



# A Comparison between Personality Traits and Dog or Cat Adoption Preference using the Big Five Personality Inventory

Kristen Ludwick, BS  
Ethicon Endo Surgery



## Abstract

The majority of animal lovers can self-identify with either being a “**cat person**” or a “**dog person**” and know which pet they would choose

Common stereotypes suggest that dog people are **more social and outgoing**, and cat people have a tendency to be more **introverted homebodies**

Using a free, publicly accessible website, 224 people were surveyed using the **Big Five Personality Inventory (BFPI)** and asked to choose a pet preference for adoption (dog, cat, neither, or another pet). Results suggest that **dog people trend towards extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism** while **cat people trend towards openness**

## Introduction

3.9 million dogs<sup>1</sup> and 3.4 million cats<sup>2</sup> enter animal shelters annually. From these numbers, 1.4 million (36%) of dogs and 1.3 million (38%) of cats are adopted annually<sup>2</sup>.

This means that 63% of animals in shelters are not adopted each year<sup>3</sup>.

In an effort to increase proper placement and encourage adoption of shelter animals, **this research attempted to determine if pet preference could be identified by a human's personality traits using the Big Five Personality Inventory test**.

The BFPI divides personalities into five dimensions<sup>4</sup>:

**Openness:** inventive and curious personalities who are imaginative, independent, unpredictable, and comfortable without rigid guidelines

**Conscientiousness:** efficient, organized, dependable, and disciplined individuals who prefer scheduled, planned events

**Extraversion:** outgoing, energetic individuals who draw their energy from being around other people, assertive, and overall are positive

**Agreeableness:** friendly, compassionate, cooperative, trusting, helpful, and well-tempered individuals

**Neuroticism:** the tendency to associate with sensitive or nervous behaviors such as anxiety or vulnerability, worrying, or people who are easily irritated

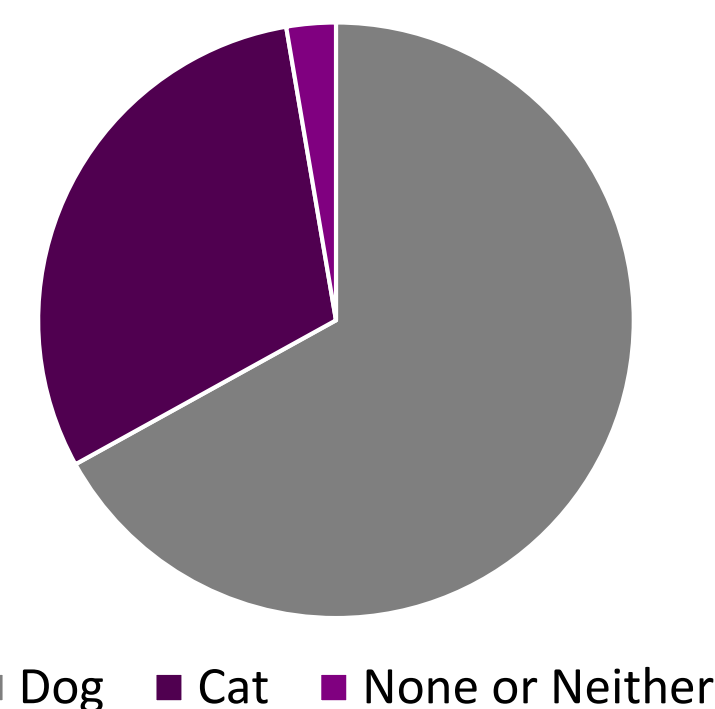
## Hypothesis

**Dog people** will associate with **extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness**

**Cat people** will associate with **openness and neuroticism**

Similar study conducted at **University of Texas** yielded same results<sup>5</sup>

Pet Preference from Survey



■ Dog ■ Cat ■ None or Neither

Chart 1. Percentage of dog vs. cat preference

## Methods and Materials

- Using a **free, publicly accessible online survey**, 44 statements from the BFPI test<sup>6</sup> and additional questions around pet preference, demographic information and individual background information was conducted
- A link to the survey was distributed across social media outlets and other social sharing platforms with a **goal to achieve 200 complete surveys** by participants over the age of 18
- The survey was available online from October 3<sup>rd</sup> to November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016. **The survey was closed when the target of 200 surveys was exceeded**
- Any incomplete survey, or survey conducted by an individual under the age of 18 was eliminated from the results
- The **BFPI results were tabulated and results compared using an un-paired t-test** to distinguish any statistical significance between personality traits and pet preference

## Results

A total of **244 surveys were submitted**, 20 were excluded (incomplete or conducted by an individual under the age of 18)

Of the 224 completed surveys, **150 individuals (66.96%) selected dog** as their pet preference and **68 individuals (30.36%) selected cat**. See Chart 1.

