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Absolutely
perfect!

Are Pit Bulls Aggressive Because of Genetics or Training?

In August of 2007 Michael Vick, former Atlanta Falcons quarterback, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to operate a dogfighting enterprise. His dog fighting operation, Bad Newz Kennels, raised and trained pit bulls to fight other dogs.(Dohrman) When police raided the kennel they found forty-nine pit bulls that were injured or in poor condition. They also found the buried remains of many dogs that had either been hanged or drowned because they were unwilling to fight.(Clark) The publicity of Michael Vick's case created widespread interest in whether pit bull aggression is genetic or caused by training(Dorhman).

Pit bulls are small dogs that have unusual strength for their size(Fogle 274). They are very muscular, graceful, and have wonderful agility. Their low center of gravity helps them stay on their feet during fights.(Colie 147) They have a short, glossy coat (46) and were once used for attacking bulls and bears and for dog-fighting matches(Fox 503). Some of the breeds commonly known as pit bulls include the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, bull terrier, bulldog, bull mastiff, and Staffordshire bull terrier.(Fox 503)

Aggression in dogs is anything threatening such as growling, snapping, or snarling as a warning or attempt to cause physical injury. It is most often inherited and can be recognized while the dog is a puppy.(Siegal 8) There are many different types of aggression. Some of these include fear aggression(Tennant 121), predatory aggression(140), food aggression(156), possessive aggression(152), and dominance aggression(119). Of these, the most dangerous is fear

aggression. It is so dangerous because what might trigger the dog is unpredictable. Some of the common triggers are people who walk with limps, children that are animated, and people who try to befriend the dog by petting it.(122) Predatory aggression occurs when a dog feels threatened and may result in attacks on humans or other dogs(120). Food aggression can be seen when the dog growls at anyone who tries to take its food or walks near the food. It is an attempt by the dog to display dominance. Food aggression happens because many trainers do not teach the puppy at a young age that the trainer has the right to take away or come near the dog's food.(156)

Possessive aggression is when dogs display dominance when dealing with their toys. In the wild, ownership of any object is a signal of dominance and high ranking. When humans use toys to play games with dogs, it is fun for the human, but to the dog it is a display of status.(152) The root for almost every type of aggression is dominance aggression. All dogs are born with the natural tendency and instinct to be at the top of the dominance stake which prepares them to live in a wolf pack. Even when they live with humans, dogs assume pack roles and try to establish a position through interaction with the pack members. There is proof that male dogs tend to be more dominant than females.(120)

There are many contributions to dog aggression(Siegal 61). Some include age of the dog(Serpell 94), genetics, source of the dog, lack of socialization, and misguided owner behavior. Some dogs are born aggressive while others have it taught to them.(Siegal 61) People who use their dogs as security frequently create permanent, uncontrollable aggression. The lack of proper socialization by any type of breeder has a large influence on the behavior of the dog as an adult. Severe punishment, harmful training techniques, and any type of negative human behavior almost always creates aggression.(6) If the dog grows up with an experienced breeder it is more likely that it will be better trained than if it were brought up by any other source(62).

Genetics plays a large role in how aggressive any dog is and may either increase or decrease the tendency to aggression(Serpell 133). If either parent of the dog is aggressive, the trait is most likely going to be inherited by all the puppies(Siegal 6). If a dog is aggressive the owner most likely will not be able to change the behavior, just control it(Siegal 230). Some of the solutions to control your dog's aggression are changing the external conditions, leash correction, verbal correction, muzzle, wire dog crate, use of food, shake can, spray bottle filled with water, garden hose, or use of doorbell(170). Dog aggression needs to be recognized and addressed because its presence is often denied by humans.(61).

There is proof that pit bulls and other fighting breeds have been purposely selected for their ability and eagerness to attack and high tolerance of pain(Serpell 61). It has become a major human objective to make the animals more aggressive than their wild ancestors(132). These dogs have been chosen to portray the aggressive impulses of humans and have given these animals a violent image(133). According to many surveys, pit bulls rank highest in number of dog bites and attacks(136). Many communities have banned ownership of these dogs for safety reasons(253).

Forty-seven of the dogs bred by Michael Vick have now been given freedom and are thriving in their environment. This indicates that the genetic history can affect the aggressiveness of pit bulls, but it is mainly caused by how they are trained (Serpell 132). Many people think that in just a few generations pit bulls could be changed into dogs that are acceptable as pets for many people (133).

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