

Pit bull label may triple length of stay in dog shelters

March 23 2016



Labelled as pitbull

Lookalike labelled as boxer

A figure from the *PLOS ONE* Manuscript: Gunter LM, Barber RT, Wynne CDL (2016) What's in a Name? Effect of Breed Perceptions & Labeling on Attractiveness, Adoptions & Length of Stay for Pit-Bull-Type Dogs. *PLoS ONE* 11(3): e0146857. Credit: Arizona Animal Welfare League

Dogs labelled as "pit bulls" may wait three times as long to be adopted from shelters than differently labelled lookalikes, according to a study published March 23, 2016 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Lisa Gunter from Arizona State University, USA, and colleagues.

Previous research had suggested that certain types of [dogs](#) take longer to be adopted from shelters, but it was unclear how much breed identification influenced adoption decisions. Since pit bull breeds are often negatively perceived, the authors of this study wanted to know if the "pit bull" label affects adoption.

The authors initially assessed perceptions of pit bull dogs compared to other breeds. They then analysed the effect of the "pit bull" breed label in dog shelters by surveying the perceived attractiveness to potential adopters, based on factors including perceived friendliness, aggressiveness and intelligence, of dogs labelled as pit bull breeds and of differently labelled lookalikes. They also examined length of stay in shelters.

They found that pit bull breeds were perceived by study participants as less adoptable than other breeds such as Labradors, considered less friendly and more aggressive. In shelters, compared to lookalikes that were unlabelled or labelled as other breeds, dogs labelled as "pit bull" breeds were again seen as less 'attractive', and waited over three times as long as lookalikes to be adopted.

Lisa Gunter notes: "We were surprised how very similar looking dogs sometimes get labelled "pit bull" and other times as something completely different. These dogs may look and act the same, but the pit bull label damns them to a much longer wait to adoption."

Assigned breed labels can be inaccurate, based on sometimes misleading appearances, and this research may indicate that dogs could be inadvertently penalised when labelled as a pit bull breed. The authors state that removing breed labels seems to be an easy way to improve the experience of pit bull type dogs in animal shelters.

More information: Gunter LM, Barber RT, Wynne CDL (2016)

What's in a Name? Effect of Breed Perceptions & Labeling on Attractiveness, Adoptions & Length of Stay for Pit-Bull-Type Dogs. *PLoS ONE* 11(3): e0146857. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0146857](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0146857)

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