

**Analysis of News Media Coverage  
Regarding Law Enforcement Canines**

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**Abstract.** Utilizing a national sample of 2,022 newspaper articles that provided 250 -303 articles per year regarding police canines, this study explores the socially constructed image of police dogs as constructed by the print news media. Although police canines are often linked to violent crime stories, it was hypothesized that coverage would be structured along other dimensions to fit ongoing themes news themes and dramatic story framing. Results show that a new framework of police canines has been constructed within the news media and that the framework exists as a five category typology. The canine coverage typology of *harm, canine interest, capture, force, and vest* is seen to have parallels with the thematic coverage of human law enforcement officers. Print media emphasis on different typology categories also is seen to shift. Vest articles represent 5 percent of the total number of articles written. However, 87 percent of those articles occurred during 1999-2000. Prior, vest stories were virtually non-existent. Other categories such as canine interest remain relatively constant over time. The anthropomorphic re-construction of police canines is reflected in the coverage, showing the evolution of police dog from the vicious raging crime-control beast of the

1960s to the four-footed community police officer of the  
21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Analysis of News Media Coverage  
Regarding the Law Enforcement Canine

In the United States two frames compete in the media for the depiction of police canines. The first frame is that of "man-eater." Emerging from the 1960's use of police dogs in the dispersal of demonstrators, this frame paints a grim picture of canines in police work. Commenting on this image, Ellis and Kirchner (1990) stated "many remember seeing the front page of their newspaper of the "400 pound" German Shepherd straining at the end of the lead, about to make a eunuch out of a black civil rights activist" (p.2).

The second frame is a more recent development. Over time, the image of police canines available to the public has softened as portraits of them as a positive, proactive law enforcement tools were forwarded in the entertainment media. Movies such as *K-9* (1989), *Turner and Hooch* (1989), *Top Dog* (1995) and *K-911* (1999) depicted police dogs as fearless crime-fighters that were capable of amazing feats. In this new entertainment portrayal, police dogs were given human-like personalities and a sense of vulnerability. Hollywood showed them no longer as man-eaters, only capable of extreme acts of violence but as valuable tools for law

enforcement that could be injured or killed. Their loss felt to nearly the same extent as a human police officer.

Newspaper articles about police dogs are hypothesized to have changed as well and utilizing a social construction of reality perspective, this article will examine changes in the coverage via a content analysis of newspaper stories about police canines. The literature regarding the influence of newspaper coverage on the public's attitudes is well established (Bennett, Johnson & Triplett, 1998; Fox & Van Sickel 2001; Schudson 1978). And since most of us have very little direct experience with police canines, the news media coverage of them is thought to play an important role in their current conceptualization.

The importance of media information for individuals to construct a sense of reality comes from the fact that most individuals have limited personal experience with crime (Surette, 1998), so media attention is necessary to bring it to the public's attention (Best, 1999). Direct experience with police canines is rare for the majority of the public, therefore, most people are reliant on media portraits for their constructed reality of law enforcement canines, their attributes, nature and utility. Regarding the perception of police canines, it is a tenant of social constructionism that the public's view can change without a

change in the actual number or nature of events involving police canines. As the media can raise rare acts to disordinate public visibility and concern (Jenkins, 1998), can increase the seriousness with which a criminal justice event is perceived (Best, 1991), or can trivializing an event's prevalence and effects (Surette, 1998), the content of the news media is felt to be even more crucial than the actual number and nature of police canine use. Therefore, as a first research step, it is important to detail what the available content concerning police canines was and how that content has evolved.

In sum, this research seeks to illuminate the socially constructed image of police dogs as constructed within the print news media. Although police canines are often linked to violent crime stories, it is speculated that coverage will be structured along other dimensions to fit ongoing themes, dramatic story framing and canine interest (Fishman 1978; Graber 1994). By examining this construction, it is hoped to identify the repetitive themes the public is exposed to and distinguish the devices through which the news shapes the symbolic meaning of police dogs in the public's perception.

A completely unexplored area of study, the analysis of the evolution of news coverage of police canines

demonstrates the media's general role in the social construction of crime and justice reality. This study traces how a specific criminal justice area, in this case police canines, came to be reconstructed in more positive tones by the news media in the relatively brief time span of six years. The issue of police canines is, therefore, a narrow example of a broader process: the social construction of criminal justice policy being reframed from the negative perspectives of the 1960's to more positive paradigms in the present.

