

Perceptions of Pit Bulls and Other Canine Breeds

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Why pit bulls?

- Worked at a dog kennel from 2007-2009
- Observed people's reactions to a pit bull



Thesis Question

- Is there a significant difference between people's perceptions of pit bull breeds compared to non-pit bull breeds?
- Are there identifying characteristics between people who have a positive and negative perception of pit bull breed dogs?

What is a pit bull?

- Not an official breed; refers to a type of dogs
- Over 20 breeds can be considered pit bulls

- American Pit Bull Terrier
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier
- American Staffordshire Terrier

- Many Bulldog breeds and European breeds

Can you spot the American Pit Bull Terrier?



Can you spot the American Pit Bull Terrier?



American Pit
Bull Terrier



Alapaha Blue
Blood Bulldog



Presa Canario



Dogo Argentino



American Staffordshire Terrier

Characteristics of pit bulls

- Medium to large size dog
- Muscular, stocky build
- Short coat
- Wide skull and square jaw



(AKC, 2012)

History of the pit bull breeds

- Europe (particularly England)
- Terrier x Bulldog
- Purposes:
 - Used by butchers, hunting, baiting
 - Companionship, “Nanny” dogs
- Known for confidence, strength, gameness, loyalty, friendliness, and intelligence (BADRAP, 2011)

History of the pit bull breeds

- Brought to the United States by English settlers
 - Hunting/catch dogs on farms, companionship
- Military dogs
 - Sergeant Stubby – first war dog; World War I
- Search and rescue
- Service dogs
- Drug and bomb detection
- Therapy dogs
(Ferguson, 2012)



(ForPitsake.org, 2011)



(Sgt. Stubby, 2009)

Dog fighting

- Began when bull baiting became illegal
- Became more organized and widespread in the United States in the 1970s
- Pit bulls gained a “tough dog” reputation
- Stereotypes made the breed popular among gangs
- Became “associated with young male owners, dog fighting and the drug trade” (Burrows and Fielding, 2005)

Dog bite reports

- No national system of recording dog bites
- Factors:
 - What constitutes a dog bite?
 - Who identifies the breed?
 - What counts as a pit bull?
- CDC report of dog bite related fatalities, 1979-1998 (Sacks, et al, 2008)
 - Collected information from HSUS registry, newspapers
 - Most well known report



