



AMERICAN HUMANE

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Pit Bull Myths vs. Facts

1. **MYTH: Pit bulls bite more than any other breed.**

FACT: There is no system in place to track statistics on dog bites and attacks accurately in the U.S., and many incidents are never reported.

The Centers for Disease Control study “Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998” explains the inherent problems in attempting to calculate breed involvement in fatal attacks.¹ The CDC further explained that a major flaw in the study was the inability to factor in total breed populations relative to breed-related fatalities. The CDC concluded that fatal attacks are so rare as to be statistically insignificant in addressing canine aggression.



Pit Bulls Patch and Minnie

2. **MYTH: Pit bulls attack without warning or provocation.**

FACT: According to Karen Delise in *The Pit Bull Placebo*, the classification of an attack as unprovoked is usually based on the declarations of owners who are unable to understand canine behavior, or are too busy to have seen the signals dogs usually display through body language or vocalization. Dogs do this with stares; body stiffening; positioning of ears, tail and head; and growling, to name only a few. Pit bulls give these signals as much as any other breed of dog.²

Additionally, dog attacks tend to be a result of several factors that are statistically more dangerous than a simple breakdown of breed culpability. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, these factors are:

- Breeding: Dogs that are bred to be aggressive will be aggressive regardless of the breed.
- Socialization: Puppies need socialization to learn how to live in human society.
- Training: Beyond socialization, puppies need training so they will at least obey basic commands.
- Health: Some dogs bite because they are uncomfortable or in pain.³
- Spayed or Neutered: 97 percent of dogs involved in fatal dog attacks in 2006 were not sterilized.⁴
- Tethering: One out of every four fatal dog attacks involves a chained dog.⁵

¹ CDC. (2000) Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998.

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/dogbreeds.pdf>.

² Delise, K. (2007). *The Pit Bull Placebo: The Media, Myths and Politics of Canine Aggression*. Anubis Publishing.

³ See generally, The American Veterinary Association, Dog Bite Prevention: A Community Approach. JAVMA, Vol. 218, No. 11, June 1, 2001. http://www.avma.org/public_health/dogbite/dogbite.pdf.

⁴ ASPCA, Are Breed Specific Laws Effective? http://www.asPCA.org/site/PageServer?pagename=cruelty_dogfighting_breedspecific.

⁵ See supra, note 3.

3. **MYTH: Pit bulls have locking jaws.**

FACT: There is no factual research to support this claim. Pit bulls' jaws are the same as any other breed of dog.

There are statements by experts that refute the locking myth, such as:

- Dr. I. Lehr Brisbin of the University of Georgia conducted research on the functional morphology of the jaws of various breeds and showed that:
“...there were no mechanical or morphological differences between the jaws of American Pit Bull Terriers and those of any of the other comparable breeds of dogs which we studied. In addition, we found that the American Pit Bull Terriers did not have any unique mechanism that would allow these dogs to lock their jaws.”⁶
- Dr. Howard Evans (professor emeritus, College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., and author of the world's definitive work on canine anatomy [*Anatomy of the Dog*]), in conjunction with Dr. Sandy deLahunta, one of the foremost dog neurologists in the country, along with Dr. Katherine Houpt, a leading dog behaviorist, wrote the following statement about the supposed “locking jaw” in pit bulls:
“We all agree that the power of the bite is proportional to the size of the jaws and the jaw muscles. There is no anatomical structure that could be a locking mechanism in any dog.”⁷

4. **MYTH: Pit bulls have more bite force in pounds per square inch than any other animal.**

FACT: Again, there is no factual research to support this claim. However, there is research that refutes this myth.

Dr. Brady Barr of *National Geographic* conducted a study on animal bites. The force of bite (in pounds of bite pressure) in the test subjects were:

- Crocodiles: 2,500 lbs.
- Hyenas: 1,000 lbs.
- Snapping turtles: 1,000 lbs.
- Lions: 600 lbs.
- White sharks: 600 lbs.
- Domestic dogs: 320 lbs. (on average*)
- Humans: 120 lbs.

* A German shepherd dog, American pit bull terrier and Rottweiler were tested using a bite sleeve equipped with a specialized computer instrument. The American pit bull terrier had the *least* amount of pressure of the three dogs tested.⁸

5. **MYTH: Pit bulls have worse temperaments than other dogs.**

FACT: In a recent study of 122 dog breeds by the American Temperament Testing Society, pit bulls had a passing rate of 83.9%. That was better than miniature poodles (76.6%), beagles (80.3%) and collies (79.4%).⁹

6. **MYTH: Pit bulls do not feel pain.**

FACT: While most dogs do not respond to pain while in the frenzied state of a severe attack, pit bulls feel pain just like other breeds do.¹⁰

Pit bulls have the same nervous system as any other breed, and they do feel pain. Historically, dogs that would tolerate or ignore discomfort and pain and finish the task they were required to perform were the dogs that were bred and the type of dogs breeders strove to produce. This is the trait of “gameness” that so many breed fanciers speak of, which may be defined as “The desire to continue on and/or complete a task despite pain and discomfort.”¹¹

⁶ Ontario Superior Court of Justice Affidavit of Dr. I. Lehr Brisbin, Jr., senior research scientist, University of Georgia.

⁷ See supra, note 2.

⁸ Dr. Brady Barr. *National Geographic*. “Dangerous Encounters: Bite Force.” August 18, 2005.

⁹ American Temperament Testing Society. Retrieved January 8, 2009. <http://www.atts.org/statistics.html>.

¹⁰ See supra, note 2.

¹¹ New Hope Pit Bull Rescue. http://www.nhpbr.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=32.