A BIT ABOUT US

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TO KICK THINGS OFF:

• We’re not saying there is no such thing as breeds – Pure breeds of dogs definitely exist!

• It’s estimated that 75% or more of dogs in shelters are MIXED BREED

• Community members are looking to us, the animal shelters, as the experts on pets.
BACKGROUND INFO
THE LATEST AND GREATEST IN RESEARCH AND SCIENCE

"WHAT KIND OF DOG IS THAT?"

MEET THE CANINE GENOME!

Variation across only 50 genes determines "breed defining" physical characteristics

**THAT MEANS:**
Less than 0.25% of a dog’s genes determine physical features

Approximately 20,000 Genes make up the dog genome

Photo Credit: Lisa Prince Fishler, Printz Photography, HeARTs Speak, Inc.
When we look at a dog and see breed, we are seeing ONLY ROUGHLY 50 of their nearly 20,000 GENES.

That is 0.25% of a dog’s ENTIRE GENOME.
The set of 50 genes associated with physical appearance is DIFFERENT from the set of thousands of genes responsible for brain development and function.

Looks DON’T EQUAL BEHAVIOR

Instead of depending on inaccurate breed labels, we want people to choose their future companions based on accurate personality profiles.
The problem is that breed identity elicits behavioral expectations on the part of the new owner, even though researchers have found enormous behavioral variability within all breeds.

A TRIED & TRUE CONCEPT

Let’s Play a Game:

If these two 4-month old puppies came in to your shelter...

What would you label them?
MEET THE PARENTS!

Scott and Fuller, 1965, Genetics and the Social Behavior of the Dog

IN LATER GENERATIONS, THINGS GET EVEN MORE COMPLICATED

"None of the 72 puppies in the total F2 population showed an exact resemblance to either parent breed."

REMEMBER:
These pups have only Basenji and Cocker Spaniel in their background

We can’t accurately predict the behavior of mixed breed dogs by comparing them to pure breed dogs, even if the pure breed dog is a parent.
The offspring of 2 different pure breed dogs isn’t a member of either parent’s breed.

IT IS MISSING 50% of each parental breed’s DNA, and we don’t know which 50%!
**RESEARCH ROUNDUP!**

Dog breed identification is no basis for shelter policy. A true reflection within the variability of such characteristics varies according to environment, age, health, and reactivity.

Some animals may look like a pure breed yet not be a true representation of that breed. Some examples of this include "Pit Bull" dogs that may be mixed breed and not truly a Pit Bull, or a dog that may appear to be a pure breed but is actually a mixed breed. The identification of a dog's breed can be challenging because of the variability within breeds and the potential for genetic diversity within a single litter.

The results from this study indicate that breed identification can be inaccurate and unreliable. The research suggests that breed identification may not be a reliable tool for determining a dog's health or behavior. The study also found that breed identification may not be a useful tool for determining a dog's socialization or temperament.

**MIND-BLOWING FACTS:**

- The offspring of two different pure breed dogs isn't a member of either breed.
- Once a dog is less than 100% of a single breed, they are members of no breed at all.
- Looks DON'T Equal Behavior.

**GUESSES AT BREED LABELS CAN CAUSE CONFUSION AND FALSE EXPECTATIONS**

Photo Credit: Lisa Prince Fishler, Printz Photography, HeARTs Speak, Inc.
SO WHY ARE WE STILL GUESSING?

Photo Credit: Jill Flynn, Visual Harmony Photography, HeARTs Speak, Inc.

LABELS AFFECT ALL DOGS

Photo Credit: Lisa Prince Fishler, Printz Photography, HeARTs Speak, Inc.

BEYOND THE RESEARCH

BREED LABELING IN THE REAL WORLD
THE EVOLUTION OF SHELTER SOFTWARE

SHELTER SOFTWARE

THE SHELTER SOFTWARE SYSTEM REQUIRES THAT WE CHOOSE A PREDOMINANT BREED OR BREED MIX FOR OUR DOGS. VISUAL BREED IDENTIFICATION IN DOGS IS UNRELIABLE SO FOR MOST OF OUR DOGS WE ARE ONLY GUESSING AT PREDOMINANT BREED OR BREED MIX. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO SELECT YOUR NEW COMPANION BY CONSIDERING EACH DOG'S INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY AND PET QUALITIES INSTEAD OF RELYING ON A BREED LABEL THAT IS ONLY A GUESS.

Dogs are INDIVIDUALS

ANIMAL SHELTER MANAGER

PET POINT

SHELTER BUDDY

SHELTER LUV

CHAMERON

Upon adoption, Chamerton will write the person a personalized letter.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DOESN'T THE PUBLIC CONTINUE TO GUESS?
WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN PEOPLE ASK, “WHAT BREED IS THAT?”

WHAT ABOUT AREAS WITH BREED SPECIFIC LEGISLATION?

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING RESTRICTIONS?

