

Why Some Dogs Are Dead-Ringers for Their Owners

No, you're not crazy – that pooch and the person walking him really do resemble each other. Here's why you're seeing double.

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A wrinkly bulldog and his plump, aging owner. A perfectly groomed poodle and her equally groomed master. A playful yellow lab and his smiley, t-shirted sidekick. Think Reese Witherspoon and her pink-sweater-clad Chihuahua in *Legally Blonde*.

If you've ever done a double take at the sight of a **dog** and his human doppelganger, you're not alone. Most of us have noticed canines that bear a remarkable resemblance to their human caretakers (or vice versa).

"People have been wondering about dogs looking like their owners for years," says Nicholas Christenfeld, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of California, San Diego, who has investigated the idea. "The resemblance is illustrated in children's books; there are competitions for it at pet shows."

Most of us brush it off as a quirky coincidence — but recent research shows that there may actually be something to the whole man-mutt lookalike theory.

What Science Says About Pet-Owner Lookalikes

If dogs and their owners really do resemble each other, why would this be? Do humans simply (and perhaps narcissistically) choose little doggie clones — or does the semblance evolve after years of living together?

Along with Michael Roy, PhD, professor of psychology at Elizabethtown College in Penn., Dr. Christenfeld decided to put his own curiosity on the matter to the test. To do so, the researchers photographed 45 dogs and their owners separately. Then they asked study participants to match the photographs of the dogs to their masters (participants were given one photo of a human and two dog photos, with the task of choosing the correct dog).

The results? More often than not, the participants paired up the twosomes correctly — but only in the case of purebred pooches. (The participants didn't match mutts with their owners nearly as often.) Out of the 25 purebred dogs, 16 were matched correctly — that's more than 60 percent.

"We were surprised at first, and then it made perfect sense," says Christenfeld. The fact that only purebreds were matched correctly suggests the theory that people pick pooches that look like them in the first place (instead of growing to look like each other after a while). Christenfeld explains it like this: When you bring a purebred puppy home, you know exactly what he will look like as a fully-grown tail-wagger —

but with mutts, it's anyone's guess. That's why the participants could more easily match the purebreds and purebred owners. The researchers also said that the ability to match did not seem to be related to specific traits, such as perceived energy or friendliness (reinforcing that it was based on resemblance).

But Christenfeld and Roy aren't the only ones to explore the phenomenon. Another study, presented at the British Psychological Society Annual Conference, produced similar results when researchers from Bath Spa University in the United Kingdom asked a group of 70 people to match dog owners to three different **dog breeds** (Labradors, poodles, and Staffordshire bull terriers). More than half of the time, the matchups were dead on

Why We Choose Little Furry Lookalikes

Both studies ruled out the idea that cohabitating pet-person duos could grow to look alike over the years (though Christenfeld admits that some people outfit their dogs just like themselves — ahem, Paris Hilton). And that reinforces that it's all about mate selection.

But why would we single out little mini-me's in the first place?

Lance Workman, PhD, a psychologist at Bath Spa University and the head researcher behind the British study, explains that we tend to **pick pets** that fit our lifestyles. "If you are an active, robust person with a lot of energy, you may well buy a dog that is likewise full of energy. It's like selecting a **spouse** — it really will work best if you find someone whose interests and lifestyle fit with your own."

Christenfeld agrees, but he also thinks it taps into something deeper. "On an unconscious level, people want to take care of tiny, helpless, nonverbal creatures that look just like them. It's like having children — except your pet loves you," he jokes.

Humans and Their Doggie Doubles Are Everywhere!

Whether or not the research clearly proves why dogs and dog owners tend to look alike, there's no doubt that we love the idea.