

Writer's Note

I've known since I was five that I want to be a veterinarian when I grow up. I've always had a passion for animals and this desire is probably as instinctual as it is a product of my dad and his mother's influence on me. They both also love animals, and I have spent much of my life being around them. I've only had two dogs, a cat, and a couple fish as pets, but I loved them and cared for them and I am always seeking out more animals.

Five years ago, I wrote an essay to my parents explaining why we should get a dog, and it worked! Now I volunteer at a horse barn and ride in the summer. In fact, this summer I will be the very first wrangler that my camp has ever had. I'll be working with the horses and spending my whole summer caring for them instead of the campers. I've interned at a vet clinic where I watched two spays and a neuter, helped with basic checkups, and did things like counting pills and staying with animals as they woke up from anesthesia. There I learned a lot about animals and veterinary medicine. So as you can see, my love for animals is deeply rooted. I've always cared about treating animals kindly and this was probably fueled by all the horror stories I heard about dog fighting and animal abuse. When I was younger, I read a lot of book series' about veterinarians, and they always had several cases related to malnourished or neglected animals or ones who were beaten by their owners. I also watched ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) TV shows sometimes when I visited my grandparents houses, and they always scared me with their constant findings of animals that were left in the same collar until the skin grafted to it, or animals stuck inside a house after their owners moved. It seemed like that type of very obvious abuse was all around me if I looked for it. Just recently I realized that even the seemingly civil and common process of breeding is a form of abuse as well. I've become even more sensitive about animal rights and I think it's really important that people become more educated about issues like dog breeding so that we can work to stop the problems happening now.

Given my upbringing and natural passion for animals, I've always been interested in animal rights. I've generally thought the main issues had to do with physical abuse, but recently it's come to my attention that even the act of breeding can have serious consequences on the animals. I chose to research dogs because breeding problems are especially apparent, and because we have made such a variety in the dog species. Also I feel a very strong personal connection to dogs, and this makes me even more caring towards them. This project draws attention to the issue of dog breeding to discourage the dangerous cycle of breeding that is very alive right now.

This is important to the world because when health problems arise, it's essential to let the public know so they can make educated decisions. We can't ethically move past this problem knowing that our own pets are in pain because of our ignorance on the subject. Right now, pugs' eyeballs are popping out of their heads because their skulls are the wrong shapes to hold them in correctly, and Dachshunds are breaking their backs by simply jumping up onto a bed. ("Selective Breeding Problems") People don't see these problems being a result of the breeding process, and so they don't consider the fact that their own investments in the purebred culture encourages these terrible deformities that are put upon the dogs in an effort to make them look pretty.

I often found myself back at the same questions. I wondered if beauty is worth the price of pain? Is human ignorance an excuse for the pain we cause animals? And is it even up to us to decide how we want a species to evolve?

Breeding is a big problem because of the complications it causes the animals, as well as the fact that it's not a very commonly considered issue. People don't know about the problems that dog breeding causes, and they don't think twice before buying a purebred. A purebred is a dog whose parents are both from the same breed with no other breed in the near family. This quality makes dogs extra desirable to some people.

If this were a more publicized topic, maybe people would be more thoughtful when buying a dog. If people knew what was really going on, I'm sure that the dog culture would be very different. Right now, there are many issues with breeding and abuse being damaging to dogs, and these issues are being ignored because people are either uneducated, or don't care. Raising awareness about this subject could change people's buying habits, and therefore change the way we think about dogs in our society. If purebreds are discouraged, our pets would be healthier and we could avoid a lot of unintentional abuse that happens.

There is no excuse for us to continue to breed Beagles when we know that they are prone to epilepsy. We shouldn't be creating more and more Bulldogs when we know that they may suffocate if they exercise too hard on a hot day because their respiratory tracts are too weak ("Selective Breeding Problems"). Beauty is never worth pain, especially when we are choosing to inflict it on animals other than ourselves. Ignorance is not an excuse, and it is my responsibility- as well as everyone else who knows about this problem- to educate other people so that we can stop molding dogs into what we want them to be without regard to how it affects them. I am not disagreeing that purebred dogs can be very beautiful; I'm arguing that we don't have the right to treat animals this way, even when it may not be a very public issue.