### **Methodology**

The sample was derived from 2,022 articles from a major Internet search engine for newspaper stories, NewsLibrary (<http://www.newslibrary.com/>). A content analysis of the articles was performed with the intention of identifying major trends and changes in the socially constructed image of police dogs and their activities over a seven-year time span. Articles were selected through a Boolean search that included the words *police dog* from the years 1994 through 2000. Articles generated from the initial list were selected only if the primary focus of the article was the police dog. A brief reference to police dogs in the course

of describing another crime resulted the article's exclusion. The 2,020 articles represent the core social construction effort of U.S. newspapers regarding police dogs from the mid 1990's through the end of the century. Lacking choice regarding these geographic regions, one obvious limitation of this study is the design of the search engine that Newslibrary employs. Limited to only those papers that subscribed to that electronic service, larger metropolitan newspapers make up the majority of those searched. In addition, nineteen newspapers (23.75%) were excluded from the original search process (80 newspapers) because their databases did not contain articles for the full time period from 1994 to 2000. Exclusion by region ranged from 0 to 4 and distribute roughly equally across the 9 regions. The remaining 61 papers represent a cross section of U.S. print media coverage (See Appendix B). Initially the stories were compiled geographically, as dictated by the structure of the search engine. The nine initial geographic search regions and their newspapers are fully shown in Appendix A

**Table 1. Geographic Regions**

| <b>Region</b> | <b>Area Included</b> | <b>Number of Newspapers</b> | <b>Number of Articles</b> |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
|               |                      |                             |                           |

|         |  |    |     |
|---------|--|----|-----|
| WEST    | California,<br>Northwest and<br>Southwest States | 12 | 535 |
| SOUTH   | Florida and<br>Southeast States                  | 15 | 503 |
| NORTH   | MidAtlantic and<br>Northeast States              | 16 | 346 |
| MIDWEST | Great Lakes and<br>Midwest States                | 18 | 626 |

In order to simplify the regional comparison analysis, the nine Newslibrary geographic regions were recoded and collapsed into four general geographic regions as shown in table 1. Final regional division gives an adequate distribution of newspaper stories by region for analysis. A content analysis of the articles was performed on the 61 sample newspapers with the intention of identifying major trends and changes in the socially constructed image of canine units over time.

## **RESULTS**

### **Quantity and Regional Distribution**

The number of police canine related articles that met the requirements of our study was extensive. The 2,022 articles were spread evenly across the time series (See table 2). The articles consistently ranged from 250 -303 articles per year.

**Table 2. Regional Distribution of Articles over Time**

|              | West       | Midwest    | South      | North      | Total       |
|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 1994         | 75         | 92         | 42         | 65         | 274         |
| 1995         | 72         | 69         | 59         | 89         | 299         |
| 1996         | 93         | 73         | 41         | 93         | 303         |
| 1997         | 87         | 74         | 52         | 87         | 300         |
| 1998         | 65         | 82         | 57         | 104        | 297         |
| 1999         | 52         | 66         | 44         | 88         | 250         |
| 2000         | 91         | 57         | 51         | 100        | 299         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>535</b> | <b>513</b> | <b>346</b> | <b>626</b> | <b>2022</b> |

Within this seven-year time period, the number of articles from region to region varied slightly: West (535 articles), Midwest (513 articles), South (346 articles), North (626 articles) with the greatest difference emerging between the south and north. Additionally, it was found that potentially newsworthy canine news in one part of the country made their way via the Associated Press to other parts of the country. For example, the story of a police dog killed in New Jersey received national attention as it appeared in California as well as Florida newspapers. The total number of such trans-regional stories is undetermined but is likely to homogenize the construction of police canines across regions.

In order to assay the portrait, a 12-factor matrix was initially developed to delineate differences between story types. Initial coding was developed in a qualitative manner by examining each article separately and then comparing it

to those articles immediately preceding or following it.

These included:

- Mourned: (n=131) articles that focused on an agency's or a community's grief of losing a K9
- Killed: (n=104) articles that related the circumstances leading to the death
- Injured: (n=86) articles about police dogs injured in the line-of-duty
- Vest: (n=96) articles about ballistic body armor for police dogs
- Capture: (n=349) articles about apprehensions made as a result of K9 (narcotics, tracking, physical apprehensions)
- Force: (n=154) articles about excessive force by police dogs (legal actions, inappropriate bites)
- Retirement: (n=75) articles about the end of a police dog's career
- Competition: (n=116) articles about competitions or demonstrations performed by police dogs
- Training: (n=53) articles explaining the training of police dogs
- New Dog: (n=247) articles about the purchase of new or replacement dogs
- Interest: (n=572) canine-interest stories about police dogs (donations, programs, high school sniffs, funny articles, illness, misc.)
- Honored: (n=64) articles about honors bestowed on

the canine for heroic actions

After the data was placed into these categories, it became obvious that some categories were not exclusive. Five index variables were therefore created that provide a clear delineation between the emphasis of each article, which allowed mutually exclusive placement.

### Index Variables

- 1) **HARM**- (n=321) this encompasses all stories where a police dog is harmed. It is the combined total of variables *killed, mourned* and *injured*.
- 2) **VEST**- (n=96) this variable remains the same. It is all of the stories about ballistic body armor for police dogs.
- 3) **CAPTURE**- (n=349) this variable remains the same. These are articles about apprehensions made as a result of K9 (narcotics, tracking, physical apprehensions).
- 4) **FORCE**- (n=154) this variable remains the same. These are articles about excessive force by police dogs (legal actions, inappropriate bites).
- 5) **INTEREST**- (n=1063) this encompasses all of the canine-interest stories by collapsing variables *retirement, competition, training, new dog, interest, and honored*.