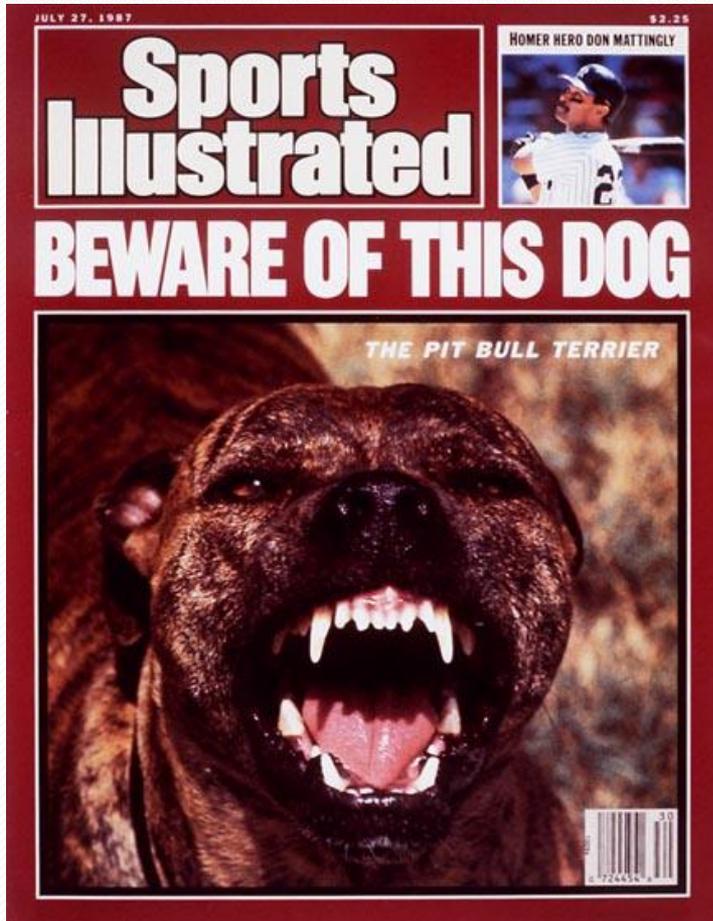
Dog bite reports

- Many dog bite statistics report that pit bulls are the breed most common to bite
- More accurate
 - Number of pit bulls vs. number of pit bulls that bite
 - Difficult to obtain population numbers
- Delise, K. (2002) estimated pit bulls were responsible for 6.7% of dog bite fatalities from 1965-2001
- ACF (2002) estimated U.S. pit bull population for be 9.6% of dogs

Media influence

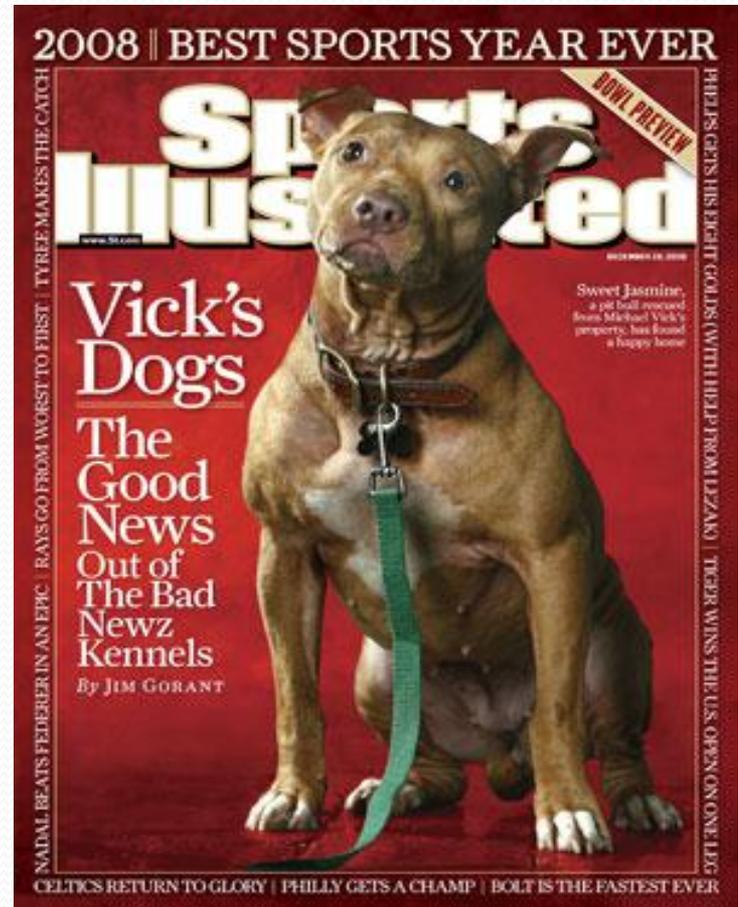
- Helped propel negative stereotype
 - Cover stories of *Sports Illustrated*, *Rolling Stone*, *People Weekly*
- Report a disproportionate amount of pit bull bites compared to other breeds
 - Pack journalism (Cohen and Richardson, 2002)
- Misleading photos/misidentifying breeds
- Emotional language – vicious, dangerous, etc
- Probably not an anti-pit bull agenda, just capitalizing on “pit bull hysteria”

1987



(Watcher, 1987)

2008



(Bruty, 2008)

Breed specific legislation

- Laws that aim to reduce the number of dog bites to humans by regulating or banning specific breeds or types of dogs
- Vary widely
 - Restrict ownership to outright ban, restrict to owner's property, wear muzzle in public
 - Owner must have liability insurance
- Also can affect homeowner's insurance, rental contracts



