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Introduction:
As an owner of seven Staffordshire Bull Terrier crosses and an employee and volunteer of Thanet Animal Group, in which I manage the dog rehoming section, I have encountered a lot of stories about Breed Specific Legislation, the Dangerous Dogs Act and the seizure and destruction of dogs. In light of recent media hype about dangerous dogs and the tragic dog attack which led to the death of 14 year old Jade Anderson in March 2013, I decided to undertake a study of the public’s own thoughts and opinions on the effectiveness of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (DDA).

My research questions were as follows:
1. What have been the impacts of the DDA?
2. Has the DDA been effective in preventing dangerous dogs from being bred?

In this paper I shall address the current literature surrounding the DDA and its effectiveness. I shall then go on to explain the methodology of my own piece of research, my findings and results, discuss them and finally conclude with what I have found about the DDA and its impact, if any, and effectiveness.

Literature Review:
To date only limited research has been conducted regarding the efficacy of the use of Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) within the DDA. In one Kennel Club review on the DDA the review group wrote, ‘...it has not prevented a large number of dog attacks or reduced the number of Pit Bull Terrier type dogs in the UK. Statistics on dog attacks have not reduced since this Act was introduced and in fact, the number of hospitalisations is reported as having doubled.’¹ Dangerous dogs are probably an issue we will always have to tackle, but what is suggested by many is that there are better ways to minimise the risks and the amount of dangerous dogs.

In a study back in 1996, by Klaassen et al., on mammalian bites in an A&E Hospital department; they found that the DDA had made no difference on the attendance rates for dog bites. Dogs accounted for 74% of bites and over half were bitten by their own dogs or ones well known to them. Before the DDA, 24% of bites were caused by German Shepherds, 18% by crossbreeds, and 6% by Pit Bulls, Rottweilers and Dobermanns combined. Three years after the Act, 31% of bites were caused by crossbreeds, 17% by German Shepherds, and 11% by Pit Bulls, Rottweilers and Dobermanns combined. They concluded that the DDA, ‘...does little to protect the public from mammalian bites...The Act has singled out certain ‘dangerous’ breeds without, it would seem, any substantive data to support it.’² Having identified the unjust discrimination against alleged ‘inherently dangerous’ breeds, they suggest that in order to prevent injury from dog bites, there should be wider control on the

¹ ‘Objective for Future ‘Dangerous Dogs’ Legislation By the Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group’ for the Kennel Club. DDASG includes representation from: Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Blue Cross, British Veterinary Association, Dogs Trust, the Kennel Club, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Wandsworth Borough Council and Wood Green Animal Shelters.
dog population in general, not just specific breeds.\textsuperscript{3} Despite this no changes were made to the DDA and it continues this day to remain just as discriminatory.

In another study by Beach\textsuperscript{4} on dog aggression and its various forms it was concluded that the chances of a dog being predisposed towards behaving aggressively is greatly influenced by the breed composition, sex and reproductive status of that dog. She continues that ‘\textit{whilst there is always room for individual differences, particularly as a result of environmental factors, the average Dobermann, for example, is more likely to behave aggressively than the average Border Collie and an intact male is more likely to behave more aggressively than any other category.’

Watson highlighted that the term Pit Bull has often been used as a generalised description to describe a type of dog. In the United States and the UK the term is usually used to describe the;

- American Pit Bull Terrier,
- American Staffordshire Terrier,
- Bull Terrier,
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier,
- Almost every dog that looks anything like these dogs.

Watson writes, ‘It is also not uncommon for the English Bulldog or the American Bulldog to be included. Another common practice is that any dog that looks even remotely like a Pit Bull is classified as a Pit Bull, Pit Bull type or Pit Bull cross even if another breed of dog is just as evident.’\textsuperscript{5} Watson also talks about new genetic research which has recently concluded that there are no inherent differences in breeds of dogs in determining aggressive tendencies. Aggressive tendencies are innate in all canine species. We cannot simply assume some breeds are all aggressive and some are entirely not.

In a study in America by Twinning et al.\textsuperscript{6} on the stigma attached to Pit-bull owners, interviews were conducted with 28 Pit-bull owners to explore their experiences within society. A vast majority of respondents felt that their dogs were stigmatized because of their breed. Respondents made this conclusion because friends, family, and strangers were apprehensive in the presence of their dogs and because they made accusations about the breed’s viciousness and lack of predictability. ‘In the face of this stigma, respondents resorted to using a variety of interactional strategies to lessen the impact of this perception or prevent it from occurring. These strategies included passing their dogs as breeds other than pit bulls, denying that their behavior is biologically determined, debunking adverse media coverage, using humor, emphasizing counter-stereotypical behavior, avoiding stereotypical equipment or accessories, taking preventive measures, or becoming breed ambassadors.’

