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Date: February 2, 2016
Subject: **Determining Public Awareness on the problems associated with Purebred Dogs**

Introduction

Man's best friend, the domesticated dog represents one of the longest-running experiments in human history beginning over 14,000 years ago. The modern domestic dogs evolved from their closely related wild counterparts (gray wolves, coyotes, and jackals) over time with the selection of certain traits such as tameness and others such as coat color, floppy ears, and eagerness to please humans. The process of selective breeding became official in 1873 with the founding of the UK Kennel Club. Since then, 100 countries worldwide have adopted their system of registering pedigree dogs, which has formalized breed standards. These breed standards allow us to analyze a dog's traits such as their conformation, temperament, and coloration etc., to identify the breed. However, with the rising in popularity of dog shows in the middle of the nineteenth century, the focus of breeding dogs have shifted away from a functional purpose to a one of the aesthetics. To meet buyer demands, many breeders have started to inbreed dogs to exaggerate desired physical attributes of certain breeds. Thus, breeding standards and consumer demand have forced, in some cases, extreme morphological features that have directly and indirectly adversely impacted on the health and welfare of purebreds. The British Small Animal Veterinary Association identified 13 clear conditions of abnormality: hip dysplasia (abnormal development of the hip socket), patella dissociation, entropion (eyelid inversion), retinal atrophy (kidney failure), elongated soft palate, abnormal temperament, skin-fold dermatitis, uterine inertia (absence of uterine contraction during labor), elbow dysplasia (abnormal development of the elbow joints), lens luxation (displacement of the lens), ectropion (out folding of eyelid), trichiasis (ingrown eyelashes) and deafness. In a study conducted by Asher et al. in 2009 on the UK's top 50 breeds, they found 63 inherited disorders were directly from the selection from a conformation trait and 21 were conformation-inherited (inherited disorder exacerbated by a conformational trait). The myth still exists that purebred dogs are healthier and more superior than crossbred dogs, also known as "mutts." Given the wide array of genetic diseases found in purebred dogs, the public must be made aware of the truth behind purebreds. This proposal seeks to determine the level of public awareness and acceptance on the health problems associated with purebreds and to review the effectiveness of implementing different strategies to decrease the number of disorders.

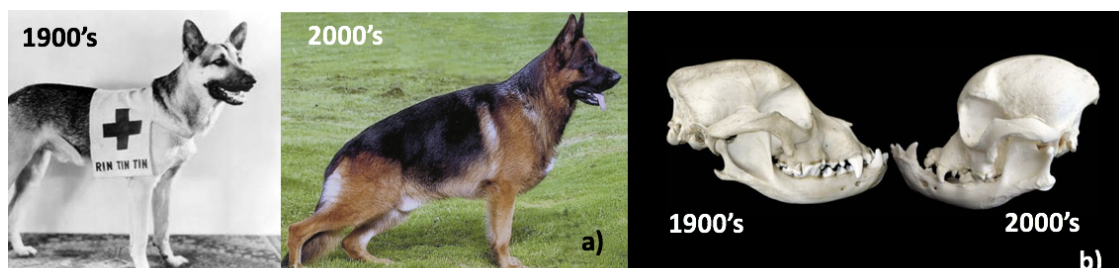


Figure 1. a) Picture of how the shape of a German Shepherd has changed over time. Notice the sloped back. b) Left: Bull dog skull (1900's). Right: Bull dog skull (2000's). Change in the skull shape has a negative impact on its breathing ability.

Statement of problem

Even with all these health problems that arise with purebred dogs, pedigree animals make up a majority of the chosen pets than “Mutts” or crossbred dogs, which have a much lower chance of having these diseases. Thus, consumers may be unknowingly limiting the genetic diversity of dogs, thus propagating the number of health issues they inherit. The vast array of genetic diseases found in purebred dogs clearly reflects their unnatural development and their unnecessary pain and suffering is a good indicator that our practices and views need to change.

Proposed solution

Breeders breed dogs for certain traits, which ultimately lead to health disorders, due to pressures of consumer demand. To change breeding methods and enforce stricter breed standards, pop culture, fashion and consumer dog demands must change. Thus, studies must be done to determine public awareness and concern to be better able to combat the “purebred superiority myth.” Next, educating the public on the issues that surround purebred dogs may also hope influence their choice when purchasing a puppy. Several aspects of inherited purebred diseases must be investigated to determine what changes need to be made in current breeding practices, and how these changes can be implemented effectively. More research must also be done in regards to changing pop culture, fashion and consumer dog demands, the modern kennel club breed standards, breeding methods, and canine genetics must be explored to understand the main causes of the problem and how it can be resolved.

Scope

To assess the public's awareness to the problems associated with purebreds, I plan to pursue five areas of inquiry:

1. How are pet owners choosing their dogs?
2. What are the current laws and regulations regarding purebred breeding?
3. Is the public aware of the problems associated with purebreds?
4. How does the public feel about the level of inherited diseases?
5. What can we do to improve the health problems for future generations?

Methods

My primary data sources will include public surveys and interviews. These surveys and interviews will be conducted in person or online. Additionally, I will consult with veterinarians and animal welfare researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Secondary sources will include the Kennel Club standard code of practice, the Criminal Code of Canada, the Prevention of Animal Cruelty Act and research reports and studies.

My Qualifications

I have always been passionate about animals and consistently pursue knowledge about animal behavior and physiology. Through my pursuit, I took an animal welfare course at UBC, where I was first exposed to the issue. I also volunteer at a veterinary hospital, where I am exposed to

different health problems related to dogs. I noticed that most pet owners sincerely care about their pets, however, some may be unaware or appearance-biased when it comes to choosing their pets. In May this year, I will receive my BSc in biology from UBC. Therefore, being a student with biological and animal welfare knowledge, will allow me to understand the issue.

Conclusion

Determining public awareness is the first step in combating the issues revolving the propagation of inherited genetic diseases in purebred dogs. Next, educating the public may influence their choice when purchasing a puppy. However, people must ultimately reconsider their ethical responsibilities and values we have of dogs. By addressing the five areas of inquiry mentioned earlier, I can determine the level of public awareness. With your approval, I will begin research at once.