

Pit bull Aggression
Olivia Brenay and Hannah Lamp
South Lyon High School
December 2018

Abstract

This paper is used to address the stereotype against Pit bulls and their aggressive behavior. Pit bulls are shown in a negative light to the public due to their aggressive label. This label of aggression affects the way Pit bulls are treated and because of this many are terminated. We searched for sources that not only supported but also denied the stereotype. We made sure to get both point of views which allowed us to broaden our research. Not only did we focus on the internet articles, but also tv shows and music. We conducted a vague survey to determine if the stereotype is present today. With this survey, we found who specifically believes the stereotype without knowing it. After we administered our survey and looked over the results, we were able to see that a specific gender seems to believe this stereotype more. It was difficult to find stories that were reliable and truthful, many people put their stories on the internet without any credentials. In conclusion to our research, we found that this stereotype stills exist today. This stereotype has been around for a while so it was very easy to find history on not only the Pit bull, but also the stereotype itself. The Pit bull stereotype of being aggressive is still present in today's society and media.

Word Count: (225)

Pitbull Aggression

Introduction

A dog is more than just a pet, but they are a part of a family. They are always there for you even if you don't realize it. Imagine a young family playing at the park with their new puppy. Most people probably thought of a young golden retriever or maybe even a lab. Instead the family just got a Pit bull puppy. This is probably not what you would or thought about for a new family pet. Today stories are constantly popping up about the dangerous nature of these animals, and how unsafe they are to others. Many dogs are labeled as aggressive or harmful, but the Pit bull is especially known for this, and is feared by plenty. People say that because of their background they will always be an unsafe breed and they should not be able to be homed as pets. Today restrictions have evolved in order to keep the public safe and discourage people against this breed. Because of this a stereotype has been built about the breed, the dogs then suffer due to it.

History and Origin of the Stereotype

To understand the history of the stereotype; we first have to know the history of the Pit bull. They were originally used for bear-baiting, they would train these dogs to attack and then put them in a pit and they were forced to fight bears, this was very popular in England in until the 1800s. They were also thrown in with Bulls and other dogs as well (Muller & Fitzhugh, 2016). This became illegal, but dog fighting still exists today, most common in the deep south. The Pit bull has been bred to fight for hundreds of years which leads them to have a bad reputation. What may be surprising is that Pit bulls were actually used as nanny dogs, shown in

Figure 1 and *Figure 2*, before all this (For Over, 2011). This goes against the stereotype that Pit bulls have been able to accumulate over time. The stereotype began once the dog fighting started and people were more exposed to these dogs that were specifically trained to attack and viewed that as their natural behavior. There are multiple myths surrounding Pit bulls; such as, a Pit bulls brain does not stop growing and it continues to swell eventually leading them to go crazy. Others include the ability to apply jaw pressure as strong as 1600 P.S.I; as well as, the ability to lock their jaws (Pit Bull Myths, 2014). These myths have been refuted multiple times yet plenty of people still believe them. These myths are a driving point behind the Pit bull stereotype.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Pit bull nannies. Both figures are past pictures of children posing with Pit bulls, this gives off the impression of a sweet, gentle dog.

Analysis of the Stereotype in Present Day

Today the easiest way to spread news is through the media. Companies use this platform to educate the general public about a situation that they believe is important to be known. Television shows, movies, music, and commercials are all forms of media that are used to veer a person's view in a specific direction, whether it be good or bad.

Television is probably one of the easiest ways to spread information to the public. Americans spend a good amount of their free time in front of a television screen. With this being said, a t.v. series or show that helps convey a positive light on Pit bulls attitude could potentially be seen by thousands. A well known television show that has helped to improve lives of this breed is called, "Pitbulls and Parolees". This show was produced to help create a positive connotation for this breed. Showing the public that these Pit bulls are not always as bad as how people make them seem to be. It is all about giving these dogs, who are left to die, a second chance at life and a loving home. They take Pits that are thrown on the streets, having to learn to survive on their own, and help mend them back to health. They go from knocking on death's door to a new loving family because of this organization. This started as a small family business, but with the growth they had from their show it is not a booming company in New Orleans.