Breed specific legislation

- Often targets specific breeds but includes a “catch all” statement:
“...an American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, **or any dog displaying the majority of physical traits of any one or more of the above breeds...**” (Denver Code of Ordinances, 2012)
- Physical traits was only about 25% accurate when compared to DNA analysis (Voith, V.L., et al, 2009)
- Courts haven't allowed DNA testing in BSL cases

Breed specific legislation

- 300-650 cities in the United States
- U.S. Army, Air Force, and Marines have banned pit bulls and Rottweilers (Military breed-specific laws, 2012)
 - Army includes Dobermans and Chows
 - Individual bases address seven different breeds
- 37 countries
 - 27 countries with national laws
 - 10 with BSL in some part (like U.S.)

Breed specific legislation

- Ineffective because it identifies certain breeds as a whole as being dangerous, instead of identifying behavioral factors of individual dogs (Weiss, L.S., 2001)

City	Dog bites in 1971	Dog bites in 2007	Percentage decreased	BSL
Baltimore	6,809	593	90%	No
New York City	37,488	3,776	90%	No
Minneapolis	1,692	239	86%	No
Denver	3,361	493	85%	Yes

- Denver has euthanized approximately 3,500 pit bulls since BSL implemented

Breed specific legislation

- BSL not scientifically supported
- BSL repelled in Netherlands, Italy, Ohio
 - Replaced with “dangerous dog” laws; protocol for when an individual dog exhibits aggressive behavior
- Five main factors that influence a dog’s tendency:
 - Genetics
 - Early experiences (from puppyhood)
 - Socialization and training
 - Health
 - Victim’s behavior

(AVMA Task Force on Canine Aggression on Human-Canine Interaction, 2001)

Survey

- Blind test
- Distributed via Survey Monkey to three Baccalaureate core classes at Oregon State University in Spring 2011

1. How trainable is this breed?
2. How friendly is this breed?
3. Is this breed appropriate as a family pet?
4. How likely is this breed to attack a human?
5. How likely is this breed to attack another animal?
6. How would you feel if this dog was off leash and approached you at the park?
7. Is this breed considered a pit bull breed? (Yes or No)

Survey

- Demographic information:
 - What class did you get the survey through?
 - What college is your major in?
 - Have you ever owned a dog?
 - Have you ever owned a pit bull?
 - Gender
 - Age
- 194 respondents total