**Dog people trended towards extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism**

**Cat people trended towards openness**

The hypothesis was **not supported by the data** – dog people associated higher with neuroticism than cat people ( $p = 0.35$ ) (Chart 2)

While the data showed no statistical significance in any of the five dimensions, there was a trend that dog people associated more with **agreeableness** ( $p = 0.08$ ) and **extraversion** ( $p = 0.12$ ) when compared to cat people

Survey participants were:

- 90.63% female** (203 individuals) and **8.48% male** (19 individuals)
- 25 and 34 years of age** (105 individuals, 46.88%)
  - however ages ranged from 18 – 65 years or older
- Married** (130 individuals, 58.04%)
- Of **Caucasian decent** (215 individuals, 95.98%)
- Listed as **Democratic** for their registered voting party (109 individuals, 48.66%)

Pet Preference in regards to Owner Personality

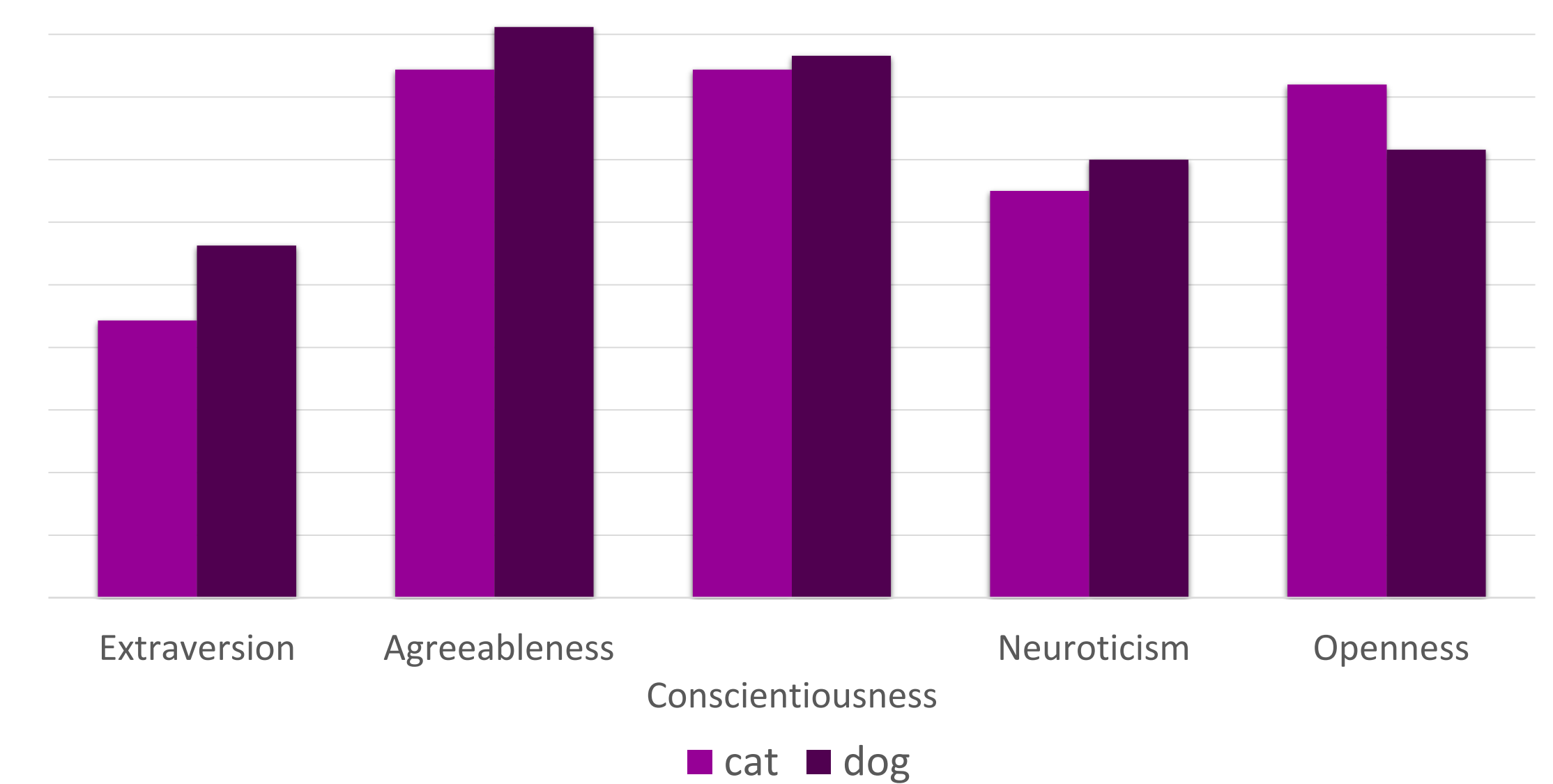


Chart 2. Graph of personality traits versus pet preference

## Discussion

There are **trends between human personality traits and their pet preference** between cat or dog ownership

Finding the appropriate pet is important, because it **increases the chances of a solid pet-owner bond**

**Strong pet attachment has been linked to positive effects** on an owner's mental and physical health as well as assisting with how pet owners deal with their emotions, traumas, and other relationships<sup>7</sup>. The benefits for a pet in a proper placement home is the security of a **strong animal-human bond** with the promise of a **secure and comfortable home**<sup>7</sup>

Providing a solid match between pet and owner will help **reduce the number of animals in shelters who need adopting**

Research Limitations:

Large majority of survey **participants were white women**. In separate studies, women report higher scores in **extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism than men**, regardless of pet preference<sup>8</sup>. Majority of participants were registered as **Democratic**, and additional studies have shown **that Democrats associate with the personality dimensions of openness and extraversion**<sup>9</sup>

## Action Component

Results will be presented at a meeting of the **Cincinnati Veterinary Technician Association**, potentially as soon as the first quarter of 2017

Additional communication with **local shelters** is in the works. The hope is to create an **easily accessible survey** for shelter staff to guide potential pet owners through and **help distinguish the proper pet for the proper personality**

## Contact

Kristen A Ludwick  
Ethicon Endo Surgery  
ludwicka@miamioh.edu  
513.484.3581 (c)

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