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THE AMERICAN SHELTER DOG: IDENTIFICATION OF DOGS BY PERSONALITY

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In most shelters across the United States, the majority of dogs are mixed breeds of unknown parentage. Nevertheless, it is common practice for staff to guess a dog's breed based on appearance. This "best guess" is used to identify the dog, although the actual pedigree is unknown. The ramifications of this can influence the adoption of a dog, elicit behavioral expectations on the part of the new owner (regardless whether or not the dog may actually be of the breed ancestry listed and even though there is behavioral variability within all breeds), and impinge on the owners on where they can live and if they can obtain household/liability insurance.

A recent study (Voith et al., 2009) compared breed identification of 20 mixed breed dogs adopted from shelters and similar agencies to breed identification by DNA analysis. The dogs came from 17 different agencies. Some dogs had been identified by the adoption agencies as a "type" of dog, e.g., terrier, shepherd. Sixteen had been identified as having, or probably having, 1 or 2 specific breeds in their ancestry. For only 4 of these 16 dogs did DNA analysis report the same breeds as the most predominant breeds in the dog's ancestry; and, in 3 of these 4 dogs, those breeds comprised only 12.5% of a dogs' genetic make-up. The majority of breeds suggested by the adoption agencies were not indicated in the DNA analysis. In fact, breeds proposed by the adopting agencies were not reported in DNA analysis in 87.5% (14/16) of the dogs. The "Lab mixes" were really just black dogs with floppy ears, with no

DNA evidence of a Labrador retriever. The "shepherd mixes" did not have evidence of the German shepherd dog in the DNA analysis. The wavy-haired black and white dogs did not have Border collie in their DNA analysis. In a separate study, Amy Marder and colleagues analyzed DNA samples from dogs visually identified as "pit bull mixes". While the DNA of many of these dogs showed some evidence of American Staffordshire terrier, a variety of other breeds were identified as well.

The Center for Shelter Dogs now identifies dogs not by assumed breeds but rather by appearance and individual personalities. Instead of using inaccurate breed labels, dogs are profiled by personality based on their results from the MATCH-UP Behavior Evaluation, a standardized evaluation currently undergoing validation. This approach provides information about the dog's personality traits as well as likely reactions in real-life situations. Staff are able to select appropriate behavioral and enrichment programs and owners learn about each dog in terms of their personality and unique needs. In addition, mixed breed dogs are identified as "American Shelter Dogs", rather than erroneous breed assumptions, which allows the focus to remain on personality. This new approach will enhance understanding and appreciation of dogs and will benefit both dogs and owners alike.

Key words: dog; breed identification; personality; shelter

Reference

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HORSE PERSONALITY PROFILES AND PERFORMANCE

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Horses play a significant role in animal assisted therapy, they are trained and employed by the police and military, and used in sports (Potter et al., 1994; Anderson et al., 1999). In all these situations horses' suitability and performance are fundamental and behavioral or personality traits may determine their success (Visser et al., 2001; Visser et al., 2002). Horses in therapy are required to be placid and calm, friendly and approachable, which may not be desirable for horses in sports (Worth-Estes, 1952; Hutson and Haskell, 1997; Visser et al., 2003; Buckley et al., 2004). We report on the personality