As illustrated, table 3 shows the temporal distribution of the number of stories in each of the five categories. The 96 vest articles represent 5% of the total number of articles written. However, 87% of those articles (82)

occurred during the last two years (1999-2000). Prior, vest stories were virtually non-existent. However, other categories such as canine interest remain relatively constant over time while representing 53% (1090) of the articles, while harm and capture stories waxed and waned. It is revealing to examine the relationship of time to each of the index categories in detail.

**Table 3. Breakdown of Articles 1994-2000**

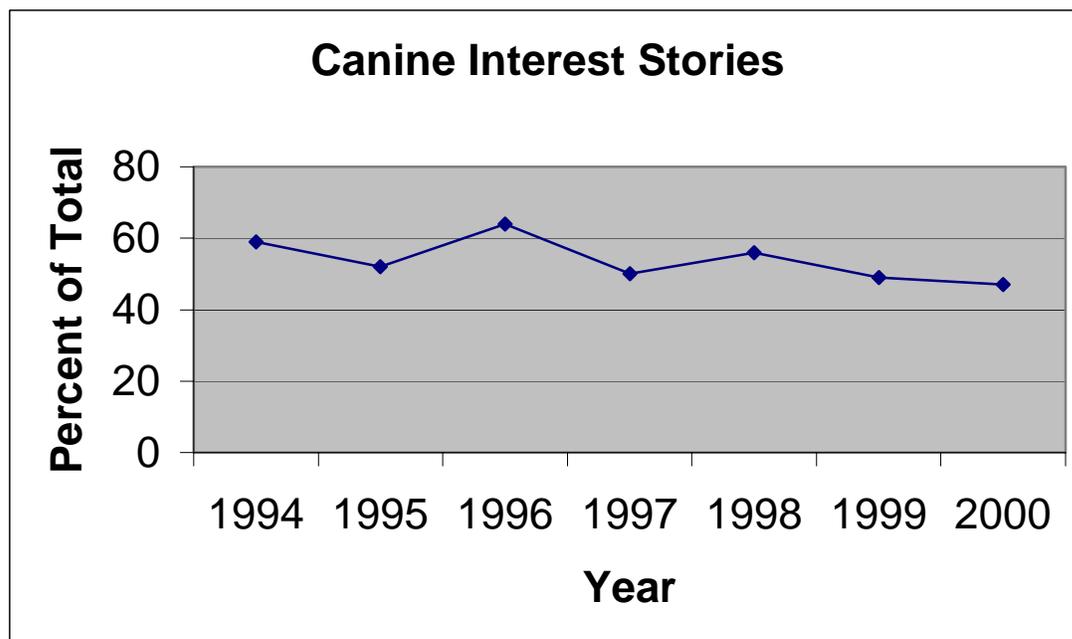
|               | <b>Interest</b> | <b>Capture</b> | <b>Force</b> | <b>Harm</b> | <b>Vest</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| <b>1994</b>   | 163 (59%)       | 57 (21%)       | 16 (6%)      | 38 (14%)    | 0 (0%)      | <b>274</b>   |
| <b>1995</b>   | 154 (52%)       | 66 (22%)       | 32 (11%)     | 45 (15%)    | 2 (1%)      | <b>299</b>   |
| <b>1996</b>   | 193 (64%)       | 56 (18%)       | 19 (6%)      | 35 (12%)    | 0 (0%)      | <b>303</b>   |
| <b>1997</b>   | 151 (50%)       | 58 (19%)       | 18 (6%)      | 64 (21%)    | 9 (3%)      | <b>300</b>   |
| <b>1998</b>   | 166 (56%)       | 47 (16%)       | 14 (5%)      | 67 (23%)    | 3 (1%)      | <b>297</b>   |
| <b>1999</b>   | 123 (49%)       | 29 (12%)       | 22 (9%)      | 37 (15%)    | 39 (16%)    | <b>250</b>   |
| <b>2000</b>   | 140 (47%)       | 46 (15%)       | 33 (11%)     | 37 (12%)    | 43 (14%)    | <b>299</b>   |
| <b>Totals</b> | 1090 (58%)      | 359 (18%)      | 154 (8%)     | 323 (16%)   | 96 (5%)     | <b>2202</b>  |

#### **CANINE INTEREST STORIES**

This type of article was the most difficult to quantify due to their varied nature. The category results

from the collapse of *retirement, competition, training, new dog, interest, and honored*. Although many of the articles were meant to be comical in nature, they had a generated a positive feeling and leaned toward humanizing the dogs (See Example 1). These articles often portrayed police canines in heroic terms yet emphasized the fact that they were considered part of the handler's family. Additionally, these articles serve as a justification to a community that canine units are necessary and cost effective (See Example 2). Canine human-interest stories, as reflected in Figure 1, have declined slightly over time to less than half of the stories total but they continue to dominate coverage.