Pit bulls



Bull Terrier



Boxer



Am. Staffordshire



Am. Pit Bull

Non-pit bulls



German Shepherd



Labrador Retriever



Cocker Spaniel



Rottweiler

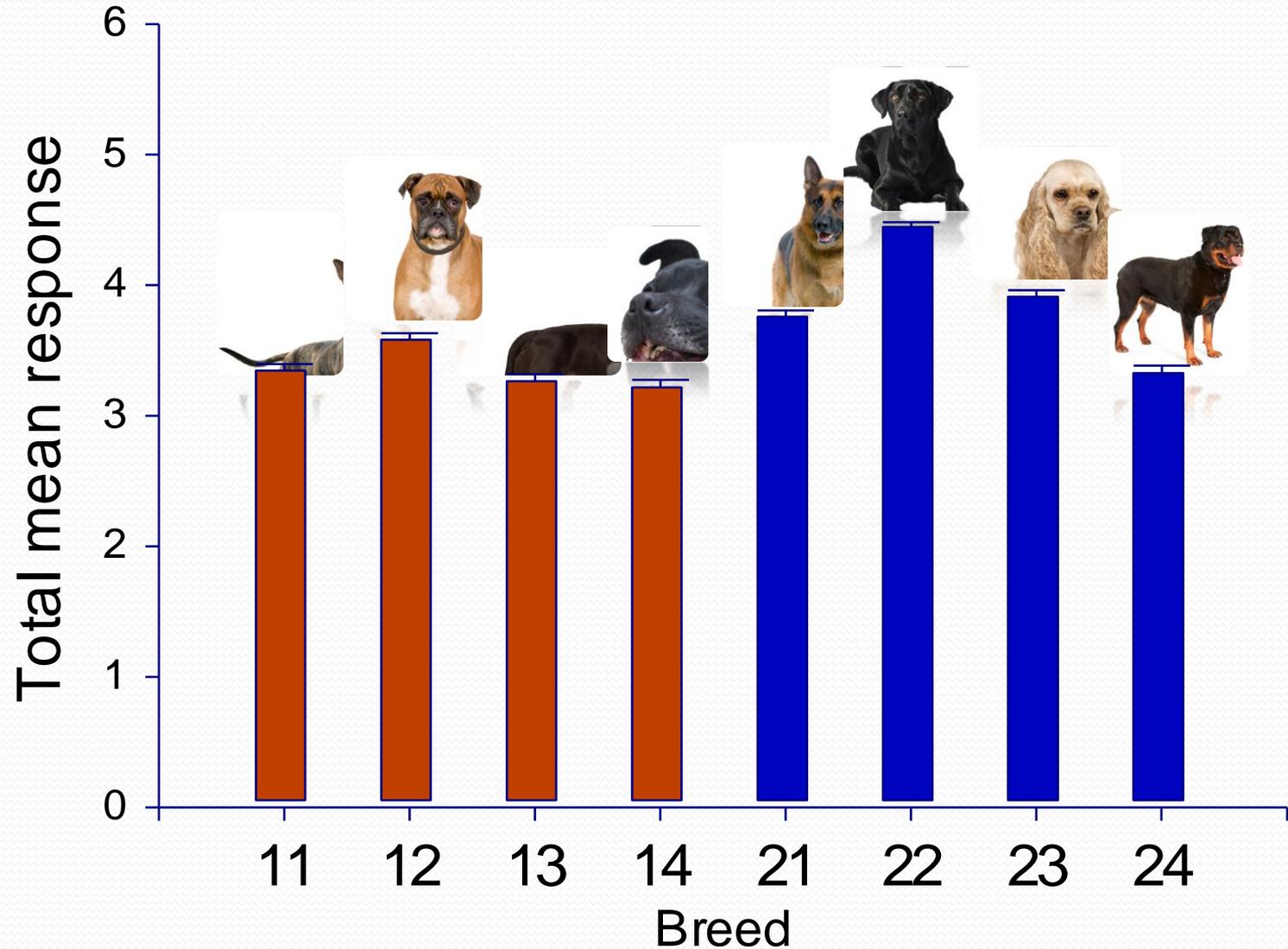
Results

- Mean response for all eight breeds

How trainable	4.0
How friendly	3.7
Appropriateness as a family pet	3.6
Likelihood to attack a human	3.7
Likelihood to attack an animal	3.4
Comfort level off-leash	3.4

