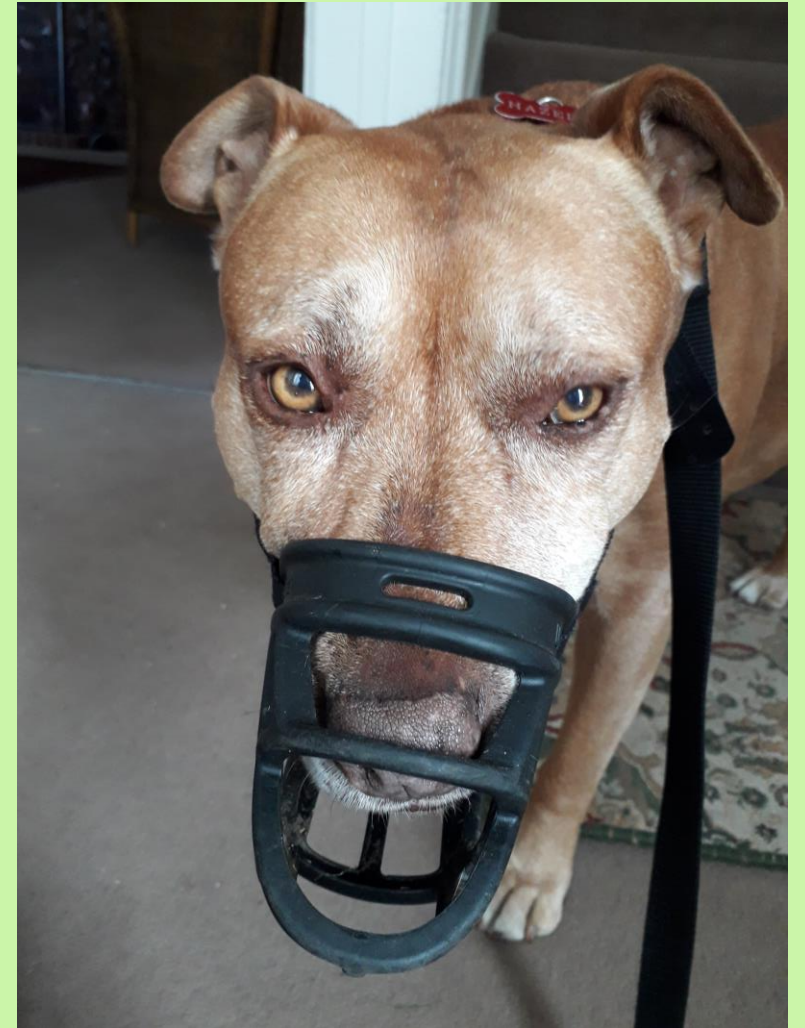

THE MESSAGE OF THE MUZZLE: A STUDY IN LABELLING

DR MARIA KASPERSSON
UNIVERSITY OF
GREENWICH

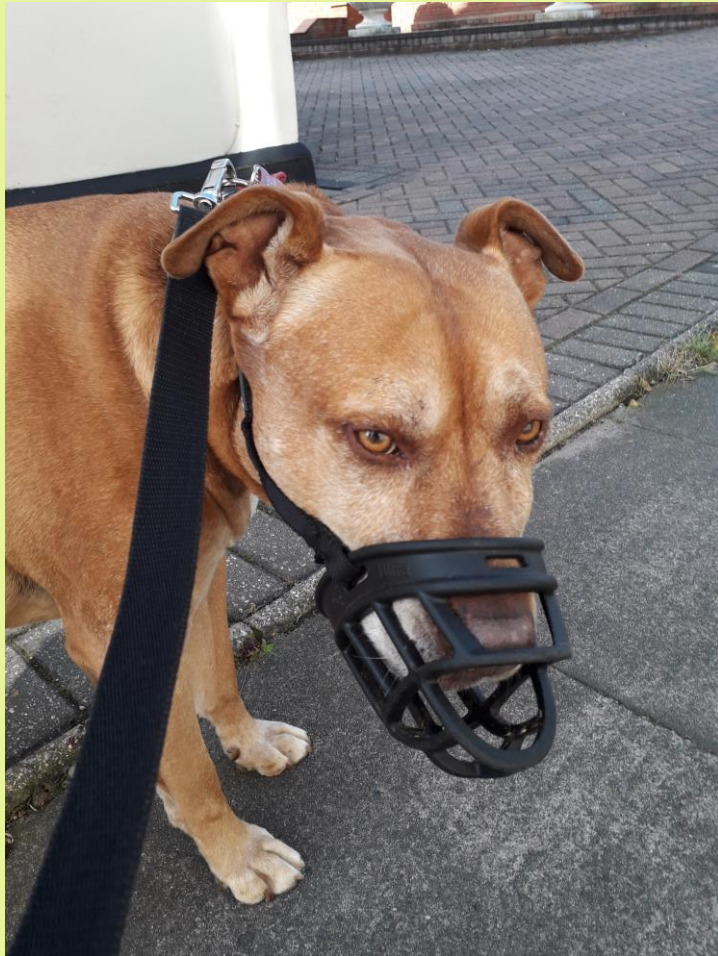


BACKGROUND

- Ethnographic study of 'status' dog owners
- Twining et al. (2000): Pit Bull owners' dealing with the stigma of banned dogs.
- This study: the general public's reactions to a muzzled dog
- Previous research on humans and management of stigma and people's reactions to it
