

Do Dogs Resemble Their Owners?

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ABSTRACT—We examined whether the frequent casual reports of people resembling their pets are accurate by having observers attempt to match dogs with their owners. We further explored whether any ability of observers to make such matches is due to people selecting dogs who resemble them, in which case the resemblance should be greater for predictable purebreds than for nonpurebreds, or is due to convergence, in which case the resemblance should grow with duration of ownership. Forty-five dogs and their owners were photographed separately, and judges were shown one owner, that owner's dog, and one other dog, with the task of picking out the true match. The results were consistent with a selection account: Observers were able to match only purebred dogs with their owners, and there was no relation between the ability to pair a person with his or her pet and the time they had cohabited. The ability to match people and pets did not seem to rely on any simple trait matching (e.g., size or hairiness). The results suggest that when people pick a pet, they seek one that, at some level, resembles them, and when they get a purebred, they get what they want.

{from METHODS} Each set of 15 pictures was viewed by 28 naive undergraduate judges who were participating for course credit. We constructed triads of pictures, each consisting of one owner, that owner's dog, and one other dog photographed at the same park. Each judge was shown the 15 owners from one dog park, one at a time, and instructed to identify which of the two possible dogs belonged to each person. In a Latin square design, each of the 14 incorrect dogs served as a foil for each dog, with the order of presentation randomized. Thus, within each set of 15 pairs, each owner-and-dog pair was presented with every other dog photographed at that park. A dog was regarded as resembling its owner if a majority of judges (i.e., more than 14) matched the pair.

RESULTS There was no evidence of any resemblance between nonpurebreds and their owners; of the 20 such dogs, there were 7 matches, 4 ties, and 9 misses, $\text{Chi_square}(2\text{df}, N=20) = 0.64$, n.s.. However, purebreds could be matched with their owners; of the 25 purebreds, there were 16 matches, 0 ties, and 9 misses, $\text{Chi_square}(2\text{df}, N=25) = 6.75$, $p < .05$. The difference between the matchability of nonpurebreds and purebreds was significant, $\text{Chi_square}(2\text{df}, N=45) = 7.03$, $p < .05$

No. of judges/28 who correctly matched owner and dog
[Data supplied by author to JH; "mutt" = not purebred]

Mutt #	No./28	Purebred #	No./28
1	15	1	17
2	23	2	21
3	15	3	17
4	12	4	12
5	14	5	12
6	14	6	15
7	9	7	17
8	12	8	21
9	21	9	10
10	9	10	20
11	7	11	17
12	11	12	8
13	14	13	18
14	12	14	8
15	20	15	17
16	14	16	18
17	16	17	18
18	12	18	11
19	17	19	18
20	13	20	9
		21	16
		22	20
		23	11
		24	15
		25	10
Mean	14.00		15.04
SD	4.01		4.15