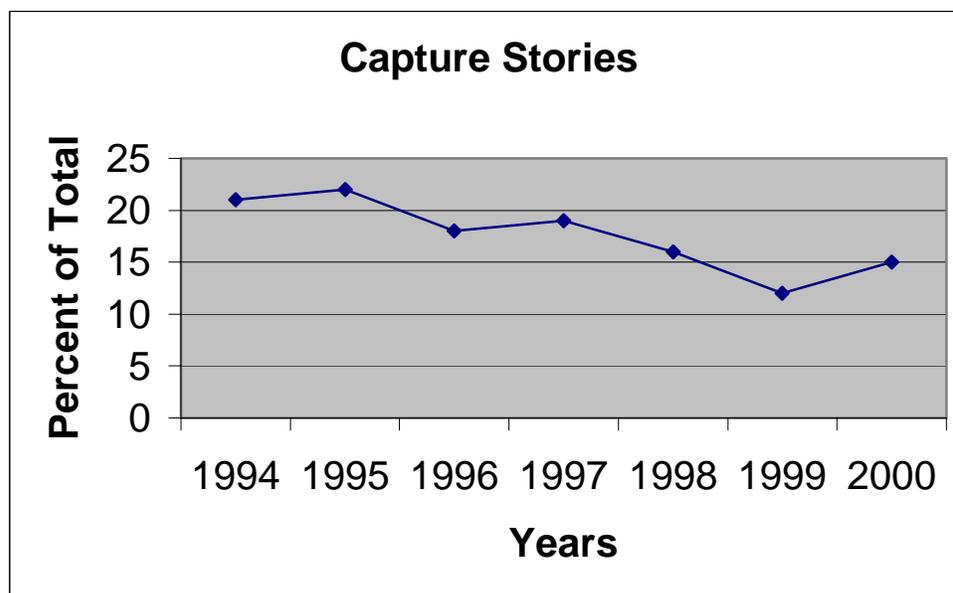
Figure 1.



### CAPTURE STORIES

These articles focused on the canine as a tool for law enforcement with about 1 out of five (18%) of the stories as capture related. The role of police dogs in apprehensions through their advanced olfactory skills or physical ability is accented through headlines like "POLICE DOG HELPS SUBDUE SUSPECT" (Arizona Republic, 11/19/2000) or "POLICE DOG NABS BURGLARY SUSPECT", (Daytona Beach News Journal, 08/02/2000). A mild downward trend is noted in Figure 2, with these types of stories varying from 1/8 to 1/5 of the total amount of coverage.

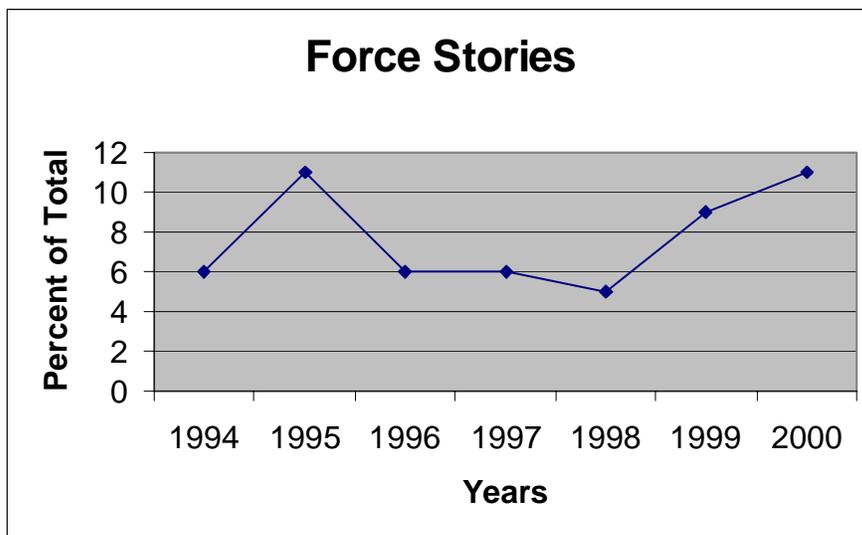
Figure 2.



## FORCE STORIES

Each article in this category focused upon either litigation against the police department for *injuries* caused by police dogs against suspect or *accidental bites* to citizens. As a result, all were questionable (ethically or legally) and conveyed a negative image of police dogs especially in dramatic headlines: *FATHER SUES AFTER SHERIFF'S DOG BITES SON AT PROGRAM* (St Pete Times, 09/19/00) or *POLICE DOG BITES MAN WHO LIVES IN A TENT* (St Pete Times, 06/28/00). Equal in proportion to capture stories, force stories comprise 18% of the total. A recent upward trend can be noted in Figure 3.