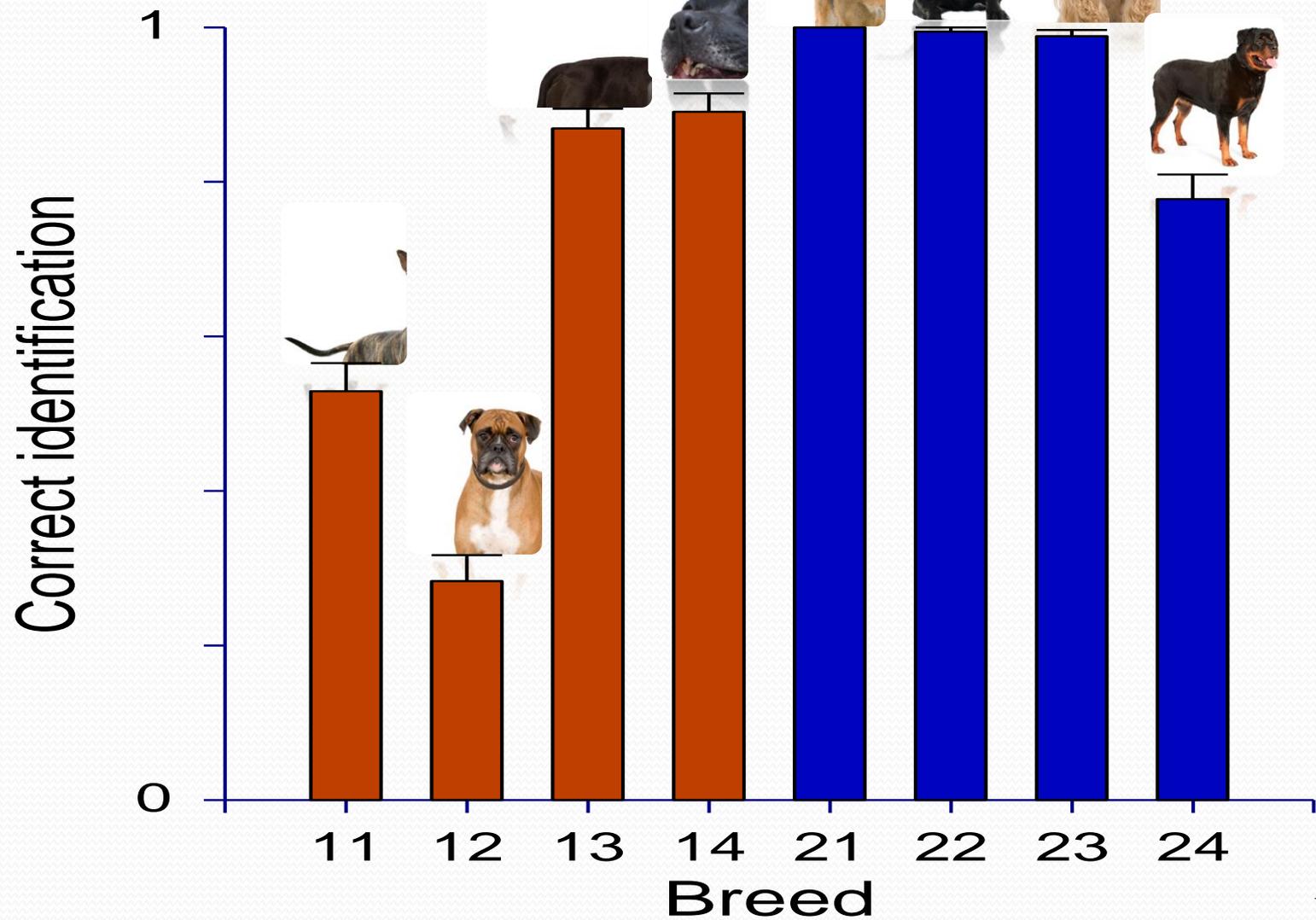
- Ratings were neutral to positive overall

Total mean response by breed



$P < 0.05$

Identification as a pit bull breed



Results

- Likelihood to attack a human and attack another animal are positively correlated overall
- Likelihood to attack a human is negatively correlated to friendliness overall
- American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Bull Terrier, and Rottweiler were almost always rated similarly
- Boxer was not rated similarly to the other pit bull breeds; also not recognized as a pit bull breed by 75% of respondents (Twining, et. al., 2000)

Results

No significant difference between:

- Dog owners and non-dog owners
- Pit bull owners and people who did not own pit bulls
 - Owners scored pit bull breeds higher, but the population was very small (10%)
- Between age ranges
 - However population was primarily 18-25 years old (93%)
- Significant difference between colleges
 - Business and Engineering (3.4) versus Agriculture Sciences, Public Health and Human Sciences, Education, and Science (3.7)

Results

- Pit bull breeds were rated more negatively than non-pit bull breeds.
- Pit bulls were not perceived negatively.
 - 3 on a 1-5 scale
- A survey with a representative sample may yield different results.

Thank you!!

- Dr. Blythe
- Dr. Menino
- Dr. Rosenlicht



- Everyone who has listened to me ramble on about pit bulls in the last three years!