- This study (and Twining et al. (2000)) interested in how non-human animals are stigmatised even if the animals are unaware



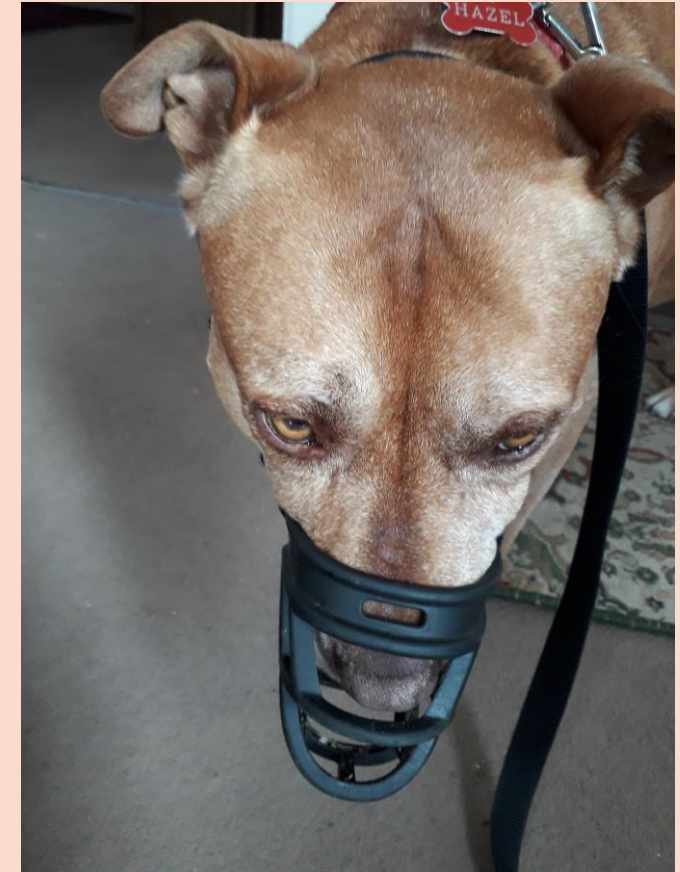
BACK TO BASICS: GOFFMAN, GARFINKEL AND BECKER



- **Stigma** – imputes imperfections
- **Stigma symbols** – draw attention to a debasing identity
- Strength of stigma depending on **visibility, known-about-ness** and **obtrusiveness**
- The muzzle as a successful **degradation ceremony**
- **Labelling** – the muzzle makes the dog an outsider and people treat it accordingly

