Effects of Differing Traits in Dogs on Perceived Adoptability[1]

Dogs are a mainstream part of American life. While many pet dogs are mutts, 35% of potential pet owners would prefer a purebred dog (Campbell 2012). In order to ensure that they are buying a purebred dog, most of these potential pet owners buy from breeder. They may think that because a dog was purchased from a breeder, it means that the dog is healthier, smarter, and better overall than other dogs. Unfortunately, this mindset leads to overcrowded shelters full of adoptable dogs that are waiting to be brought to a home. Since some shelters will euthanize animals who have been in the shelter for too long, the decision to adopt from a breeder can kill other dogs. Some owners who purchased from a breeder will also inevitably surrender their dog to a shelter, thereby continuing the cycle. To stop more shelter dogs from living large amounts of time in shelters, I wish to survey adults in Hamilton County to find to what extent the perception that one has about a dog impacts the likelihood that he or she will adopt a particular dog. I then hope to use these factors to convince more potential dog owners to adopt from shelters, rather than buy from a breeder. By discovering what will encourage people to adopt from shelters, fewer dogs will end up in shelters, and those that do will spend less time waiting to be adopted.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to answer the question "To what extent does the perception that one has about a dog impact the likelihood that he or she will adopt a particular dog?" To achieve this, I researched how specific characteristics of dogs affected the overall perceived adoptability of a dog.

Questions six and seven of the survey both tested whether the position a dog is pictured in influences their adoptablility. In question six, I used three Australian Shepherds, all of a blue

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[1] This is an excerpt of a 22 page thesis written on research performed in February of 2016.

merle coat. The dog standing and not looking at the camera received the most votes, gaining

approximately 43 percent of votes. The dog sitting and looking directly at the camera came in

second place, while the dog standing and looking at the camera received the least amount of

votes. See Table 6.

	1	2	3	Total	Score
	33.07 % 42	40.16 % 51	26.77 % 34	127	2.06
	21.77 % 27	45.16 % 56	33.06 % 41	124	1.89
	42.75 % 56	16.03 % 21	41.22 % 54	131	2.02

Table 6

Question seven tested this hypothesis with four Siberian Huskies. In this question, the

dog sitting and looking directly at the camera received approximately 26 percent of votes. The

husky standing on a rock and looking down at the camera received 15 percent of votes. The

profile head shot of the husky received approximately 35 percent of votes, while the dog

standing and not looking at the camera got 23.5 percent of votes. See Table 7.
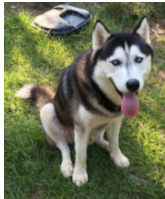
	1	2	3	4	Total	Score
	26.23 % 32	21.31 % 26	22.13 % 27	30.33 % 37	122	2.43
	15.08 % 19	24.60 % 31	26.98 % 34	33.33 % 42	126	2.21
	35.25 % 43	27.87 % 34	30.33 % 37	6.56% 8	122	2.92
	23.53 % 28	26.89 % 32	20.17 % 24	29.41 % 35	119	2.45

Table 7

As far as I have found, there is no previous research that is focused on the effect of position of a dog on perceived adoptability. My original hypothesis for this characteristic was that people would feel a stronger connection to a dog that was looking straight at the camera versus one that was profile or looking in a different direction. However, is seems that my original hypothesis was incorrect. In almost every case, the dogs not looking at the camera had more votes for most adoptable than the dogs looking at the camera. Participants likely inferred that the dogs looking at the camera were perceived to be more unafraid and aggressive. The most popular dog was the one holding a "show dog" pose. Refer to the appendix to see the photo used. This

could mean that the participants perceived it to be more obedient than the other dogs. As found by Boccini et al. (2013), management is a very important factor to potential dog owners. This pose is not normal for a dog to hold, so the holding of this pose implied to the participants that it is a very manageable dog and is willing to follow the direction of its owner. It could also imply that the participants preferred the pictures where more of the dog was able to be seen.

J DeLeeuw's (2010) research found that being female was preferable in adoption rates. My research agreed with this, finding that the majority of participants preferred a female dog. However, another popular opinion of those who took part in the survey was that it did not matter if the dog is a male or a female so long that it was spayed or neutered. Looking at both of these results, it seemed as though people are afraid that the male dogs would mark the house. Shelters could address this concern by offering discounted spaying and neutering sessions to those who adopt from the shelter.

Conclusion

This study found that while factors such as color, breed, age, gender, and status prior to being housed at the shelter had large effects on perceived adoptablility, others, such as coat length and pose in a photo, had less of an effect. These findings add to the previous research on characteristics of dogs that affect its perceived adoptability, including an entirely new study on how the pose in a photo affects how potential pet owners perceive the dog. The next step is to implement this research in animal shelters. By understanding what the potential dog owners of Hamilton County want in a dog, shelters can elect to display these dogs more prominently in the shelter. They may also elect to take these dogs to events where the shelter is promoting animal adoption. Doing so may convince more potential dog owners to adopt from shelters rather than

buy from a breeder. As this research focused on preferences for dogs in a suburban county,

future research should study what characteristics are preferred for dogs in rural and urban areas,

so that shelters in those types of areas can also effectively market to their own demographics. By

helping shelters to implement these changes and continuing research in this field, fewer dogs will

live out their entire lives in overcrowded shelters waiting for someone to take them home. (Word

count: 997 excluding citations, headers, footnotes, labels, and information included in tables)

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