

# PROFILE BY DEED, NOT BY BREED

This month, I have chosen a topic that is not only about canine behavior, but also about human behavior, and unfortunately, it represents the darker side of both. I've been reading a lot in the media lately about "breed profiling", or the banning or euthanasia of specific breeds of dogs based on that breed's potential to be dangerous. As fatal dog bite stories ripple through communities and strike fear in our hearts, everyone scrambles to come up with a solution to the problem. What we usually end up with, though, is a knee-jerk reaction; such as banning an entire breed of dog for an entire community of people. That response doesn't really address the core issue.

Instead of breed specific legislation, communities should enforce existing dog laws that punish owners for irresponsibility. Just recently, in our own community, we read in the paper about an unfortunate Good Samaritan who had to undergo a painful and expensive series of injections to prevent rabies, after she was bitten by a dog of unknown origin. Who was at fault here?

While Akitas, Rottweilers, Chows, Pit Bulls, Dobermans, Great Danes, and Saint Bernards are breeds frequently profiled as being biters (and that is by no means a complete list), the fact is, any dog in the wrong situation can be a biter and any bite can be serious. Any dog in the hands of the wrong person in the wrong environment has the potential to bite and to be dangerous. In fact, the dog that recently mauled a French woman so badly that she was given the world's first face transplant was, of all things, a Labrador Retriever. Communities would be better served by identifying and centrally registering dangerous dogs (known "biters") and their owners, punishing irresponsible pet owners for creating the problem, and by educating people on how to socialize and raise a well-adjusted dog.

Part of the problem, according to studies performed by the Center for Disease Control and the United States Humane Society, is that in about one-fourth of all fatal dog-bite cases, the owners were previously involved in illegal dog fighting activities. According to Indiana state law, dog fight contests are strictly prohibited and conviction carries a 6-month to 3 year sentence. But, how often do we read or hear in the news about people being arrested and actually prosecuted for exploiting and abusing dogs ... before their dog bites or kills someone? Here's a question ... Should people who have been convicted of dog fighting or other forms of animal cruelty be allowed to own another dog after they have served their sentence? What and who is preventing them from doing just that?

There will always be people who knowingly and intentionally exploit and abuse certain breeds of dogs for their "entertainment". Consequently, that breed of dog gets a bad rap, and not the breed of human who engages in this type of activity. Randall Lockwood, one of the country's leading dog bite experts said, "The junk-yard German shepherd - which looks as if it would rip your throat out - and the German shepherd guide dog are the same breed. But, they are not the same dog, because they have owners with different intentions."

It is very rare for a well socialized, well trained and supervised dog to bite or cause any serious harm to anyone. In my opinion, dangerous dogs should be identified by deed, not by breed. And, regardless of breed, all dogs will bite. The dogs that bite, maul and kill people are vicious because they have owners who want a vicious dog. How do you fix that?

Margo Watkins  
Pet Behavior Counselor  
Hilltop Animal Hospital