Dogs were the first domesticated animals and fossils show they have been companions to humans for at least 33,000 years. It is believed that breeding was first practiced about 5000 years ago in Egypt (The Science of Dogs). Since then we have used dogs for protection, hunting, working, sniffing, pulling, herding, helping handicapped people, showing off, and many other things. We value their friendly, loyal, and protective personalities, and we also make use of their talents. In the 1800's, dogs became a symbol of wealth and that is when breeding really took off.

Eighty percent of the breeds we know of today didn't exist 100 years ago, and breeding has only continued and gotten more intense since then (The Science of Dogs). The Finnish Lapphund, The Entlebucher Mountain Dog, and The Cesky Terrier are all new breeds that were certified by the American Kennel Club in 2012, and they are all products of dog breeding. ("The Westminster Kennel Club | Latest News")

With over 400 breeds, the dog is the most varied species of all animals in size and behavior. This is because dogs have significantly more tandem repeats than most animals. A tandem repeat is a string of genes that all code for one trait, but the gene is repeated over and over in one strand of DNA, which has 2.4 billion possible base pair combinations. If one base pair in that whole string gets changed, the dog can look totally different. This combined with the fact that dogs can have litters of eight or more puppies two times a year means that dogs can evolve very quickly. All dogs are 99.8% genetically identical, but that .02% can still produce a huge variety. (The Science of Dogs)

I especially love big dogs, and I can't disagree that Dobermans look gorgeous, German Shepherds look beautiful, and Saint Bernards look so cuddly and friendly. Even a Whippet looks really nice. I can't deny that many purebreds are really stunning, but that isn't the point. I am trying to draw attention to the issues that come along with breeding. German Shepherds commonly have hip dysplasia, and arthritis, and their stomachs can twist over itself trapping food inside until it bursts. Dobermans have been bred in a way that their heart is stretched out of its normal shape, and now most Doberman's hearts can't pump blood effectively anymore ("Selective Breeding Problems"). Most purebred dogs have defective anatomy because of being over bred, and breeding also makes a pathway for abuse, and problems within our own society. Purebreds are beautiful, just like mixed breeds, but we need to take a step back and look at the problems that go hand in hand with the dog culture we have created.

When people decide that a certain trait is attractive such as low haunches, short legs, long nose, etc. they breed two dogs together that both share that trait. Some of the resulting puppies will likely have inherited the trait, and to expand the population of dogs with this trait, you have to breed again among this tiny family of dogs with the trait, or find another dog of the same breed with the same trait ("Dog Breeding"). Inbreeding is a big problem because when you single out a group of dogs that have the desired appearance or personality that you want, it can be hard to find more dogs to breed with that will let you keep the characteristic. You'll have to have lots of dogs to raise the chances of finding another with this desired trait, or you could continue breeding the same dogs over and over to duplicate the new characteristic. Once breeders find "perfection" they want to keep it, and because gene pools are so small, breeding can become dangerous very quickly. When a dog is bred with a close relative, the puppies have a much higher chance of having physical or mental disabilities. Many unintentional abuse cases come out of dogs who are being inbred with each other. They share bad traits as well as the good traits that they're being bred for, and when a deformation arises, it stays in the bloodline because all the dogs are only being bred with other dogs who also have this mutation ("Selective Breeding Problems").

Another unintended consequence of breeding for physical (or even behavioral) traits or skills is that when we decide to do something like push the haunches of a German Shepherd down lower, we change their back, hip, and leg anatomy which can lead to hip dysplasia. This type of problem happens in many purebreds. We find a trait we like, and we breed for it without considering the issues that it will bring. Most breeds have their own problem that occurs frequently because of unintentional consequences that come with traits we breed for. Many

bulldogs can't give birth anymore because their hips are too narrow to be able to pass the broad shouldered puppies, and big dogs like Great Danes have problems with bloat which is where their stomach will twist around itself trapping food until it bursts ("Selective Breeding Problems"). There are so many consequences that happen when dogs are bred, but because people aren't educated about it, breeding continues and these dogs still have to live with all of the problems.

Mixed breed dogs are usually much healthier than purebreds because they generally inherit good genes from each parent, which helps them to avoid the disastrous problems that their purebred cousins may have. If we didn't try so hard to produce copies of purebred perfection, we would have healthier dogs. When dogs aren't forced to breed with other dogs who share the same physical or mental defects, the resulting puppies will be less affected by these malformations, because most of the problems I have mentioned are recessive and will be pushed aside and replaced by healthy traits that come from the other parent ("Dog Crossbreeds"). When we keep rebreeding for the same traits, problems never go away because every possible mate for a dog would have the same problems. Issues arise and become normal when a bloodline is repetitive. All Labrador Retrievers will be extra susceptible to obesity if the only mate choice for a female Lab with obesity is a male Lab who is also obese ("Selective Breeding Problems").

