling through the fence "puppies, puppies."

Much of the conversation surrounding pit bull bans centers on where the blame for these attacks should be placed. A site against bit bull bans offers up this analogy: "Banning Pit Bulls would be like banning cars because people get killed in car accidents!" ("Pet Pit Bull"). That's some interesting reasoning, but it is not reasoning that the United States Army agreed with because in 2009, the United States Military banned pit bulls, and all dangerous dog breeds, from their base housing areas (Riddle). There are also 713 U.S. cities that do not agree with that reasoning because that's how many cities have laws to protect people from dangerous dog breeds, most of them focusing against pit bulls ("Estimated U.S. Cities").

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Comment [23]: This is a pretty expert move. I searched for the place on the website where they discuss how they did the research. She is correct but her Works Cited reference could be more specific here. It took me a few clicks to find this, but it was there.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 9:06 PM

Comment [24]: Showing where the two most opposing sources agree is an interesting and effective way to inform the audience about this conversation.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 9:09 PM

Comment [25]: It's nice to help readers by summarizing a central aspect of the conversation that is easy to understand.

This contentious problem is far from resolved. Proof of that could be found by simply visiting the Google News Site and typing in the words *pit bull attack*. This paper was written in November 2011 and that search brought back stories that had happened on the day the paper was finished being written. Long after I have forgotten even having had this class, stories about pit bull attacks will still be found with a Google News search. Try it on whatever day you read this. But you might also try searching *pit bull ban*. Because as long as pit bulls are biting people, people are also going to be trying to limit a person's freedom to own a pit bull. This is a difficult conversation that does not seem to have a convenient solution for the foreseeable future.

Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 9:24 PM

Comment [26]: This is a pretty standard way of writing a conclusion for our informative paper. It's very likely that the conversation you have investigated started before you arrived and it will continue after you leave. A strong conclusion will remind readers that both sides still do not agree on central aspects of the question and might make a guess that the conversation is likely to continue until some kind of agreement can be reached.

Works Cited

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Unknown Author 2 6, 2012 9:27 PM

Comment [27]: This paper is just a little longer than four pages and yet still manages to integrate ideas from ten sources.

This paper uses the Gladwell's "Troublemakers" as an anchor. The writer offers an in depth summary of the entire article.

The author also offers a very nice and near complete summary of Leschin-Hoar's "Showing Their Teeth."

The author of this paper obviously has chosen a topic that she is not only interested in, but curious about. It is successful because the author has summarized a polarizing conversation, offering numerous perspectives, and remains quite neutral to the very end.