

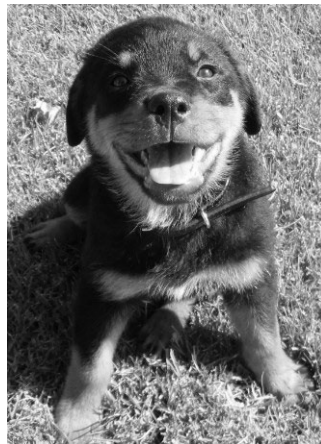
Editor's Note

When constructing an argument the author must consider how he or she will use *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* to appeal to an audience. In her essay, "A Born Killer?" author Leah Johnson opens with an image of her small puppy and a caption asking, "Does she look dangerous to you?" Does this image, coupled with her introduction, successfully grab the reader's attention? Which of the three appeals is Johnson employing in this opening? Johnson also uses images in her argument. What is the effect? If the image were not included, how would this change your reading of the introduction? How does the image support the argument?

The author identifies herself as a dog owner. What is the relationship between her possible biases and the logic of her essay? Do her emotional appeals outweigh her logical appeals? Think about how you would approach an essay that discusses an issue in which you have a personal stake. How would an attachment to a topic change your treatment of it?

A Born Killer?

Leah Johnson



This is my dog Maya. Does she look dangerous to you? Would you put this puppy to sleep just because she is a Rottweiler? (Source: Johnson)

Do you have a dog? If so, what would you do if someone knocked on your door one day and told you that you had two choices: either move your dog out of the county, or have it euthanized (killed). It could happen. Some dog owners in certain regions of the country, such as Miami, Florida, are faced with this decision. You might

not think that this would ever happen to you and your dog but with new legislations being put in motion throughout the United States regarding “dangerous dogs”, and more specifically “dangerous breeds”, your beloved pet could be targeted.

Rottweilers and pit bulls are easy targets for supporters of banned breed legislation. According to the United States Center for Disease Control about “4.7 million dog bites” are reported annually. Of these attacks only about fifteen to twenty are fatal; however, Merritt Clifton, an expert on dog bites, did a study on dog bites over a period of twenty five years and found that “sixty five percent of those fatalities were caused by pit bulls, Rottweilers, and Presa Canarios.” As a result of these figures many local governments are instituting ordinances to regulate these and other potentially dangerous breeds. While Chihuahuas, poodles, and other small breeds are responsible for the majority of dog bites reported, larger dog breeds such as Rottweilers and Pit Bulls have the ability to inflict more damage. In fact, the director of the Ventura County Animal Regulation, Kathy Jenks, informed me that the “Chihuahua is responsible for more annual bites than the Rottweiler and Chow breeds combined.” Even though Rottweilers and Pit Bulls are responsible for fewer bites, when they *do* attack the consequences can be deadly. According to Mary Randolph, a lawyer specializing in legal issues regarding dogs, “there are sweet dogs and aggressive ones—and even within breeds that have been bred for aggression, most of the individual dogs are not dangerous.” For instance, my Rottweiler, Maya, has been to a number of different veterinary offices. In every single one people have remarked on what a sweet dog she is. Initially, many people are intimidated by her because of her breed but it would make no sense to have to get rid of this sweet dog *just* because she is a Rottweiler. As there are no bad races in humans, there are no bad breeds in dogs.

Even though there are no bad breeds, legislation has been passed against them. An example of breed specific legislation is the Pit Bull Law in Miami-Dade County in Florida, where it is illegal to have a Pit Bull in your possession unless you registered it prior 1989. If you are found to be in possession of a Pit Bull while residing in the county after 1989, you will be fined for violating this law and the “humane destruction of the Pit Bull” will be ordered by a court (Miami). Even if you did register your Pit Bull before 1989, Miami Dade County requires you to muzzle, confine, and have your dog insured for fifty thousand dollars in case the dog injures someone. However, the definition of what is considered a Pit Bull is really up to the discretion of the officer. In my personal experience, I have had my purebred English Labrador retriever, Kudo, mistaken any number of times for a Pit Bull because he has a large, blocky head and a powerful build. Kudo, however, was donated by a reputable breeder to Guide Dogs of America to be trained as a seeing eye dog. Given the lack of any kind of guidelines regarding what a pit bull is, if an animal control



This is my dog Kudo training to be a guide dog. Does he look like a Pit Bull to you? He may not, but to some, possibly those who decide his fate, he does. (Source: Johnson)

officer decided Kudo was a Pit Bull, he could be destroyed if he lived in a county implementing breed specific legislation. If Kudo was persecuted just because he looked to be one of a banned breed, then that would result in the loss of a potentially very valuable dog that has done nothing wrong. Guide dogs of America only uses dogs bred to have friendly, docile temperaments—they are not vicious.

