

# Good pit bulls are a misunderstood breed research paper example

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The American Pit Bull Terrier, more commonly known as pit bull, has been portrayed in various media as a “vanguard for canine evil” and a “predator of the defenseless” over the past 15 years (Cohen & Richardson, 2002). All the negative publicity the pit bull has been receiving has affected political policies on pit bull ownership. According to Cohen & Richardson (2002), 75 communities in the United States prohibit ownership of pit bulls. They are also the most common breed of dogs in animal shelters across the U. S. (Tullis, 2013). Why is the pit bull being singled out as the most aggressive breed and the biggest liability to their owners? To a great extent, various stakeholders such as the media, law enforcement authorities, and ultimately irresponsible owners are to blame for the present predicament facing pit bulls. In this regard, Cohen & Richardson (2002) established that information portrayed by the media negatively influences the public’s perception of pit bulls. This paper is an investigative research on published literature to demonstrate that pit bulls are a misunderstood breed and that the media, legislative bodies, and irresponsible owners are partly responsible for the negative attitude towards pit bulls.

Dogs have been cohabitating with humans for over 10, 000 years (Medlin, 2007). Dogs and humans have adapted to each other’s presence and have a mutual relationship that benefits both parties. Having a dog has been linked to physical, social, and emotional benefits for dog owners. Dogs benefit from a responsible owner who provides the dogs’ basic needs for food, shelter. Moreover, owners also provide for the dogs’ well-being: social interaction, love, and warmth (Wong Poh and Cheong Sau, 2010). However, not all people care for dogs or any other pets at all. Over time, different dog breeds

have been considered extremely dangerous.

Discrimination against specific dog breeds has been around since time immemorial. It can be traced back to as early as the late 1800s, when bloodhounds were the breed of concern in the US. They were often used to capture runaway slaves. After the Second World War, German shepherds became public dog enemy number one because of their association with the Nazis (Tullis, 2013). Prior to that, shepherds were generally regarded as a family-friendly breed. Another dog breed implicated in World War II was the Dobermans, which were also not considered harmful before the war. Like the German shepherd, the Dobermans were also used by the Nazis (Delise, 2007). Even though these breeds have since restored a part of their reputations, there is still a lingering uneasy feeling people have towards the Dobermans and German shepherds in particular. Today, the dog breed that is widely feared and alleged to be dangerous is the pit bull.

The pit bull is actually an umbrella term that encompasses dogs of a certain appearance. The breed pit bull can include American pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, and Staffordshire Bull Terriers (Campbell, 2009). It can also apply to mixed breeds that bear a resemblance to the short-haired, muscular physique of pit bulls (Peters, 2011). The stigma associated to pit bulls does not necessarily limit itself to specific breeds but extends itself to any dog that resembles it. This could be a result of people being easily influenced by over-sensationalized news and immediately form a subjective opinion without further research. This presents the negative perception of pit bulls as a deeply-rooted issue propagated by vague or misguided information.

The pit bull has what can be considered a sad history. Pit bull breeds descend from 19th century bulldogs, popularly used in England for the sport of bullbaiting. It was eventually banned for being inhumane, but people turned to dogfighting instead. Breeders aimed for smaller, more muscular, and more agile dogs for dogfighting. Furthermore, these breeders bred those dogs to be aggressive to other animals but friendly to humans so that they can be easily handled. The British brought these dogs and their dogfighting traditions to the United States. However, as families moved westward, pit bulls became popular as farm dogs and family companions instead of dog fighters. Pit bulls gradually came to be loved for their mild temperament and unwavering loyalty (Medlin, 2007; Cohen and Richardson, 2002; Von Drehle and Ball, 2009).

During the first part of the 20th century, pit bulls were known as the “ all-American family pet.” Helen Keller and President Theodore Roosevelt had pit bull pets. A pit bull named Stubby earned a purple heart and a Gold Medal of Valor for his heroic actions during World War I, where he served as a therapy dog and had the job of locating wounded soldiers. Stubby saved numerous lives when he awoke and alerted his sleeping regiment during an overnight gas attack (Medlin, 2007). The pit bull relished in its well-deserved popularity and was endearingly called the “ nanny dog” (Peters, 2011).

Sadly, the pit bull’s popularity did not last. Everything turned to the worst for the breed around 1976, when “ curbs on animal-fighting ventures were added to the Animal Welfare Act” (Tullis, 2013). Pit bulls that were trained for dogfighting began to be seen as dangerous. Over the next two decades, numerous stories on vicious pit bull attacking and killing humans damned

these dogs to become unwanted and reviled by many.

A primary driver for the general dislike towards pit bulls has been the news media. The media has always been criticized to have a tendency for being biased and for over-sensationalizing stories (Cohen and Richardson, 2002) for the sake of greater viewership. The power that the media holds over a society is something that shouldn't be taken lightly. The general public looks to the media for information they could use on a daily basis. However, are the portrayals of pit bulls by the media really fair, or even accurate?

One major controversy surrounding pit bulls stems from their portrayed violence as a result of their having been bred for dog fighting. The media paints pit bulls as a violent dog, which is why they are used for dog fighting. Sometimes it's the other way around—that they are biologically violent because they were made for dog fighting. What people seem to lose sight of is that correlation does not imply causation. It does not mean that because a number of pit bulls have attacked humans, their entire breed is violent. It all boils down to nature versus nurture.

