

Aggression and Dogs

“No significant difference found between breeds”

INTRODUCTION

On July 5, 2000 the government of Lower Saxony, Germany ruled that 14 breeds of dogs were especially dangerous and placed restrictions on the ownership, management and breeding of dogs of these breeds. The breeds cited included Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Pit bull Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Rottweilers and Dobermans. Exemption from the restrictions required that the owner and dog pass a standardized temperament test administered by veterinary behaviorists at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Hannover, Germany. A passing score demonstrated that the dog displayed no exceptional aggressive behavior or aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

415 dogs of the targeted breeds were tested in 21 situations of dog-human contact and 14 situations of dog-environment contact. The dog's behavior in each situation was scaled from 1 to 7.

1	No aggressive behavior
2	Visual or acoustic threat behavior while backing away or remaining stationary
3	Bite movements while backing away or remaining stationary
4	Bite movements while moving forward but stopping at some distance
5	Bite with preceding threat signals
6	Bite with no preceding threat signals
7	Bite with no preceding threat signals and unable to calm within 10 minutes

70 Golden Retrievers, having been volunteered by their owners, were also tested using this same standardized temperament test.

RESULTS

- **There was no significant difference between the volunteered Golden Retrievers and the dogs from the targeted breeds that were required to submit to the test in the occurrence of aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations.**
- **Dogs of the targeted breeds signal their intent just like other dogs.**
- **Dogs of the targeted breeds are statistically no more likely to show inappropriate aggressive behavior than are Golden Retrievers.**

No indicators of greater dangerousness of any of the then-restricted dog breeds were found. Rather than regiment dogs by breed, more emphasis should be put on the dog owners' education.

This study contributed to the repeal of breed specific legislation in Lower Saxony.

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Dr. Esther Schalke holds a degree in Veterinary Medicine from the University of Hannover in 1997 and a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine from the Department of Animal Welfare and Behavior of the University of Veterinary Medicine of Hannover.

She has been a practicing animal behavior therapist since 1998 and runs the Animal Behavior Clinic at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Hannover, where she teaches courses in animal behavior, learning theory and behavior problems in dogs as well as in cats. She runs puppy socialization and pet dog training classes, training classes for SAR dogs and police dogs. She lectures nationally and internationally on various aspects of animal behavior.

Her recent areas of research include the various aspects regarding aggressive behavior in dogs. For example, temperament testing, assessing and comparing aggressive behavior in various dog breeds, including Pit Bull Terriers, Golden Retrievers, and others according to the guidelines of the Dangerous Animals Act of Lower Saxony, Germany (GeFTVO) of 05.07.2000.