Another large part of people's lives today is music. Songs are not made up of only a beat and a melody, but through lyrics, important messages can be communicated to the collective population. John Shipe wrote a song that showed what the general public thinks about Pit bulls when they encounter one. Throughout his song he touches base on many precautions taken around these animals. The lyrics of the song explain the stereotype that is held against these dogs. Shipe writes, "People see me walking down the street, they all run and hide, I used to take it personally, now I take it in stride"(Pit Bull Blues, 2009). This displays the fear that people feel when they see these dogs. People don't even want to walk on the same sidewalk as these animals, because of the unknown. It not only shows how this reaction is common recurrence when people see a Pit bull, but also how prevalent this stereotype is in today's society. In addition John Shipe writes about how children are often afraid to pass through his yard, making

it apparent that parents are teaching their children to be in fright around these animals. Which is why this stereotype and the undenyng fear that these animals evoke within the public has a growing history like it does. Generation after generation fear these animals without ever truly getting to understand why they might act the way they do.

Another well known case of animal aggression was seen in the Blackfish documentary. During the movie, a comparison was made between the whales attacking humans and Pit bulls attacking humans. They commented saying that if it had been a Pit bull that had killed someone; it would have been euthanized; however since it was a whale, different actions were taken.

The Stereotypes Validity

Experiment

As a team we conducted a survey that will help us better understand this specific stereotype; as well as, to whom it applies to most. In the survey five simple questions were presented. With these questions, we were hoping to find any patterns or commonalities that would connect to this stereotype. Basic questions were listed first as to help with later results. The survey consisted of questions; such as, gender identity; as well as, the age of the participant. This allowed us to see if a specific gender believes this stereotype more than the other, or if age groups would have any major influence on how people may feel. The next question was regarding family household incomes. This question was intended to help see if wealth has any influence on what type of dog breed a family may prefer. These first three questions were important to help find patterns within the results that we found later in the survey. The last two questions had to do with dog breeds. We asked if the person being surveyed was a dog owner; if

they replied with “yes” then a follow up question was asked, “what breed of dog do you own”? This helped us to find if any of our results were bias or not. If someone were to own a Pit bull breed dog then they were more likely to disagree with this stereotype. The final survey questions was regarding what breed of dog they thought was best for a family household. They were to choose one option from the follow: Lab, Beagle, Pomeranian, Pit bull, and Border Collie. Our results suggest that females are more likely to choose a Pit bull as a family dog opposed to males. We found this interesting because women have a stereotype to be more cautious and we expected them to pick a different breed, while expecting that men to choose the muscular and more built dog.

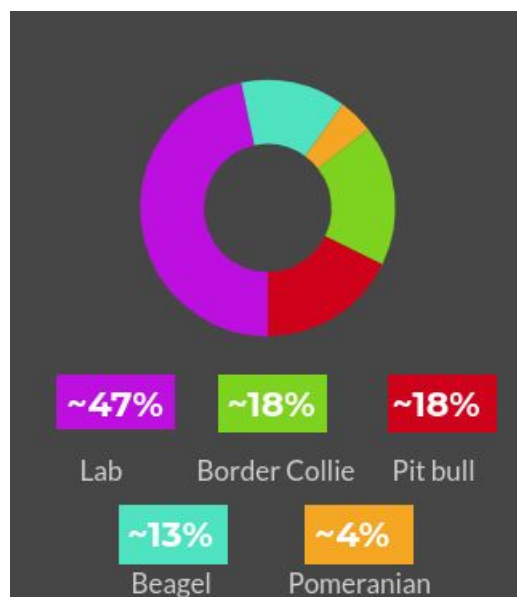


Figure 3: Results for the different types of breeds. Determines the breed that people seem to believe is the best in a family environment.

The survey was given to 45 people, of both genders and all age groups. As seen above, most people chose the Lab to be the best breed for a family with ~47 %. We found that both the Border Collie as well as the Pit bull both received a ~18% scoring. Lastly, the Beagle received a rating of ~13% and then Pomeranian only ~4%. Our results corresponded with our predictions that we had before our research. There is always going to be people who disagree with the media

no matter what the conflict may be. With this being said, we knew that there was going to be those who thought that Pit bulls are fine as a family pet and see nothing wrong with their personalities.