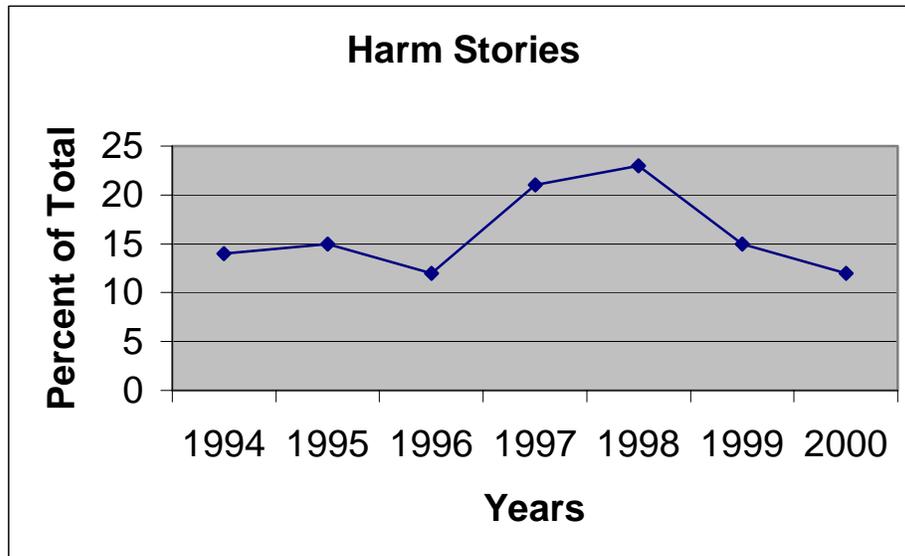
**Figure 3.**



## HARM STORIES

The index variable harm was formed by collapsing three variables: *mourned*, *killed* and *injured*. Articles were often written so that they included all elements. As a result, it was determined that the concept of harming a police dog outweighed any benefit of separating the previous variables (See example 3). Harm stories comprised 16% of the total number of stories. Headlines for these articles displayed commonalities: *POLICE DOG KILLED CHASING SUSPECT* (The Tallahassee Democrat, 07/24/00); *SERVICE WILL HONOR POLICE DOG KILLED IN CONFRONTATION* (Miami Herald, 07/25/00). There was a substantial increase in reporting harm to police dogs in 1997 and 1998. However, by 1999, the number of articles returned to its prior level and has remained stable. It is unclear whether police dogs were actually injured more during this time period or if other factors led to the newsworthiness of the stories.

Figure 4.



#### **VEST ARTICLES**

The original examination of newspaper stories identified these articles as an interesting trend. Headlines for these articles tend to be rather generic and similar wording across regions and the nation was not unusual:

*GIRL'S VEST-A-DOG FUND COULD SAVE A POLICE PUP'S LIFE* (St Pete Times, 08/25/00) *POLICE DOGS RECEIVE BULLETPROOF VESTS* (Bradenton Herald, 09/02/00; Atlanta Journal Constitutional, 10/02/00) or *VESTED INTEREST IN POLICE DOGS* (St Pete Times, 10/17/00).

Although vest articles account for only five percent of the articles examined over this seven-year period, they have increased dramatically over time. As shown in Figure 4, they have increased from zero articles in 1994 to forty three articles in 2000. The question remains: what caused

the surge of interest for bulletproof vests for dogs? The ability to outfit police dogs in ballistic armor has been available for years and yet little public interest appeared prior to 1999. The most likely answer is the strong support by children in organizations such as Vest-a-Dog (1998) and Pennies for Police Dogs (2000) and Protect our Protectors (2000).

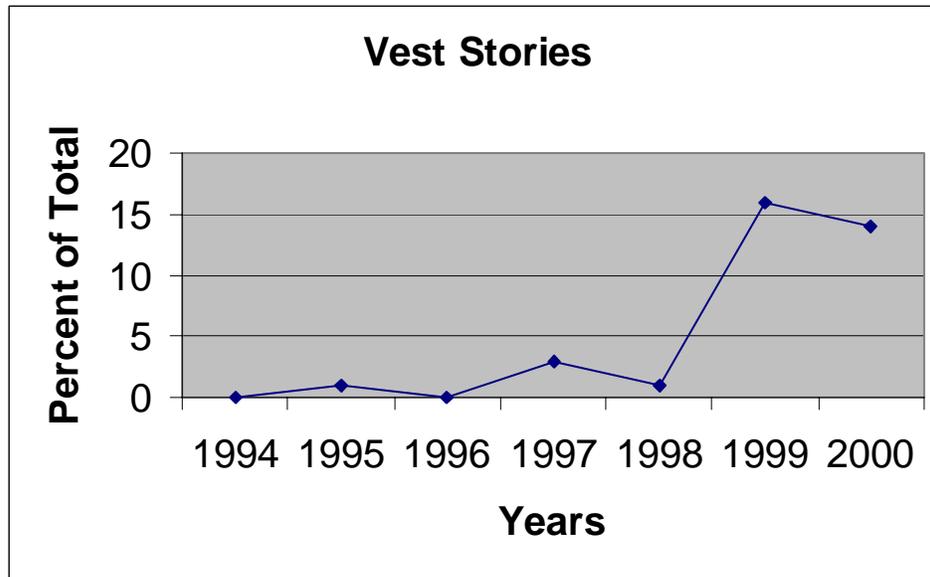
Vest-a-Dog's 11-year-old founder Stephanie Taylor was inspired to begin this program after reading about the 1998 killing of a New Jersey police dog<sup>1</sup>. The death of this individual work dog became the symbolic crime in the social construction tradition that fueled the policy desire for canine body armor. Pennies for Police Dog's founder Stacy Hillman began her program after reading about the death of a police canine in Miami in July, 2000. Eve Bachmaier, the 11-year-old founder Protect our Protectors' read a newspaper article about Vest-a-Dog and wanted to start a similar program in Pittsburgh<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 5.

