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Independent Study 490A: What Were the Reasons for Why Adopters Choose a Black Dog Over Other Colors?



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Summary and Implications

Many animal shelters across the country have noticed that black dogs are not adopted as quickly as lighter colored dogs. This trend goes even further as a dog that is all black is not adopted as quickly as a black dog with one white toe or other small white flashing. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the reasons why an adopter chose a black dog over other colors. This study was performed at the Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Iowa, located in Des Moines IA. A total of 13 canine records were used in this study. The dogs that qualified for this data set had been 100% black (solid). The three questions asked of each adopter were as follows; (1) What attracted you to a black dog? (2) Have you had a black dog before? and (3) If no to question 2, are you familiar with a black dog from friends' family or the neighborhood? In addition, the type, age, sex and how long that dog was at the ARL was also collected. A variety of dog breeds were involved in the study with the most popular all black dog breed being classified as a Labrador mix (8) respectively. **What attracted you to a black dog?** The most commonly cited reason for why a black dog was being adopted was based on appearance (n = 4). Next, breed (n = 2), color did not matter (n = 2) and previous ownership (n = 2) were cited. "Other" (n = 3) included an emotional connotation "he is big and smart" "I felt lucky" and "I love black dogs." **Have you had a black dog before?** Of the 13 responses, 8 said that they had owned a black dog in the past (Figure 1). **If no to question 2, are you familiar with a black dog from friends' family or the neighborhood?** Of the 13 responses, 12 were familiar with a black dog before. Therefore in conclusion, the most common reason cited for adopting a black dog was based on dog appearance.

Even though 8 out of 13 adopters had owned a black dog before, previous ownership was only cited twice. Furthermore, the majority of adopters were familiar with a black dog and it could be hypothesized that this interaction was favorable.

Introduction

Many animal shelters across the country have noticed that black dogs are not adopted as quickly as lighter colored dogs. This trend goes even further as a dog that is all black is not adopted as quickly as a black dog with one white toe or other small white flashing.

Many theories exist to explain this trend. Some believe that potential adopters have a more difficult time feeling an instant connection with a black dog because the dog's facial features are somewhat camouflaged by their dark fur. Others think that adopters' may have a more difficult time in seeing into the back of the kennel and "finding" the dog. Maybe the photographs that potential adopters see on the website are not able to depict their features as well as a light tan or brown dog. Another theory suggested is that black dogs are under represented in popular media. The black dogs that are represented in popular media are usually either stalking predators or omens of evil. No matter what the theory behind this phenomenon, the fact remains that black dogs are the most commonly overlooked "type" of dog in shelters. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the reasons why an adopter chose a black dog over other colors.

Materials and Methods

Location and personnel: This study was performed at the Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Iowa, located in Des Moines, IA.

Facilities: All canines were brought into the ARL of Iowa, kept in individual kennels and were fed two times a day (0700 and 1700 h) a nutritionally balanced canine diet and had *ad libitum* access to water. If canines showed interest, approved toys were provided. All canines were evaluated by the veterinarian upon arrival, and were

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checked for conformational irregularities and/or disease (i.e. heart worm and distemper) and if required were treated. The time for a canine to be brought in and behaviorally evaluated ranged from 3 to 14 d depending on health issues, the severity of the behavior issue and stray dog holding requirements. Once the canine had been given a clean bill of health and passed the behavioral evaluation he/she was then placed into adoption kennels.

Data collection: A total of 13 canine adoption records were collected by one undergraduate from June 1st to July 31st 2009. The dogs that qualified for this data set were 100% black (solid). A three question survey was created and attached to the adoption ticket. The three questions asked of each adopter were as follows; (1) What attracted you to a black dog? (2) Have you had a black dog before? and (3) If no to question 2, are you familiar with a black dog from friends' family or the neighborhood? In addition, the type, age, sex and how long that dog was at the ARL was also collected.

Results and Discussion

A variety of dog breeds were involved in the study with the most popular all black dog breed being classified as a Labrador mix (8) respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. Dog breeds and sex that were used in the survey.

Breed Type	Sex		No.
	Male	Female	
Border Collie	1	0	1
Labrador / Golden	1	0	1
Labrador Mix	5	3	8
Labrador / Weim.	1	0	1
Mini poodle Mix	1	0	1
Shepherd / Ret.	1	0	1
Total			13

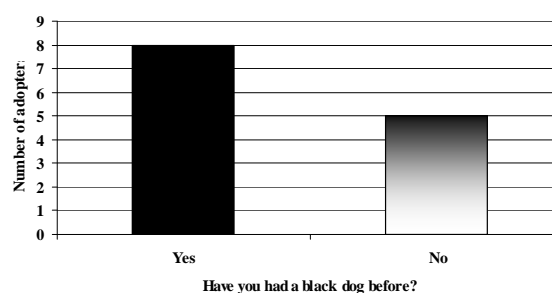
What attracted you to a black dog?

The most commonly cited reason for why a black dog was being adopted was based on appearance (n = 4). Next, breed (n = 2), color did not matter (n = 2) and previous ownership (n = 2) were cited. "Other" (n = 3) included an emotional connotation "he is big and smart" "I felt lucky" and "I love black dogs."

Have you had a black dog before?

Of the 13 responses, 8 said that they had owned a black dog in the past (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Responses to if an individual had owned a black dog before.



If no to question 2, are you familiar with a black dog from friends' family or the neighborhood?

Of the 13 responses, 12 was familiar with a black dog before.

Therefore in conclusion, the most common reason cited for adopting a black dog was based on dog appearance. Even though 8 out of 13 adopters had owned a black dog before, previous ownership was only cited twice. Furthermore, the majority of adopters were familiar with a black dog and it could be hypothesized that this interaction was favorable.

Acknowledgments

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