NON-DOG PEOPLE

- *Assume the muzzle means the dog is human aggressive*
- “Dad, why does that dog have an oxygen mask on?” (on way to the Meadow, September 2008).”
- “On the way home I overtook a mother with a pram and two children, a boy and a girl, about four to five years old. As I passed them with Hazel the boy lightly stroked it. He asked his mother why the dog had this ‘thing around its nose’ and the mother answered: ‘It’s so it can’t bite little boys like you.’ At that point the boy froze with fear as he had touched the dog (on way from Nunhead Cemetery, May 2009).”
- **Subtle** and **direct** manifestations of breed stigma in informal interactions with other people





DOG PEOPLE

- *Assume the muzzle means the dog is dog (and/or animal) aggressive*
- “‘Is it because of the DDA or because it doesn’t get on with other dogs?’ (Horn Park, August 2018).”
- “‘The Staffie Pit Bull cross Billie’s owner implied muzzling was dog abuse and claimed that ‘in a few months’ time you can take it off’, despite my assurances that my dog *is* aggressive to some dogs and once bit a dog in the leg. ‘Yes, but it was the leg, not the neck!’ he responded (Nunhead Cemetery, September 2009).”
- “‘A dog owner did not see the reason why I asked him to keep his off-lead dog away from my dog, by stating ‘but it’s muzzled, innit’ (Elmstead Woods, November 2016).”

PIT BULL PEOPLE

- *Take the muzzle as a sign the dog is 'vicious' and this is considered a positive trait*
- *Does not separate between human or dog aggression*
- *Muzzling rarely seen as compliance with DDA*
- *“So she's started biting now' (Casella Road, July 2008).”*



PIT BULL-SPECIFIC HOSTILITY



- *The muzzle signifies an aggressive pit bull who should not be allowed to live as it is dangerous*
- “Just as I arrived at the market outside Rivington’s a man on the other side of the road started shouting that my dog should not be alive, that I was breaking the law as my dog was banned, that it killed people etc. I shouted back that the dog was exempted and properly registered, but the man just kept on screaming and didn’t hear me. Other people started staring, but no one said or did anything (Antique markets, Greenwich, June 2016).”

‘TURNING’

- *Once breed is known the behaviour alters, sometimes dramatically*
- “I was walking home with Hazel and we passed a man who was waiting at the bus stop. He asked about the muzzle and I explained. He withdrew when he heard Hazel is a Pit Bull and spat out ‘yeah, they always turn eventually’. I couldn’t help thinking that the only turning I have experienced is of people when they learn Hazel is a PB (on the way home from Chinbrook Meadows, May 2019).”



CONCLUSIONS

- The muzzle sends out a strong negative message
- The muzzle as a stigma symbol
- Reinforces people's negative perceptions
- The muzzle as a preventive measure that makes things worse



REFERENCES

- Becker, H. S. (1963) *Outsiders. Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press.
- Garfinkel, H. (1956) 'Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies'. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 61 (5), 420-424.
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma*. London: Penguin.
- Kaspersson, M. (2008) 'On Treating the Symptoms and not the Cause: Reflections on the Dangerous Dogs Act', *Papers from the British Criminology Conference*, Vol. 8, 205-225. Available from: www.britsoccrim.org.
- Kaspersson, M. (2018) 'Ethnography: Separating Your Different Selves in a Covert Field Study of So-Called "Status Dog" Owners.' *SAGE Research Methods Cases Part 2*. **DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526451736>
- Twining, H., Arluke, A. and Patronek, G. (2000) 'Managing the Stigma of Outlaw Breeds: A Case Study of Pit Bull Owners'. *Society & Animals*, Vol. 8 (1), 25-52.