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Genetic influence on the dog's behavior

A dog's behavior is influenced for about 40% by its genes and hormones and for about 60% by what it learns and experiences in its life.

A dog's mind can be genetically manipulated. Although, mainly in a quantitative way, as qualitatively seen, genetic manipulation has virtually no effect on behavior. The genetic stability of a dog's mind is amazing. Despite of many centuries of domestication, at times with intense selection, dogs are still very similar to their ancestors, the wolves. There may be a huge variation in appearance and behavioral traits, but the ancestral patterns in dogs (species) all over the world are hardly modified. They still speak the same vocal and body language, and interact amongst each other and with us in a very similar way as wolves do between them. Abstract thought or conditional sentences will never be understood. A sentence such as "If you dig again, I'll gonna be very angry" is nothing more than a tone of voice and body gesture to the dog. Just try this same sentence in a friendly voice and a smile on the face, and you will meet a happy tail wagging dog.

Whereas genetic manipulation has hardly any effect on behavior in a qualitative sense, quantitatively it is possible to modify a dog's mind. In the early days, most dogs were bred mainly for their working abilities for which a sound character was needed. So were, through selective breeding herding- guarding-, tracking-, sniffing-, retrieving-, pointing-, flushing-, cornering-abilities increased, and also traits such as courage (security dogs) or sitting silently on a satin cushion for hours (companion dogs). Unsound characters like aggressive- shy- or fearful ones were ruled out from breeding or the pup or dog was even culled. Unfortunately, nowadays dogs are mainly bred for their beauty and not so much for their workability anymore. A dog's good looks, a price in the cupboard and a title on the Pedigree has become more important than it's physical and mental health. Interestingly and sadly a study, performed by Dr. I. Stur of the Vienna Animal Genetics Institute, shows a negative correlation between the beauty or 'good-looks' and the constitution (that is the inherent state of health, strength etc.). Breeding mainly for beauty has resulted in a increase in hereditary diseases and unsound characters. For example, there is a distinguish difference in the temperament of show Golden Retrievers and their working line counterparts known for their calmness of nature that originally made them good field dogs, whereas, the show lines can be more flighty or even aggressive. A consequence, something that many people do not realize, is that Golden Retrievers and also Cocker Spaniels have reached the top in showing aggression towards their owners! Many show-Labrador Retrievers, originally known for their will-to-please, have turned into over-excitable and stubborn creatures, and Rottweilers show more dominance aggression compared with the early days.

Therefore, a very important role is reserved for the breeders. Dominance aggression, over-excitability, shyness and fearfulness occur in many breeds of nowadays. To my opinion, it is the duty and responsibility of the breeders. to select consistently stock with sound characters (and free from other hereditary defects) for breeding purposes. Only in such a way, these unstable and unreliable characters will disappear. After all, dogs with unsound temperaments, and also physical hereditary defects, can cause not only a lot of misery to their owners and their neighborhood, they can even be downright dangerous to us and our children!