In Collier’s\textsuperscript{7} study on whether the laws regarding Pit-bull terriers are justified he founds that, ‘...the primary problem is that reliable data do not (sic) exist for the number of attacks relative to breed population. Of 19 human fatalities in Australia over the past two decades, none has involved a dog verified to be an American pit bull terrier.’ Because Pit-bull terriers are rarer than, say German Shepherds, the statistics seem over-exaggerated. So, in Collier’s

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{4} G. Beach, ‘When Fido Sees Red: Aggressive Behaviour in the Domestic Dog,’ 2012
\bibitem{5} L. Watson, ‘Does breed specific legislation reduce dog aggression on humans and other animals? A review paper,’ 2003
\bibitem{7} S. Collier, ‘Breed-specific legislation and the pit bull terrier: Are the laws justified?’ Journal of Veterinary Behavior (2006) 1, 17-22
\end{thebibliography}
study he found for the German shepherd dogs there were 63 attacks, there were at that time 35,711 of this breed registered, so that meant 0.2% of the breed had attacked. For Pit-bull terriers there had been 33 attacks, 3,244 dogs registered, which meant a much larger 1.0% of the breed had attacked. These statistics over often over-exaggerated to the detriment of no single breed— the Pit-bull.

In a study by Maher et al., comprising of interviews with 25 youths and seven animal welfare and youth practitioners, it was found that over half of the youths belonged to a youth gang and the remainder a youth group, with the majority owning an animal which was most often a ‘status dog’ (e.g. a bull breed of some type). Some of the interviewees freely admitted to having tortured or maimed an animal, chopped of a dog’s tail and beating and stabbing dogs. 11 of the youths reported using their dog as weapon to attack others. The study revealed a huge amount of active dog fighting circles, and a complete lack of fear, by the youths, for any form of punishment for their actions or the cruelty they inflicted.

**Methodology:**

My sample was taken purely from ‘friends’ on Facebook. Some dog rescue sites and dog rescue support groups to posted the link to the questionnaire onto their pages so that anyone on there could fill in the essay, so in some respects it was completely random, and I do not know a vast majority of those who responded. I do fully acknowledge that my respondents were still people who had an interest in dog rescue and who perhaps were more compassionate and knowledgeable on the topic of the DDA, however this enabled me to get meaningful results and opinions as opposed to a lot of ‘I do not know’ answers; which I still received some of irrespective. I sent some private messages to friends, dog rescue contacts and the DDA Watch Facebook group to get more results too. I was hoping to get 80 respondents, and was dubious as to whether I could achieve this, so I was surprised when I received a massive 352 replies between the 14th and 26th April 2013.

I chose to do a questionnaire as they are quick; mine only took approximately 10-15 minutes, easy to answer and straight forward to complete. I am unaware as to whether I received any non-responses to my questionnaire from those I asked personally in private messages, as all survey results are anonymous. I have used both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Some results are statistical based on ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses, some are purely opinions which I have taken the time to read and analyse in the next section.

**Findings/results:**

Of the respondents 88% were woman, the age-groups were fairly equally spread from age groups in the 18-65 range, with the majority, 28%, being between 36-45 years old. 81% of respondents had no children under the age of 12, interestingly there was no correlation found between those who did have children under 12 and a desire to have any other breeds banned. In fact more people who had no children under 12 wanted to see other breeds banned, however, this was still only 35 of the 292 people who answered ‘no’ to having children under 12, which wanted other breeds banned. So of the 352 responses, there was a very small fraction that actually wanted more breeds banned and who have young children, therefore it would appear that people do not exactly live in fear for their children of these so called ‘dangerous’ dogs, even though there is evidence that dog attacks are on the rise.

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93% of respondents owned dogs themselves. There was an almost even split between those who had, or had not been bitten by a dog. Again there was little evidence of correlation between those who had been bitten with those who wanted to see other breeds banned. When asked the breed of dog that had bitten them, 36 answered Jack Russell Terrier, 25 answered Collie, and 20 answered Yorkshire Terrier. Of the 176 people (53%) who said they had been bitten only 7 people said it was by a Staffordshire Bull Terrier (SBT) or SBT Cross. (See Chart 1).