Currently breed specific legislation targets mostly Pit Bulls. Governments seem to “uphold laws that impose special restrictions on certain breeds or ban them outright” (Randolph 10). If the breed is not prohibited entirely, oftentimes many restrictions are placed on them, such as muzzling the dog in public, sterilizing it, and keeping it confined. Ironically, the Pit Bull, once used on “United States World War II posters to represent the American spirit—stalwart, unafraid, but not belligerent”—now seems to be public enemy number one (Randolph 12).

In previous years the same stigma now attached to owning a Pit Bull, was attached to owning a German shepherd, Doberman and Rottweiler, animals currently used as assistance dogs and police dogs. These dogs have the ability to be aggressive but are so highly trained that they are valued members of the owner’s family. Many are concerned that once Pit Bulls are eradicated the attention will shift to eliminating Rottweilers, then Akitas, and so on.

Before legislations start banning entire breeds altogether, we should find the underlying source of the problem—irresponsible owners. The majority of the individual dogs that are considered potentially dangerous (because of their breed) have never shown any signs of aggression and are great family dogs. As their service work in the police field and as therapy dogs shows, they are extremely intelligent and dedicated. These attributes seem to suggest that the problem of aggressive dogs seems to lie more with the owner and a lack of training than with the dog.

Many problems concerning dog attacks and aggression could easily be solved with “proper training and socialization methods” (Jenks). Most dogs are kept as family pets in households. While pets do not have to be as highly trained as police dogs, they all benefit from training and socialization—getting the dog acclimated to new people, objects, and environments. Many people might argue that a lot of the reported dog bites and attacks by Pit Bulls and Rottweilers are not from dog fighting dogs but from family pets attacking toddlers. After all, most dog bites happen to children between the ages “five to nine” (United States). However, the main reason for these attacks is poor socialization. Many times, for instance, a couple has a Rottweiler or Pit Bull before they have children and do not expose it to infants or toddlers. When their dog is exposed to children, some might react negatively by biting or attacking the child; this happens with all breeds, not just “dangerous breeds” because the dog simply does not know what the child is—it may not recognize the child is a human.

There is a solution to preventing dogs from being aggressive; to fix the problem we need to take a look at a very important element: education. I believe the United States government should put more effort into educating dog owners about the proper way to raise and train their dog, and there should be less focus on punishing the breed. It would be a tremendous help if dog owners put an effort into “knowing the temperament of [the] dog, the history/origin of the breed, and proper training and socialization methods” to help eliminate dog aggression and attacks (Jenks). I believe it would be effective for dog owners, especially those with more powerful dogs, such as Pit Bulls and Rottweilers, to attend mandatory puppy obedience and socialization classes to obtain their dog license; while these classes would be most beneficial for puppies, they would also benefit adult dogs as well.

Moreover, since it really is not effective to ban a whole breed I think more effort needs to be put on restricting people who buy these potentially dangerous dogs and monitoring individual dogs that have bitten people. An aggressive Pit Bull or Rottweiler happens as a result of how it was raised and what kind of training was provided to it—not its breed. Pit Bulls in particular are often used for dog fighting where the owner’s desired result is an aggressive dog. Rather than spending money on enforcing banned breed laws, police should concentrate on dismantling dog fighting rings and prosecuting the people responsible. Currently there is no monitoring

system in place to ensure that pit bulls do not end up in the hands of irresponsible people.

There have been some good efforts to control “dangerous dogs” as individuals. I acknowledge that some dogs do have behavioral problems and are aggressive, but there is a solution for these dogs. For example, in some jurisdictions throughout the United States people have the opportunity to report a dog that bites and/or shows aggression. Typically there is a hearing where the case may be stated both for and against the dog, and a ruling is made. Rulings can range from dismissal to fines, restrictions on the dog itself, such as muzzling in public or confinement to a fenced yard, to euthanasia. Whatever the outcome of these rulings, the dog has been treated as an individual and not just punished because of its breed.

The problem of dog aggression is not from a certain breed. We cannot sit back and blame Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, or any other breed that we deem dangerous. Pet owners need to take the blame. Many times dog owners tend to be a huge problem and can unintentionally create these dangerous dogs. I know from personal experience that proper training is effective. I own a dog that could potentially be very dangerous: a Rottweiler. From the moment I brought her home, I have paid special attention to taking her to obedience classes and socializing her, getting her used to everything I could think of. As a result of the time I spent with her, she is a loyal, friendly dog that respects me and other people and would never resort to aggression. Since a lack of education seems to be the major problem, the focus should shift from eliminating bad breeds to eliminating bad owners.

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