

# Does your personality affect your dog? Here's how you can find out

August 31 2015, by Kristin Butler

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When I adopted my dog Kia from a puppy rescue center three years ago, I became a member of a growing sub-culture of people who focus their time, money, and love on their dogs.

Once valued for their ability to perform work, [dogs](#) are now more often considered to be a part of the family. This trend is evidenced by an increasing number of pet friendly hotels, restaurants, and workplaces in our communities; by brain imaging research that indicates we love our

dogs like we love our kids; and by economic statistics that show we are spending more money than ever on our four-legged friends.

Despite dogs' more elevated status in our society, according to the Center for Canine Behavior Studies, four million of them are still surrendered to shelters by their owners each year due to the dogs' behavior problems, and 2.2 million are euthanized.

Last month Dr. Nicholas H. Dodman and Dr. James A. Serpell of the Center launched a two-year citizen science research project, the Animal Ownership Interaction Study, to help reduce these startling numbers. Dodman, a professor at Tufts University and Serpell, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania are both leading canine researchers and members of the Center's Scientific Advisory Board.

Their premise is that a dog's behavior "problems" could be caused by their owner's personality and psychological status.

This echoes the conventional wisdom Kia and I encountered from dog handlers and owners as we journeyed through obedience training, agility classes, and the local dog park circuit: If a dog has behavioral problems, it may have something to do with the owner. It stands to reason. One of the most remarkable things about dogs, and the trait that makes them a member of many families, is their ability to recognize and respond to the emotions of their human companions. Unfortunately, it is this characteristic that also makes them vulnerable to the personality quirks and emotional states of the people they depend on.

Researchers at the Center launched the study because they think it is possible to prevent dog [behavior problems](#) and reduce dog relinquishments and deaths by better understanding the relationship between dog owner and pet and using this information to better match dogs with the right human companions.

"We are looking at the personality and emotions of the dog owner, and asking them to tell us about their perceptions of the dog's behavior," said Chris Mapelli, the Center's Executive Director.

"Dogs are very perceptive to a person's emotional and chemical reactions," Mapelli said. "We are looking to draw conclusions and findings about how an owner's emotional state and personality may be affecting a dog and causing it to react in a certain way."

While there have been smaller studies that look at these types of questions, the researchers hope that by using a citizen science approach, they will involve up to 10,000 participants from around the world, making the study the largest of its kind, which will increase the validity and impact of the research.

Two thousand dog owners have already registered to help, and given the enthusiasm we have for our dogs these days, I anticipate many more will come forward to help.

Interested dog owners can register to participate on the Center's website, sign a waiver, and then answer 100 questions during four surveys (one every six months). In addition, citizen scientists who participate in the study will have the opportunity to send questions about their dogs to Dodman and begin the process of strengthening the bond they have with their canine companions.

The study is being administered by Tufts University where Dodman teaches, and the research will be analyzed and shared in peer-reviewed publications and also with the media, Mapelli said.

Ultimately, Dodman and Serpell hope the information they collect will help shelters and pet adoption agencies better match dogs with people, and equip [dog owners](#) with the information and training they need to

behave in ways that help their dogs behave.

Kia and I, and all our dog park friends, can't wait to see the results!

**More information:** Learn how you can participate in the project:  
[scistarter.com/project/1043-Animal  
%20Ownership%20Interaction%20Study](https://scistarter.com/project/1043-Animal%20Ownership%20Interaction%20Study)

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