Research

After analyzing multiple sources, we found that most exhibit our stereotype of Pit bulls and aggression, it is apparent that there are many people to this day that are still supporters of this stereotype. One article in particular wrote about Pit bulls using the word vicious repeatedly to describe these dogs and stated that they can turn in an instant, even against their owner, and become aggressive (Roberts, 2007). Why is it that Pit bull actions are always highlighted on the media while other breeds actions go overlooked? Pit bulls are not the only dogs that bite humans and act aggressively. However, studies show that Pit bulls and Rottweilers, another breed labelled as aggressive, account for half of the dog bite related fatalities (Muller & Fitzhugh, 2016). We found that certain countries have banned Pit bulls even some states here in America have banned them. Breed Specific Legislation, BSL for short, shows that eleven states have BSL constitutional laws against Pit bulls (Greenwood, 2017). This means that the Pit bull breed is illegal to have in your home if you live in that state or county. As seen in *figure 4*, instead of banning Pit bulls all together, certain places present laws that make it more difficult for people to own Pit bulls. These laws are put in place to discourage people to want to own this breed due to the difficulties they have to overcome to have them. In 2016, a man had adopted a new dog in Waterford and posted a picture of him on social media. Not too long after, the police showed up at his door claiming that he had to get rid of his dog because there was a law in place that banned Pit bulls from that area. The owner claimed that his dog was an American Bulldog and not a Pit

bull; however, the officer believed him to be a Pit bull. It all came down to whether the veterinarian would claim him as a bulldog or Pit bull. If the dog was deemed as a bulldog then the owner would be able to keep, but if he was labeled as a Pit bull then he would have to be rehomed (Wisely, 2016).



Figure 4: A poster shows that if your Pit bull is not registered by a certain date, than it will be removed from your care and put down.

Conclusion/ Predictions for the Future

Dogs are commonly seen on an everyday basis. You probably don't realize how often you pass by a dog walking downtown or in a park. In today's world, restaurants and companies are more open and willing to allowing dogs in their location. Although people and places are more accepting of these animals, some have limitations. Through our research and survey, we found sources that helped us prove that our stereotype is true, and still active today. After looking at our survey we were left with results that we did not expect. This stereotype is well known all around America. It is constantly talked about how dangerous and aggressive this breed is towards people. Within these past few years, more and more Pit bull organizations have evolved. A well known organization is The American Pit Bull Foundation. There they address the issue of homeless pitbulls; giving them the opportunity at a second life and the ability to be

adopted (2014). They are trying to broaden the general public's knowledge on these animals and helping to educate those who may not know much about this breed. In the next few years we are hoping that society will become more inviting to these animals. Hoping to change the stereotype of these loving animals, allowing them to be more welcomed as a breed.

References

- For Over 100 Years, Pitbulls Were Our Babysitters. (2011, September 04). Retrieved from <https://www.adoptapet.com/blog/for-over-100-years-pitbulls-were-our-babysitters/>
- Greenwood, A. (2017, December 07). Here's A Map Of Where Your Pit Bull Isn't Welcome. Retrieved October 5, 2018, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/06/bsl-map_n_7216190.html
- Muller, W., & Fitzhugh, J. (2016, November 20). Why do pit bulls attack? Retrieved October 12, 2018, from <https://www.sunherald.com/news/local/article115943753.html>
- Pit Bull Blues by John Shipe [Advertisement]. (2009, July 14). Retrieved October 7, 2018, from <https://youtu.be/TtGT2apOlKw>
- Pit Bull Myths - Debunked. (2014, March 06). Retrieved from <https://americanpitbullfoundation.com/pit-bull-myths-debunked/>
- Pitbulls and Parolees (T.V. show) Home. (n.d.). Retrieved September/October, 2018, from <http://www.vrcpitbull.com/>
- Roberts, B. (2007, January 4). WHO LET THE DOGS OFF? EXCLUSIVE Scandal as THOUSANDS of Pitbulls Go Unchecked. *The Mirror (London, England)*. Retrieved October 7, 2018, from http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-156684221.html?refid=easy_hf
- Wisely, J. (2016, June 13). Waterford police cite owner of smiling dog. Retrieved from <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2016/06/13/smiling-dog-cited/85832822/>