Many people seem to believe that all pit bulls are violent, which has led to what is called as “breed bans.” These breed bans are getting increasingly popular for local governments to address the problem of dog attacks. A few major cities have already banned pit bulls and there are at least 70 communities in the US that ban pit bull ownership (Campbell, 2009). Around two hundred counties throughout America have banned pit bulls (Medlin, 2007). Legislators seem to believe that purging certain breeds entirely would be the easiest way to reduce the probability of dog attacks on humans.

Meanwhile, other communities place restrictions on the owners of certain

breeds but not completely banning them (Campbell, 2009).

The issue of breed bans has always been problematic. For example in Denver, the pit bull ban was originally passed after separate pit bull attacks on a local minister and a young boy. The city suspended enforcement of the ordinance in 2004 after the state of Colorado passed a law prohibiting breed-specific legislation. However, Denver won a lawsuit that resulted to the law prohibiting the pit bull ban being overturned. So in 2005 Denver renewed its enforcement of the ordinance. What was so controversial about this is that Denver did not enact an updated grandfather clause, which meant that all pit bulls in the city had to be removed or surrendered. Denver's bill cites the following reasons for the ban: (1) selective breeding of pit bulls for dogfighting, (2) the pit bull's physical dominance, and (3) " an alarming increase in attacks by pit bulls against humans nationwide." Furthermore, the bill also declares that " the mere possession of pit bulls poses a significant threat to the health, welfare and safety of Denver citizens," and that " current methods of control by pit bull owners, judging by the large number of incidents involving pit bulls, have proved to be insufficient in protecting the public" (Medlin, 2007; Campbell, 2009; By 1987).

While many communities, cities, and states have adopted BSL, there are 12 states that have passed laws to prohibit the passage of BSL by local governments. These 12 states have ruled that " no specific dog breed mix shall be declared potentially dangerous or vicious as a matter of breed." The state of California enacted a law in 2005 which prohibited banning of a certain dog breed, but allowed municipalities to impose BSL relating to spay and neuter programs and breeding restrictions. Thus, municipalities in

California may require owners to sterilize their dogs, or it may choose to regulate breeders, such as requiring breeders to obtain a license pursuant to the local government's guidelines. The law also requires communities enacting breed-specific legislation to report quarterly statistics on dog bites in the community. This report must include the bite's severity, the breed of the dog responsible, and the dog's reproductive status (i. e. sterilized or not). California law cites the problems caused by " irresponsible breeding," as well as " the growing pet overpopulation and [unregulated] animal breeding practices," as justification for the law, instead of blaming specific dog breeds (Medlin, 2007; Campbell, 2009; By, 1987).

While there is indeed an increase in the incidents of dog aggression and actual attacks, people are divided on how to tackle this problem. In what seems more like a witch hunt, supporters for BSL and dog breed bans cite the " inherent violent nature" of these dog breeds as justification for their eradication. They condemn these dog breeds to extinction, or at least within their area of residence. Meanwhile, the opposition is taking a stand for innocent dog breeds.

The main argument of ban supporters is that the community's safety overrules a dog owner's right to keep their dog. The pit bull's physical stature and its dangerous reputation are commonly cited by supporters of dog breed bans as evidence of the need to ban pit bulls. Supporters also maintain that all pit bulls are highly aggressive and unpredictable. Others state that the problem is not necessarily the dog's propensity to attack. Rather, it is the amount of damage the dog can inflict that is a problem. Interestingly, supporters also acknowledge that human behaviors can affect

the development of a violent dog. However, in spite of this, they still call for more aggressive legislation because they claim that while there are pit bulls there will always be a possibility of an attack. They do not seem to care about the nonthreatening pit bulls and responsible owners (Medlin, 2007; Calkins, 1987).

On the other hand, the opposition firmly states that the history of the pit bull is not sufficient evidence to claim that the dog is inherently violent and dangerous. Pit bulls were, in fact, bred to be friendly to humans. Aggression towards other animals can be fixed by proper socialization of the dogs and sterilization. The problem, then, lies with irresponsible owners. Thus, the opposition calls for legislation that encourages responsible ownership and applies to all breeds, and not just a few (Medlin, 2007).

The debate over pit bulls is still as hot as it had been when it started during the 1980s, if not worse. However, pit bulls are not inherently violent dogs. In fact, any dog can be dangerous if they were deliberately trained to be violent. Pit bulls could be as gentle and loving as any other dog, as long as they are in a nurturing environment. There are rescue videos on Youtube of pit bulls that were used as bait dogs but do not display aggressive behaviors towards their rescuer. Dogs can also be rehabilitated to exhibit less behavioral problems. However, some dogs can be too far damaged to be fixed (Togneri, 2013). It is important to remember that dogs have different temperaments or even “personalities” and they respond to various things differently.

Currently, there are a number of rescue teams and animal welfare societies trying to break the stereotype of pit bulls being ferocious. They are showing



the entire world that pit bulls are just as loving as any other pet and that they are not all what the media makes them out to be (Peters, 2011).

In summary, pit bulls are a misunderstood breed that has been maligned in various media. As a result they are the most abundant breed in animal shelters and they are altogether banned in some areas. Pit bulls are not inherently dangerous, and even the supporters of their ban acknowledge that troubling human behaviors such as breeding, owning, and training pit bulls for the purpose of dogfighting results to the development of dangerous dogs. They were popular as a family pet before but now they are said to be unpredictable and dangerous. This change in perspective is mostly media-driven and this resulted to the overexposure of pit bulls to the news and a discrimination against the entire breeds. Legislation for specific breeds such as total ban is still contested in many communities, and a number of states are ruling that the problems are mostly caused by improper handling of dogs and not because of their breed. Many welfare societies are now working to help clear the pit bull's name and rehabilitate its image.

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