Why Intentional Breeding of Hybrid Dogs is Controversial

Introduction

Many people choose and buy their furry friends without doing much research. Most people choose based on looks. Usually, if the dog is small and compact, or big and fluffy, it gets picked. But have you ever wondered how these dogs are made and whether or not they're healthily bred? The truth is, there's been very extensive research on this topic, especially in the last five to ten years due to the exceptionally growing dog breeding industry.

A hybrid dog is a dog bred from two different breeds or mixes of breeds to create its own specific breed for a certain purpose. Hybrid dogs are not recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC). Some popular examples of hybrid dogs include those mixed with Poodles, creating the "doodle" name you may have heard. The most popular of these are the "Golden Doodle", "Labradoodle", and "Bernadoodle". Others include "Maltipoo", "Chiweenie" and so on. There are tons and tons of hybrid dog breeds out there for purchase.

While this sounds like a good idea in theory, there have been numerous researchers who have tested the genetics, temperaments, and overall health of these dogs. Thankfully, the numbers don't lie. However, some would like to disagree with this statement. I've gathered multiple credible articles from opposing viewpoints to compare results. Designer dogs, a product of intentional crossbreeding between two purebred or mixed dog breeds, have gained significant popularity in recent decades.

This review aims to explore the advantages and disadvantages associated with designer dogs, drawing insight from a range of scholarly sources and expert opinions. By examining the existing literature on this topic, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of designer dog breeding, and its implications for canine health, welfare, and owner satisfaction.

Historical Perspectives and Trends

The origins of designer dog breeding can be traced back to the late 20th century when breeders began intentionally crossing purebred dogs to create hybrids with desired traits. Helen Grinnell King's book, *What's Your Angle?*, provides insights into the historical evolution of designer dog breeding practices. She discusses how the popularity of designer dogs surged as societal attitudes towards pets evolved and demand for unique companions grew. Additionally, Gardner Animal Care Center sheds light on the early trends surrounding designer dogs. The initial interest for new breeds came in the late 1970s in Australia. It started with a woman whose husband was allergic to dogs, but would benefit greatly from a seeing-eye dog. One of three puppies, Sultan, from that first experimental breeding went to the family. This was the first official Labradoodle. Currently, there are over 500 listed crossbreeds of dogs, according to the American Canine Hybrid Club (ACH Club).

Interestingly, key individuals in the crossbreeding industry have mixed reviews about the impact of designer dogs. In Kawczynska's article, the original breeder of the Labradoodle mentioned his regret for creating the breed. He is quoted saying that he "opened a Pandora's box

and released a Frankenstein's monster". Another phenomenon to keep in mind is overbreeding. Simply put, overbreeding is the practice of breeding in any breed to accentuate certain attributes, whether they are cosmetic or temperamental. In full-bred dogs, this is seen in cocker spaniels (head shape), German shepherds (back legs and gait), and in most breeds of bulldog (hip placement for breeding issues). Over time, the dogs that are bred for these certain characteristics have significantly more complications and health issues, which can take generations to correct.

Advantages

Thankfully, it is not all "doom and gloom" when it comes to designer or hybrid dog breeding. For instance, studies in Hladky-Krage and Hoffman's article emphasizes the health benefits of hybrid vigor in designer dogs. Hybrid vigor is the phenomenon where offspring of genetically diverse parents show improved health and vitality compared to their purebred parents. This has the possibility to result in a reduced incidence of genetic disorders commonly found in purebred dogs, such as hip dysplasia or certain types of cancers.

To combat the overbreeding issue mentioned in the previous section, hybrid or designer breeds can have the harder to deal with traits bred "out". In the Labradoodle example, the mix is a Labrador retriever mixed with a standard poodle. The Labrador retriever's focus and affinity for retrieving and hunting is not as present in the resulting Labradoodle puppies. In most cases, the standard poodle's easygoing temperament will shine through.