I believe that dog breeding is very dangerous anatomically and in other ways too. Suddenly, our "herding" dogs aren't super interested in herding. They have the base instincts still, but they've been so diluted that it would be more of a challenge to get them to actually herd now than it would have been at the beginning of their time when they were being bred for their personality traits rather than their looks (The Science of Dogs). Some dogs can be bred for certain personalities- like a Golden Retriever for friendliness- but now most are bred for physical attributes. As breeding standards change and looks become more specific, we start breeding with those looks in mind and don't pay attention to personalities much anymore. So now, our "herding class" dogs have lost their passion for herding because we have been focusing on their body types rather than their personalities. When people buy border collies they expect a dog who is really into herding, but because we've been breeding for looks, the border collies you see being shown on TV wouldn't actually know what to do if they were put into a field with a flock of sheep. Maybe they'd have the instinct to chase the sheep, but their herding spirit is now very diluted because the dogs have been bred for their body shape. The behaviors that were once celebrated are now being pushed aside in order to breed more dogs that look like the dog that once had that behavior.

Because dogs are for the most part bred for looks, they have become objects to flaunt and brag about. When a "purebred" didn't mean anything special, dogs were held as pets and animals to love. They still are, but have now fallen towards the status of objects that humans own for the purpose of loving- but also boasting about. In the 1800's, someone who had a purebred dog or a rare breed of dog was seen as someone who was rich (The Science of Dogs). This idea continued and is still somewhat a factor in today's society. What do you think when you see someone walking a pair of nicely groomed poodles down the street?

On top of the consequences that breeding causes each individual dog, it also impacts all dogs involved. As I said before, breeding is about finding attractive traits (or traits that conform to preset standards) and repeating them. These new traits are usually the result of gene mutations or chance combinations, and are rare in themselves. So, you might need a lot of dogs to get two with the same trait. And when those two dogs have puppies, you'll be looking for the few perfect ones to breed as well. And, purebreds are much more valuable than other dogs so you'll want to

have a lot of them to sell. All of this suggests that purebreds encourage mass breeding. You need several dogs to find the trait, several litters of puppies from those two, and then lots more puppies with this special characteristic to sell. And even if there is no special thing you're breeding for, it's still true that dog breeding can easily lead to mass amounts of dogs. Breeding is usually always done for the purpose of selling, and more dogs sold equals more money made. Lots of breeders breed only to make money, and this furthers the amount of abuse because the breeders don't have the dogs well-being in mind, and are focused only on making money.

Mass breeding is not a good thing. A lot of dogs in a set amount of space can easily become overcrowded, and that leads straight towards abuse. Even if the breeder has good intentions, owning several dogs is a lot of work, and you can only play with, care for and exercise so many dogs per day. When there are too many dogs in an area, it becomes hard to maintain and keep clean ("Attack on the American Kennel Club"). Dogs are animals who strive for human interaction, and they don't do well when left alone for long at all. When one breeder owns too many dogs, they don't get proper attention, and I consider this abuse. There are laws about things like how long a dog is allowed to be left in its cage, but there isn't really a group who makes sure that these rules are being followed ("Attack on the American Kennel Club").

To get your dogs certified as purebreds, you have to fill out an application, which asks you several things including if the parents of your dog were purebred, and then send the application to the AKC to be processed. The American Kennel Club is a "not for profit organization which maintains the largest registry of purebreds in the world and governs the sport of purebred dogs in the United States." They also host events such as dog shows, obedience classes, and fundraisers in the interest of dog breeding (akc.org).

I feel that the AKC acts as a huge monopoly over our dog culture. The only way to have a 'real' purebred dog is to get it certified by the Kennel Club, and everyone recognizes them as the gold standard. However, in many ways, they don't seem to always have the dog's safety in mind. The AKC has a long and detailed history of not supporting many bills that would help to stop dog abuse ("Attack on the American Kennel Club"). I believe this is partially because they want for people to still engage in the 'sport' of purebreds, and they want people to still support the club. Many of the bills that they don't support would make dog breeding harder and more regulated. I don't think that the AKC wants people to know the more serious effects of breeding because they want it to still be commonly practiced. Understandably, they want their business to succeed, but I feel that they are doing this in a very dishonest and dangerous way. If people weren't so caught up in purebred dogs, the AKC would not be an issue. I believe that dog breeding encourages things like the American Kennel Club and their behavior encourages dog breeding, creating a very harmful cycle that the public isn't educated well enough about.