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<sup>1</sup> From October 17, 2000 edition of St. Pete Times, p 1A

<sup>2</sup> From August 30, 2000 edition of Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, p B-4



#### **HARM-VEST NEXUS**

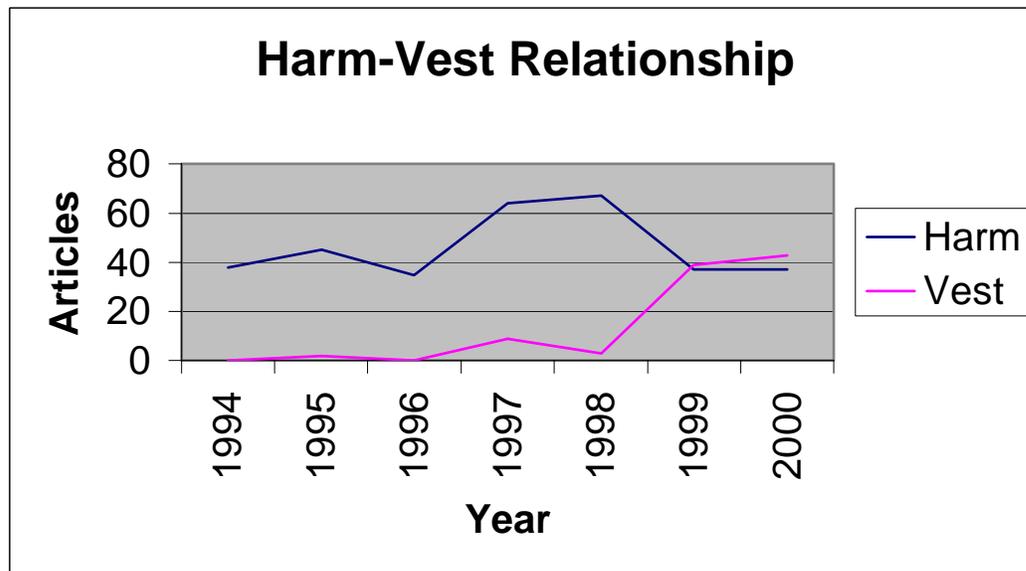
Reviewing the direction and scope of the articles during this study, a definite relationship between **HARM** and **VEST** became apparent. In 1997 and 1998, there was a distinct rise in the number of articles reflecting injury or harm to police dogs. It does not appear that this was a particularly bad year for police dogs (referencing several police canine association web sites revealed no evidence of increased injury rates<sup>3</sup>). It is more likely that public attention had begun to look at the dogs as victims of crime and that more stories were generated from a stable pool of events (cf Fishman, 1978). This explanation is further

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<sup>3</sup> United States Police Canine Association, [www.uspcak9.com](http://www.uspcak9.com); North American Police Work Dog Association, [www.napwda.com](http://www.napwda.com)

supported since in 1999 and 2000 the number of stories about communities buying ballistic armor for their dogs also increased dramatically (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**



## DISCUSSION

It is clear from a review of the newspaper medium over the eight-year period that a new framework of police dogs has been constructed within the news media using a five category typology. The canine coverage typology of *harm*, *canine interest*, *capture*, *force*, and *vest* is seen to have parallels with the thematic coverage of human law enforcement officers. There has always been interest in police use of force and a similar emphasis initially dominated coverage of police canines. As the police became

humanized in the press and the public relations efforts of law enforcement public information officers began to be felt in the 1980s (Surette 2001), stories of canine interest, police officer injury, and heroic capture stories grew (Surette 1998). Similarly, police canine injuries, heroic captures, and canine interest story frames were developed and grew in number. Finally, similar to coverage of police officers and their need for bullet proof vests, the typology category of canine vests emerged to complete the anthropomorphic re-construction of police canines.

The focus of the coverage shifted beyond crowd control to different aspects of canine units. From the content analysis and its emergent typology of coverage, police dogs tend to be looked upon more sympathetically and favorably despite the fact that overall the proportion of negative publicity they received is relatively stable. While there are still instances where canines receive less than positive publicity, they are overall more likely to be portrayed as effective via capture stories, as vulnerable in harm stories, and as needing an available piece of protective equipment via vest stories.

Consistently over the study's time frame, negative images of the police dog have been effectively countered by positive images. It is more difficult to perceive police dogs as vicious or dangerous, when you have small children creating foundations that support police canine endeavors. Overly critical opinions on police canines, especially as

they risk their lives and are killed for the benefit of society, are no longer in vogue. The social reconstruction of police dogs is epitomized in the personification of canines as equivalent to human officers with personalities and traits of heroism, sacrifice and loyalty. The contemporary police canine construction as an extension of the human police officer's family completes the media constructed evolution of police dog from the vicious raging crime-control beast of the 1960s to the four-footed community police officer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Lost in this construction is the issue of the actual effectiveness and utilization of police canines and the questionable value of vests in actually protecting the animals, two questions that have not been researched.