43% of respondents thought that the DDA affects SBT’s the most, 37% thought Pit-bull Terriers and 11% commented in the ‘others’ box, mainly that bull-breed types were most affected. (See Chart 2). An interesting add on question would have been what they defined a Pit-bull terrier to be, as Watson highlighted, basically any bull-breed dog can be classed in a Pit-bull ‘Type’ category.
85% of people said they would not report a suspected exempted breed of dog. When asked to give a reason why, most responded that they did not agree with Breed Specific Legislation (BSL). One respondent added further that he/she would not report, ‘Because it has done nothing wrong except look a certain way.’ A huge amount of respondents replied simply ‘Deed not Breed.’ And those who would report generally said they would do so on the merits of the owners.

Of all the respondents a massive 302 people would not like to see any other breeds banned and 95% of respondents do not believe a dog can be inherently dangerous by virtue of its breed alone. 95% of respondents thought the DDA provided no effective punishment for dog owners and 90% thought that ‘responsible ownership’ was ‘very important’ to reduce dangerous dogs. When asked what more could be done 37 respondents suggested that all dogs be licensed and only 10 suggested all dogs be muzzled. A vast majority of people said it should be about education and punishments for owners, compulsory training and a ban on backstreet breeding. 84% rated the DDA as either ‘very poor’ or ‘poor’ in helping to reduce the number of dangerous dogs.

When asked about people’s personal experiences with the DDA many commented that they were scared to take their bull-breed dog(s) out through fear of what people might say, or through fear of seizure. They commented that they would either not walk their dogs, or have to muzzle them to ensure people did not report them, some of the respondents replies included, ‘People think all staffs are dangerous’, ‘Unable to return home to the UK as I have a Pit-bull’, ‘Because I live in fear for his safety. Dog wardens, dangerous dog unit and many police think that a Staffie is a dangerous dog or a banned breed if you own a big one’, and, ‘I have Staffie crosses and I worry all the time that they will be taken away from me unfairly.

When asked how the DDA has impacted on the respondent’s lives, one replied, ‘I was a police dog handler who seized banned breeds.’ Another replied, ‘My time is taken supporting owners and dogs wrongly taken via DDA Watch.’, another respondent replied that she was a veterinary nurse. A varied amount of respondents from different fields of life replied to my
questionnaire and as such I feel this gives me a better scope to say that this piece of research is quite generalizable.

Discussion:
My research study has highlighted that a majority of people think the DDA targets bull-breed dogs mostly and fails to offer much helpful control on dangerous dogs as a whole. When asked the best way to control dangerous dogs one respondent replied, ‘Repeal Section 1 of the DDA, the fact that ‘type' dogs are illegal adds to their appeal.’ Another respondent added, ‘Unban all breeds- making banned breeds less attractive to the wrong people...’ Banning breeds of dog does makes that breed more appealing to the wrong sort of people, and so we end up with dogs which are dangerously out of control and causing harm. Maher highlighted youths are not at all fearful of the way they treat their dogs and actively engage in fighting or allowing their dogs to attack people. If I were to do this research again I would have asked additionally whether there should be an age restriction on owning a dog, to determine perhaps whether people thought that the younger generation were responsible for a larger proportion of dangerous dogs, through use as status symbols. Ultimately it was clear from my results that many thought BSL enhanced the appeal of certain dogs, to the wrong people, by banning them.
Interestingly out of the 176 people who had been bitten by a dog only 7 had been bitten by a SBT or SBT cross. The bull-breed has had horrific press as of late and has become a dog associated with youth-culture and menacing behaviour, depicted as a savage beast. As soon as anyone is attacked this is what is pasted across the TV and newspapers;

Yet the reality for a majority of this breed of dog, with responsible owners, is more this;
The media play a generous role in misleading the public and causing mas-hysteria as to the nature of one specific breed by reporting all incidents of attacks by that breed and none by other breeds. Despite this a majority of respondents still would not like to see any other breeds banned. The statistics I gathered on dog bites highlight that there is an extreme biased within the media and what they chose to publish as a huge amount of bites or attacks that took place on the respondents were not from bull-breed dogs. The question should not be ‘what breeds should be banned?’, as BSL has done with the Pit-bull terrier for example, it should instead be, ‘how do we punish the individual acts of one dog, regardless of breed, so as to control dangerous dogs?’ My results highlight that this begins with the owners. Dog attacks are on the increase in the UK, yet there are very few Pit-bull dogs, as Collier highlighted in his study. Other studies have shown breeds like the German Shepherd to be amongst one of the highest attacking breeds (Klaassen 1996) and my own research has proven the Jack Russell terrier and the Collie to be amongst the highest attacking breeds.

