

Pit bull bias in media



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Media Bias of the Pit Bull Deborah Delo University of Phoenix What happens when " man's best friend" goes wrong? For hundreds of years, no animal has been so trusted or loved by humans as the dog. Immortalized in film and poetry for love and loyalty, the noble dog long ago earned the epithet " Man's Best Friend. " No other animal in the modern world arouses such fear and terror as the pit bull. Time and time again, we hear horror stories of pit bulls and " pit bull types" running amok and wreaking havoc on all who cross their path.

Without proper treatment and training, any dog can be vicious; but due to the media's bias, pit bulls and dogs classified or described as pit bulls are the negative focus of dog related stories. The American pit bull was derived from experiments by breeding terriers with bull dogs. Breeders were trying to find a dog with the gameness of the terrier and the athletic abilities of the bull dog. Pit bulls are known for their " gameness", which basically means they are very determined and focused and when they commit themselves to a task, they will complete it even in the face of injury or death.

The dogs originated in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and came to America with immigrants. They were used for herding, hunting, to drive livestock, and as family dogs. Pit bulls are a medium build dog, standing 14 to 24 inches tall at the shoulder, with a smooth, glossy, stiff short-haired coat, and weigh between 30 and 90 pounds. They have an athletic build of well-defined musculature. Their eyes are round to an almond shape. The tail is thick at the base and tapers to a thin point. Pit bulls have a life expectancy of 12 to 14 years, making them one of the longer living dogs.

There is a common myth associated with the pit bull that helps to add to the public fear. It has been reported in various instances that the pit bull has a locking jaw. No animal has a locking jaw. Pit bulls have a strong and athletic build that makes them a popular breed for fighting or long enduring work. They are generally friendly, aggressive behavior toward humans are uncharacteristic of the breed. Pit bulls were at one time nicknamed the “Nanny dog” for their loyalty and protective nature with children (Hafstrom, 2007).

They are highly intelligent and have an abundance of energy. The dogs need to receive routine exercise to expel the energy to avoid any boredom or destructive behavior. As a result of their breeding nature, they have a strong instinct to chase fleeing animals, such as cats, squirrels, deer, and livestock. The name pit bull encompasses more than just this single breed; American Staffordshire terrier and Staffordshire bull terrier are considered in this breed classification.

Pit bulls, as they are known to most people, have had their reputations drug through the mud for many years now due to misinformation, misrepresentation through improper upbringing or training, and the ever present amoral media's mission to feed on and sustain society's fears and misconceptions for the sake of ratings. Over the years the media has lost their place in society. Their stories are all about the bottom line, the almighty dollar. They have to be the first to report on a story, and many times not having all their facts or reporting without fact checking.

The news stories involving pit bulls are no different. The media plays on the fears of society and what better than to report on vicious dogs. Who better than the media to pick on than the pit bull that the public has learned to hate and fear? The media's stories do not have to be accurate since there is no legal liability in the negative portrayal of the dogs or their owners. (T. E. Houston, 2007) There have been several stories of dog attacks ignored by the media because of the breed of dog that was involved. A woman in France had a face transplant after her Labrador Retriever attacked her and mutilated her face.

The story was only published in a couple of newspapers, no but flashy headlines on the front page. A lady in Canada was mauled by her neighbor's three pit bulls after they jumped the fence and entered her back yard. The story was seen internationally. The same day, a 2 year who was not supervised wandered into a yard and was killed by a starving pit bull. That story was buried in a local paper, and mostly only family and friends know of the incident. Pit bulls are also synonymous for dog fighting. Attributable to their strength, endurance, and high level of pain tolerance pit bulls are able to fight until complete exhaustion.

The training that the pit bulls endure for fighting is cruel and inhumane. They are usually tied outside with an extremely heavy chain, weights around their neck to build muscle, with no protection from the elements. They can be tied to a treadmill for endless hours. The dogs will be starved; then, thrown food that they have to fight for, sometimes containing ground glass or gunpowder. They will also be beaten with sticks or other objects to force

them to attack. Dogs that still do not become aggressive or fighters will be used as bait dogs to train others to fight.

People training dogs to fight will also use cats, rabbits, and other small animals as bait. With the negative reputation the pit bull holds as a vicious and dangerous dog, legislation has been passed internationally as well as nationally regarding ownership of the breed. Every ten or so years, the breed's popularity changes; therefore, the statistics of dog bites and attacks change as well. The 70's showed the rise of the Doberman, the 90's was the Rottweiler, and the 00's was the pit bull (Breed Specific Legislation, 2011). Breed Specific Laws has been enacted in 12 European countries and in 17 states.

The laws state that the owner must have the dog contained at all times, carry \$100, 000 to \$300, 000 in liability insurance, and must be spayed or neutered. Some states and municipalities do not allow the ownership of a pit bull or pit bull related dog. If the owner fails to uphold the laws they will be subject to varying fines, citations ranging from misdemeanors to felonies, possible jail time, and the risk of having the dog euthanized. Pit bulls are not the problem. The only problem is the people. Michael Vick is a perfect example of a problem person involved with pit bulls.

In 2007, he was arrested for a dog fighting ring in Virginia. There were 54 pit bulls found on the property. There were a total of 51 dogs seized from the property. Two of the dogs died in shelters, one died because of medical reasons, and another was put down because of its behavior was too violent. (Gorant, 2008) Of the dogs, 22 were sent to a kennel named Dogtown.

Thankfully, 21 of the dogs have been adopted except for Lucas, Vick's prize fighting dog, has been court ordered to remain at the facility indefinitely.

Aside from being great family pets and companions, pit bulls have a wide array of jobs.

Pit bulls can be seen doing a number of different jobs in the community.

They are police dogs sniffing out narcotics and explosives. Pit bulls are excellent for search and rescue and border patrol. They also make wonderful hearing and therapy dogs. Pit bulls behavior is a reflection of the care and training of their owner's or the lack of it. They are affectionate and loyal, extremely playful, and quite intelligent. They are utilized around the world as service dogs to the military, police, and other organizations, therapy dogs for the disabled, or loving and loyal companions to children and adults alike.

Many people forget the famous pit bulls like Petey on the Little Rascals.

Quite a number of well-known people have also owned pit bulls over the years. Laura Ingalls' dog, Jack, was indeed a pit bull. Helen Keller's companion was also a pit bull, as well as Fred Astaire, Brad Pitt, Presidents Roosevelt and Wilson, Thomas Edison, Humphrey Bogart, and countless others. As a powerful final testament to their non-violent temperament, the American Temperament Testing Society rates all three of the breeds commonly known as pit bulls above average for having a good temperament.

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