**APPENDIX A**

## Newspapers Searched Regionally for Canine Articles

**NORTHWEST**

Portland Oregonian  
Seattle Post Intelligencer  
Spokane Spokesman Review  
Vancouver Columbian  
Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
(from Seattle Times, Anchorage Daily News, Portland Oregonian, Tacoma News-Tribune, Montana Standard, Journal of Alaska Business & Commerce)

**CALIFORNIA**

Fresno Bee  
Long Beach Telegram  
Orange County Register  
Riverside Press Enterprise  
Sacramento Bee  
San Jose Mercury News  
Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
(from Bakersfield Californian, Business Press (Ontario), Stockton Record)

**West**

Denver Post  
Fort Worth Star-Telegram  
Phoenix Newspapers  
Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
(from Dallas Morning News, Houston Chronicle, Salt Lake Tribune, Daily Oklahoman, Tulsa World, Austin American-Statesman, Colorado Springs Gazette, Santa Fe New Mexican)

**Southeast**

Biloxi Sun Herald  
 Birmingham News  
 Charlotte Observer  
 Columbus Ledger-Enquirer  
 Kentucky & Cincinnati Post  
 Columbia State  
 Greensboro News and Record  
 Knoxville News-Sentinel  
 Lexington Herald Leader  
 Macon Telegraph  
 Memphis Commercial Appeal  
 Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
 (from Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Raleigh News &  
 Observer, Augusta Chronicle, Charleston Post and Courier,  
 Savannah Morning News, Durham Sun, Montgomery Advertiser)

**Florida**

Bradenton Herald  
 Miami Herald  
 Tallahassee Democrat  
 Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
 (from Ft. Lauderdale Sun Sentinel, Florida Times-Union  
 (Jacksonville), Orlando Sentinel, St. Petersburg Times)

**Mid Atlantic**

The Press of Atlantic City  
 Baltimore Sun  
 The Record (NJ)  
 Norfolk Virginian-Pilot  
 Philadelphia Inquirer  
 Roanoke Times and World News  
 Washington Post  
 Washington Times  
 Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
 (from Richmond Times-Dispatch)

**Upper Northeast**

Bergen Record  
 Boston Globe  
 Buffalo News  
 Hartford Courant  
 Portland Newspapers  
 The Times Union  
 Watertown Daily Times  
 Worcester Telegram & Gazette  
 Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
 (from Asbury Park (NJ) Press, Newark Star-Ledger, New York  
 Daily News, Providence Journal)

**Great Lakes**

Akron Beacon Journal  
 Cincinnati & Kentucky Posts  
 Detroit Free Press  
 Evansville Courier  
 Gary Post  
 Fort Wayne News Sentinel  
 Fort Wayne Journal Gazette  
 Indianapolis Star  
 Madison Newspapers  
 Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
 (from Chicago Tribune, Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, Dayton  
 Daily News)

**Midwest**

Aberdeen American News  
 Grand Forks Herald  
 Kansas City Star  
 Lawrence Journal World  
 Minneapolis Star Tribune  
 St Luis Post-Dispatch  
 St Paul Pioneer Press  
 Wichita Eagle  
 Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News  
 (from Chicago Tribune, Omaha World-Herald, Columbia Daily  
 Tribune, Cedar Rapids Gazette)

## Appendix B

## Distribution of Newspapers by Original Region

| REGION          | EXCLUDED | INCLUDED |
|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Northwest       | 3        | 5        |
| California      | 2        | 7        |
| Southwest       | 2        | 4        |
| Southeast       | 3        | 12       |
| Florida         | 4        | 4        |
| Mid Atlantic    | 0        | 9        |
| Upper Northeast | 1        | 9        |
| Great Lakes     | 2        | 10       |
| Midwest         | 2        | 9        |

## Appendix C Mourn Canine Article



FILE PHOTO

Venice Police Officer Charlie Mesloh was the trainer and partner of Axel, a police dog who had helped in at least 231 arrests.

### Officers mourn canine colleague

**A German shepherd that was going to retire from the police force this year has died.**

**By Tabatha Barham**  
STAFF WRITER

Axel had a nose for crime. Axel, a German shepherd for the Venice Police Department since 1996, died Thursday.

Axel, 9, was going to retire from the police force later this year.

A private memorial service was held Monday at Draftwood Kennels in Laurel with Axel's trainer and partner of seven years, Officer Charlie Mesloh, and a few other select people, said Capt. Dan McGowan.

"That's what he (Mesloh) wanted, and we decided to honor his request.

"This is not just an animal to him. To him it's a partner, a friend. They feed together, they slept together, worked together . . . 24 hours a day," McGowan said.

Mesloh could not be reached Monday.

Several officers at the police department wore black mourning bands on their badges Monday in memory of Axel, McGowan said.

Axel became ill April 22. He was taken to a local veterinarian, but he showed no signs of improvement.

Axel had participated in at least 231 arrests, resulting in forfeitures in cash, vehicles and weapons.

In September, he was named the Venice city employee of the month.

"His temperament and his personality was very good," McGowan said.

*"They lived together, they slept together, worked together . . . 24 hours a day."*

**CAPT. DAN MCGOWAN**, talking about Axel and Officer Charlie Mesloh

said. "He . . . knew when it was time to be docile and friendly. He also knew when it was time to do what he was trained to do."

Axel also sired two litters of puppies. One of those puppies, Rommel, born in May, was being trained to replace Axel when he retired.