My results coincide with those of Klaassen et al. back in 1996 study which illustrated that there is a need for wider control of the dog in general not just a few specific breeds. Any dog can bite and through implementing BSL the DDA fails to properly tend to this. In her study on dog aggression Beach concluded; ‘Considering even Dachshunds and Yorkshire Terriers have been known to kill, the concept of breed-specific legislation appears to be fatally flawed… If we, as dog owners, learn to understand and manage our dogs’ lives in such a way that they do not feel the need to take independent control, we will greatly reduce the chances any of us coming to serious harm.’ My results have highlighted that a vast majority of respondents thought the most vital way to ensure a reduction and control over dangerous dogs would be more stringent punishment for owners and more education and training for owners. Dogs are not humans, they do not live by human rules, it is imperative that education and training starts with the owner before we will see any kind of reduction in dog attacks and fatalities and this is where the DDA has significant room for improvement.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion the DDA has failed categorically to deal with the issue of dangerous dogs in a manner that is effective and useful. Instead it has created ‘banned’ breeds which in turn have become status dogs for the wrong sorts of people; un-trained, used for fighting and over-bred. If the DDA were to have all BSL removed and assumed any dog, no matter the breed, can be dangerous if in the wrong hands, and begun to punish owners for their failure to control their dogs, train them, or if necessary keep them muzzled, then people would be more inclined to be more responsible for their dogs, harsher penalties for owners is necessary if we want to see a reduction in attacks from all breeds.

There will always be people who will slip through the net, but the DDA has not even attempted to put a net in place. Instead it has singled out a few breeds who have offended in ways which have caught the media’s attention more often than others, and forgotten about all the rest. It has vilified bull-breed dogs, like mine, who are of sweet, loyal, loving natures all because of how a few irresponsible, un-educated owners have acted without punishment. We should not be punishing an entire breed; we should be punishing the deed done, going straight to the owner for retribution.

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Bibliography.

Legislation:

Journals:
- L. Watson, ‘Does breed specific legislation reduce dog aggression on humans and other animals? A review paper,’ 2003
- ‘Objective for Future ‘Dangerous Dogs’ Legislation By the Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group’ for the Kennel Club. DDASG includes representation from: Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, Blue Cross, British Veterinary Association, Dogs Trust, the Kennel Club, Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Wandsworth Borough Council and Wood Green Animal Shelters.

Websites:
- http://www.ddawatch.co.uk/
- http://www.wheldonlaw.co.uk/
Appendix.

**Questionnaire:**

1. Are you male or female? Yes/No
3. Do you have any children under 12? Yes/No
4. Do you own a dog(s)? Yes/No
5. Have you ever been attacked or bitten by a dog? Yes/No
6. If you answered yes, please specify the breed.
7. Which breed, if any, do you think the Dangerous Dogs Act 1992 affects most frequently?
   - Staffordshire Bull Terrier:
   - Pitbull:
   - Japenese Akita:
   - Rottweiler:
   - German Shepherd:
   - Greyhound:
   - Beagle:
   - Lurcher:
   - Chihuahua:
   - Yorkshire Terrier:
   - Doberman:
   - Labrador:
   - Golden Retriever:
   - English Bull Mastiff:
   - English Bull-dog:
   - Dogue de Bordeaux:
   - None:
   - Other (please specify):
8. Would you report a suspected 'exempted'/banned breed of dog? Yes/No
9. Please give one main reason for why you would/ would not report a suspected 'exempted'/banned breed of dog?
10. Which other breeds, if any, would you like to see banned?
   - None:
   - All-bull breeds:
   - Staffordshire Bull-terriers:
   - Bull-mastiffs:
11. Do you believe a dog can be inherently dangerous by virtue of its breed alone? Yes/No
12. Do you think the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, provides effective punishment for irresponsible owners? Yes/No
   12.a. Please briefly explain why you think it does/does not provide effective punishment for irresponsible owners.
13. How important, if at all, do you think the encouragement of responsible ownership is to ensuring a reduction of dangerous dogs?
   Irrelevant:
   Fairly unimportant:
   Fairly important:
   Very important:
14. Does your job involve working with dogs? Yes/No
15. Do you think the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 is an affective piece of legislation for the purpose of preventing dangerous dogs?
   Yes:
   No:
   I don't know:
   15.a. What more could be done?
16. How would you rate the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, in helping to reduce the number of dangerous dogs?
   Very poor:
   Poor:
   I don't know:
   High:
   Very high:
17. What, in your opinion, is the best way to control dangerous dogs?

**Section 2: How has the Dangerous Dogs Act 1992 impacted on you?**
18. Has the Dangerous Dogs Act impacted on your dog’s life? Yes/No
19. If yes, briefly explain how.