Property Management and Pets: Most Aggressive Dog Breeds

“Generally speaking, having an allowance for pets will increase your pool of potential renters and even the amount you can charge for the apartment. But not every pet is built equally and some will be a perfect fit while others would make for trouble. So creating a list of breeds you would not allow and spelling out your policies in the lease and on your website is a good idea.”

-Zillow for Pros
HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE LOST AND FOUND LISTINGS?

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT BREED RESCUES?

MOVING FORWARD

HOW TO LEAVE BREED BEHIND TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION PROGRAM
1. We removed breed labels from our kennel cards.
2. We stopped using breed labels in social media posts.
3. We changed how we talked about breed internally and challenged each other to use non-breed descriptors for our dogs.
4. We asked our shelter software provider to allow us to use ‘mixed breed’ as a primary breed identifier.
5. We role played with staff and volunteers what to do when someone says, ‘What breed is that?’

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CASE STUDY: FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

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AN ORGANIZATIONAL SHIFT...

Dalton is not merely smart; he is knock-your-socks-off almost-human intelligent. The evidence: He knew the commands sit, stay, down, and paw. He let us know when he didn’t have enough water left by lifting the bowl and bringing it to us. His most amazing feat, yet, was when I started putting on my boots to walk him. He instantly gave up the ball and jumped wearing it, like he wanted me to hurry up. From his inexplicably pit from the room, I heard noises down the hall, so I went to investigate. Dalton was standing there, holding my coat in his mouth! Then he looked at me and shook the coat.

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A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

“The weeks following the removal of breed from the kennel card were uneventful. However, an amazing shift had happened for not only the dogs in the care, but how we treated people that entered our facility. Removing breed labels meant we not only got to know the dogs better, but our adopters as well.”
BEYOND LABELS
WHERE TO INVEST OUR TIME,
ENERGY AND RESOURCES

PREPARE, BUT DON’T WORRY!

“Before the new kennel cards debuted, we had several meetings and
staff training sessions to prepare everyone for what to say when people
asked about the breed. We figured there would be a lot of questions
from people wondering why we omitted it from the kennel card, and
frustrations about that… It all sounded silly now, because the response
ended up being basically no response.

We get occasional questions, but people are generally satisfied when we
explain why we don’t know what breed most of our dogs are.”

-Ashley Hetzner, Capital Area Humane Society

INVEST TIME DIFFERENTLY
"The chairman of our advisory board at the time was the founder of a volunteer group called Pawsitive Shelter Photography, which takes glam shots of some of our pets. His recommendation was that the photos speak more about the animal than the breed and that we should remove the breed altogether because it was potentially putting a stigma or connotation on the dog that may not be true."

-Diane Summers, OCAS
**SHAKE UP YOUR BIO-WRITING**

**CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW**

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS + ANSWERS**

I HEAR YOU'RE A VORACIOUS READER? ANY FAVORITE AUTHORS?

*"You recently were introduced to Steinbeck and read The Grapes of Wrath. I bet you know a lot about what foods I shouldn't eat."*

WHEN I GROW UP, I'D LIKE TO BE...

*I can be anything! I'll be the next 21*

MY FAVORITE PLACE TO BE IS...

"A lap," I. "Your heart," I. "By a pool of fast water in a dance."

MY FAVORITE FOOD IS...

*I'm rather fond of bananas. Carrots are pretty tasty too, though."

SQUEAKY OR BOUNCY, WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A TOY?

"Soft, really. I do enjoy getting to get them and bringing them back and then going to get them again."

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE CELEBRITY?

*I'd really love to meet those from from Family Guy. One day. He seems like he'd be pretty cool."

**KENNEL CARDS**

**Austin Animal Center Report Card**

Name: ________

Championed by: ________

Adjacent: Sit for Treats

Stay, Come, Other

Shake, Drop-it, Down

Recs: I need to try:

Walking with a (on-leash)

Playgroups, Swimming, Car Rides

Agility, Fetch, Toys/Puzzles

Qualities: Sniff, Volunteer, Playful

Godly, Cuddly, Outgoing

Adventurous, Sweet, Independent

Calm, Gentle, Shy, Playful

**Enrichment and Equipment items**

*Feed*

Ramps, Kong, Velcro

Ball, Freezables, Agility

Treat, Tug, Hugs

Do Not Give Me:

Racing, Rubber Toys, Puzzles

Hard Bones, Tug, Tug

Food, Biscuits, Pull Toys

Equipment needs:

Easy, Medium, High

Dog Leader, Fetch

**UP YOUR MARKETING GAME**

Heartsspeak.org/FREEdownloads
FINAL THOUGHT
If you remember only one thing:
We have nothing to gain by perpetuating our guesses at breed labeling as accurate or helpful to determining a dog’s future.

Photo Credit: Jill Flynn, Visual Harmony Photography, HeARTs Speak, Inc.

THANK YOU!
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Photo Credit: Visual Harmony Photography, HeARTs Speak, Inc.