Also, research indicates that designer dogs may exhibit desirable temperament and behavior traits inherited from their parent breeds. Stregowski's article on *The Spruce Pets* highlights this aspect, mentioning that certain designer dog breeds are bred specifically for traits including hypoallergenic coats, intelligence, or friendliness. Because there are multiple breeds of dog that can exhibit traits such as friendliness, there is a greater likelihood of it being present in the resulting litters. These inherited traits can enhance both the suitability and desirability of designer dogs as companions for diverse lifestyles or living situations.

Disadvantages

Despite their potential benefits, designer dogs are not without their drawbacks. For example, scholarly research, such as the study conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), suggests that designer dogs may be prone to genetic diseases inherited from their parent breeds. For purebred dogs registered with the American Kennel Club (AKC), there are published standards for each breed, detailing sizes, colors, temperament, and common issues. On the other hand, the lack of this for hybrid designer breeds is particularly concerning. Because of the much shorter history of this practice, there is a lack of standardized health testing and screening protocols in many designer dog breeding practices.

Additionally, ethical concerns surrounding commercial breeding practices and the impact on shelter dogs and breed preservation have been raised by experts in the field. The ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) estimates that 3.1 million dogs are currently in animal shelters, with only 2 million of them being adopted yearly. What is even more heartbreaking is the ASPA also estimates that 390,000 of the remaining dogs are euthanized

annually, just to provide space to take in more animals. It is very apparent that the United States has an overpopulation of dogs, as both the city-funded and private shelters have to take drastic measures to keep up with the influx of new dogs.

Claudia Kawczynska's article on *The Wildest* delves into these ethical considerations, highlighting instances where designer dog breeding prioritizes profit over the health and welfare of the animals involved. Most animal shelters attempt to minimize the financial burden of adopting a dog, but designer and purebred breeding take a capitalistic approach. Designer hybrid breeds now have a cost that rivals AKC-registered purebred dogs. In most cases, a family will have to decide between temperament predictability or cost. Both of these are important. However, other factors such as small children or multi-generational households will often trump the goodwill of saving a possibly unpredictable dog from euthanization.

Expert Opinions and Case Studies

Expert opinions from veterinary professionals and researchers provide valuable insights into the complexities of designer dog breeding. For instance, Annie Button's article on *FitBark* features some commentary from Auburn University's veterinary professor, Bruce Smith. Smith offers valuable perspectives on the challenges and controversies surrounding designer dogs and dog breeding practices, emphasizing the importance of responsible breeding and informed decision-making. He plays both sides of the coin, citing "more variety, increased predictability, and decreased chances of genetic disease". Conversely, he states there is a "higher cost, issues predicting size, and an increased difficulty delivering the puppies from their mother".

Moreover, case studies illustrating real-life experiences with designer dog ownership further enrich our understanding, or sometimes lack thereof, of this topic. Wisdom Health and Genoscoper Labs offers comprehensive genetic testing for both dogs and cats. The company published a study titled "Frequency and distribution of 152 genetic disease variants in over 100,000 mixed breed and purebred dogs." While that is certainly a mouthful, the study is summarized with the result that purebred dogs are 2.8 times more likely than mixed breeds to have recessive diseases. On the other hand, mixed breeds were 1.4 times more likely than purebreds to be a carrier of said recessive diseases.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this literary review has provided a comprehensive overview of the advantages and disadvantages associated with designer dogs. After analyzing scholarly sources, opinions, statistics, and case studies, it becomes evident that designer dogs offer unique benefits such as hybrid vigor and lifestyle compatibility. However, they also pose risks related to genetic diseases and ethical considerations, especially overpopulation here in the United States. Moving forward, it is essential for breeders, owners, and policymakers to prioritize responsible breeding practices and informed decision-making to ensure the health and welfare of designer dogs. By addressing these challenges and controversies, we can work towards a more sustainable and ethical approach to designer dog breeding that prioritizes the well-being of individual dogs and the integrity of canine breeds.