"Obviously now this accelerates the replacement process," McGowan said.

He said Rommel will be certified probably in about two weeks.

The police department also has another police dog, named Kiki.

Sarasota Herald Tribune (04/29/97)

Appendix D  
Human Interest-Humor

**Skunked**

## No Whodunnit Here; K-9 Cop Has Proof

By **JAN ANGILELLA**  
Staff Writer

**A**xel can clear a room without so much as a bark or a growl.

All the Venice Police Department's patrol dog has needed lately is his presence, thanks to a skunk he met Wednesday morning.

"We should reclassify him as a chemical weapon," said Officer Charlie Mesloh, Axel's trainer.

Mesloh and Axel were at the Venice Wellfield recreation area when the 4-year-old German shepherd got curious about a garbage can.

"A skunk jumped out from behind it," Mesloh said. "I thought it was a cat. But it didn't run. Then it lifted its tail up, and I knew it wasn't a cat."

That was the end, so to speak, for Axel. The resultant odor was so strong, said Mesloh, "You'd thought he got sprayed by 10 skunks."

The culprit remains at large, but Axel is still carrying its memory.

The dog rolled in the gravel right after he was sprayed, but it didn't help.

"If he touched it, it stunk," Mesloh said.

The stench was so bad Mesloh decided to take Axel on the 10-minute walk back to the Police Department rather than let him stink up his patrol car.

Mesloh's supervisor, Lt. Roger Hayman, bought three quarts of tomato juice, and Axel was subjected to a vigorous scrubbing. Since then, Axel has been given six vinegar and water baths.

Axel's "almost completely recovered," Mesloh said, but seems to have taken the whole experience hard, mostly keeping to himself in a corner.



STAFF PHOTO/JEFFREY CAMP

Officer Charlie Mesloh, who is obviously a true friend to his smelly partner, Axel, spends a moment with him Thursday. Axel had an encounter Wednesday with the wrong end of a polecat.

Appendix E  
Human Interest- Controversy

**A BONE TO PICK: GENDER BIAS IN THE K-9 UNIT**



STAFF PHOTO/CARAH THOMAS MARRELL

Venice K-9 officer Charlie Mesloh, with his partner Axel, right, and Xina, the female dog he has owned since puppyhood. Xina may have the right stuff, but she's the wrong sex for the K-9 unit.

## Glass ceiling is only 3 feet high

By Darragh Johnson  
STAFF WRITER

Xina can't do it, they say, because she's a girl.

A girl dog.

Which means that instead of fighting drug dealers and seizing felons, she stays home to have the puppies.

See, the K-9 unit at the Venice Police Department would be scorned if it had anything other than a male dog. Other law enforcement officers, for example, would scoff: "Oh, isn't that sweet! You've got a female dog," said Venice K-9 officer Charlie Mesloh.

"It's a macho thing," he said. Person-

ally, he said he loves to work with Xina. She's sharp, aggressive and tougher than most males, and she would be a great drug dog. "But for PR reasons, it's just easier to go with a male dog."

As such, the Venice Police Department is asking the Venice City Council to free \$5,000 from its forfeiture coffers to buy a new dog. Axel, the department's 8-year-old German shepherd, is aging and within a couple of years he'll have to retire.

So, although Mesloh prefers working with dogs he has owned since puppyhood — as he has with Xina — and although he admits that Xina's perfectly equal to male dogs, the department

hopes to instead buy an adolescent, male Hungarian German shepherd and begin training him.

Concerns about immigration visas, like concerns about discrimination suits, are moot points when dogs are the employees.

Venice Police Capt. Dan McGoogan said females just aren't aggressive enough. Using biological arguments reminiscent of those from the 1950s, McGoogan said he believed that females aren't usable until they've been spayed. Once they've been spayed, they lose their drive.

PLEASE SEE K-9 ON 10A

Appendix F  
Human Interest- Cost Justification

## K-9 keeps a watchful eye



Staff photo by Pam Johnson

Venice Police officer Charlie Mesloh and his partner in crimefighting, Axel, prepare for their routine patrol.

*(Gondolier News Editor Pam Johnson had the opportunity to ride with a Venice Police officer and a Sarasota County Sheriff's deputy recently. She shares her experience in this four-part series. In Part I, she describes a night in the working life of Venice Police K-9 Officer Charlie Mesloh, whose shift is 8 p.m.-4 a.m.)*



By PAM JOHNSON  
News Editor

It's Saturday night. A lot of people in Venice are getting ready for some leisure-time entertainment. They are going out to dinner, to the movies, to a party — wherever people gather for diversion.

Other folks are just going to work: Bartenders, waiters, theater ushers and hotel clerks are a few. But prostitutes, drug pushers and others engaged in illegal acts to make a living are also preparing for work, hoping to have a profitable night.

It's 7:30 p.m. Charlie Mesloh and his partner, Axel, have just reported to work. Mesloh is the K-9 officer for the Venice Police Department. He and Axel, his 7-year-old black German Shepherd, have been a team for about five years.

Over the course of the next 8 hours, Mesloh and Axel will interact with others who choose

Please see K-9, 10

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