

BREED SPECIFIC OR LOOKS SPECIFIC?

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The term “pit bull characteristics” and “all three bully breeds” are used as descriptions of the dogs that the breed-specific laws would apply to. However, I’m not sure what a “pit bull characteristic” is because the term pit bull does not refer to any specific breed of dog. It is ironic that legislation containing the words “breed” and “specific” define “the specific breed” as a nebulous group of three or more distinct breeds along with any other dog that might be mixed with those breeds. It is my professional opinion that this group of dogs must be the

Breed-specific legislation targets nothing more than a small subset of morphological characteristics of dogs and does not address behavior at all.

–Dr. Kristopher Irizarry



most genetically diverse dog breed on the planet. I find it paradoxical that the consensus medical and genetic view is that even one single letter difference between two people’s DNA can result in dramatic differences in behavior, susceptibility to disease and risk of adverse drug reactions, but, when it comes to man’s best friend, the exact opposite argument is made. I think these attempts to “protect society” from dangerous dogs are flawed because the inherent assumption in these laws is that anatomical and morphological characteristics in dogs correlate with certain behaviors. The genetic program that results in a large thick skull, like that of a Labrador Retriever, is not the same genetic program that builds the brain. The former regulates genes that control the cellular differentiation and anatomical patterning of cartilage, muscle and bone. The latter regulates completely different processes including the highly ordered growth of millions of different neurons that migrate and interconnect to form neuronal circuits that communicate the biochemical language of the brain.

The “science” of inferring cognitive and behavioral traits from physical properties of the head and skull (called phrenology) had been discredited in the last century. Why we would allow laws based on phrenology to be enacted in the 21st century is a question worth investigating.

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