Lisa Peterson, the director of communications for the American Kennel Club, has said that the club is "not a law enforcement agency and not responsible for all breeders" ("Attack on the American Kennel Club"). While I agree with this and do not expect the club to be enforcing or monitoring breeders, I think that the club itself is an encouragement to dog breeding, which causes many problems. Having such a big corporation to stimulate the breeding culture helps it to continue and edges on the dangerous behavior.

The American Kennel Club has chosen not to support many legislative bills that would help to curb abuse, seemingly for their own breeding benefits. The AKC did not support a Rhode Island bill preventing dogs from being caged or tethered for more than 14 hours per day because they said it was "too broadly worded." This bill was intended to be for mass breeders and was meant to cut down on the time that dogs would be forced to stay in the same place during one

day. The Kennel Club drew attention to the fact that this bill would mean families couldn't leave their dog at home while they were at work or asleep, etc. ("Attack on the American Kennel Club" and "American Kennel Club").

The AKC also did not support a Massachusetts bill that defined how law enforcement could seize animals and charge those convicted. I don't see a benefit or reason for the club to be opposing this bill other than to allow the current breeding practices to continue. It seems like they are really trying not to let things change in the breeding world because it might negatively affect the club. Similarly, they didn't support a Louisiana bill that prohibited stacking wire cages and said that it caused "extra expenses." It really seems like the club would suffer if breeders were forced to change their methods, and so they choose not to support bills that would hurt their business ("Attack on the American Kennel Club").

Furthermore, a man named Ted Paul, who was a judge for the AKC dog shows, publicly agreed with an Oregon bill that said that only 25 sexually intact dogs could be kept at one time. He was ridiculed on the Internet and later fired from the AKC when the bill passed ("Attack on the American Kennel Club").

The American Kennel Club says that they monitor breeders for abuse, but they only have nine inspectors for the whole United States, and they refuse to give out information about how many breeders were actually inspected or reported. In the Williams case, an inspector went to a breeder and said that only two health standards were being violated at the time- air ventilation in cages and open sores on dogs. Three months later, police went to the breeder and the owner was convicted for long-term animal abuse. Ed Sayres, the president and chief executive of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says that, "the majority of commercial breeders in raids link to AKC registered litters" ("Attack on the American Kennel Club").

Alan Kalter, the Chairman of the Board at the AKC says that this is a "grossly misleading and biased picture of dog breeders", but gives no proof that the majority of breeding is conducted with safety in mind ("American Kennel Club") The facts still stand that even if dogs are being bred in the nicest of conditions, physical consequences still occur. Even a Boxer with a really nice breeder will still be extra susceptible to cancer (Selective Breeding Problems).

All of this information is pointing towards the fact that dog breeding can get dangerous very easily, and pure breeding encourages things like the American Kennel Club. The Kennel Club doesn't take responsibility for abuse, and so breeding and the club feed off of each other in a very detrimental cycle.

In conclusion, I will say again that I definitely am not disagreeing that purebreds can be really gorgeous. Many a time I have looked at a sleek Weimaraner and thought to myself, "Wow, that is a really beautiful dog," and only recently have I been able to pull myself away from that and look at everything objectively.

When I realize the consequences that come with breeding, I have to ask myself if it's worth it. Yes, the dog is beautiful, but is beauty worth the price of pain? Is it fair for us to be 'playing god' in that we create an animal we think is pretty and don't have to feel its suffering? When will we cross the line?

I was really startled when I studied the anatomical and medical consequences of breeding. People don't normally consider how an animal feels as a result of their own actions, especially when all they think is, "I'd really like to have a Dachshund."

Breeding also makes way for abusive environments and mass breeding, which are never good things. Organizations like the AKC encourage this destructive behavior, and breeding becomes a harmful cycle of money making and poor education.

If we stopped putting such an emphasis or value on purebreds, we would have healthier dogs with stronger personality characteristics, and we would have less animal abuse.

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