

Pups, People, and Personality in the Wake of a Post-Pandemic Shelter Crisis

Michael Martindale, advised by Dr. Claudia Thompson (Department of Psychology)



THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

Shelters in Crisis

- COVID-19 led to a spike in pet acquisition from stores/breeders AND in pet relinquishment to shelters (Carroll et al., 2022; Hoffman et al., 2021).
- Shelter returns are also a big problem.** People adopt dogs based on appearance and return them for behavioral/personality related reasons (Dinwoodie et al., 2022; Powell, et al., 2021).
 - Generally, shelter dogs need 3 months to become completely comfortable in the home (McConnell & London, 2011). **Studies have shown that on average, dogs are kept for about 1 week before being returned to the shelter** (Powell et al., 2022; Kalman & Gates, 2023; Modelli et al., 2004; Shore, 2005).

Main Goal of the Study

Examine the role of personality similarity among owner-dog pairs in adoption success and satisfaction.

Method:

- Dog/human personality was assessed using the **Big Five**. Satisfaction was assessed through 1-7 ratings and qualitative responses

Big Five Personality Model

Human Goldberg, 1990	Canine Gosling et al., 2001
Extraversion	Energy
Agreeableness	Affection
Neuroticism	Emotional Reactivity
Openness	Intelligence
Conscientiousness	Not observable

- Data was collected from the Wayne County Dog Shelter over the course of 5 months. A total of **50 adopters** and **48 adopted dogs** participated (2 dogs were returned and adopted again)



Major Findings:

- Personality is a bigger decider of adoption success, rather than adoption choice**

- On average, owner-dog pairs tended to match on at least 2 out of the 4 traits. **Agreeableness** and **openness** matched between owner and dog most often, however only **agreeableness** was statistically significant (all $p < .05$)

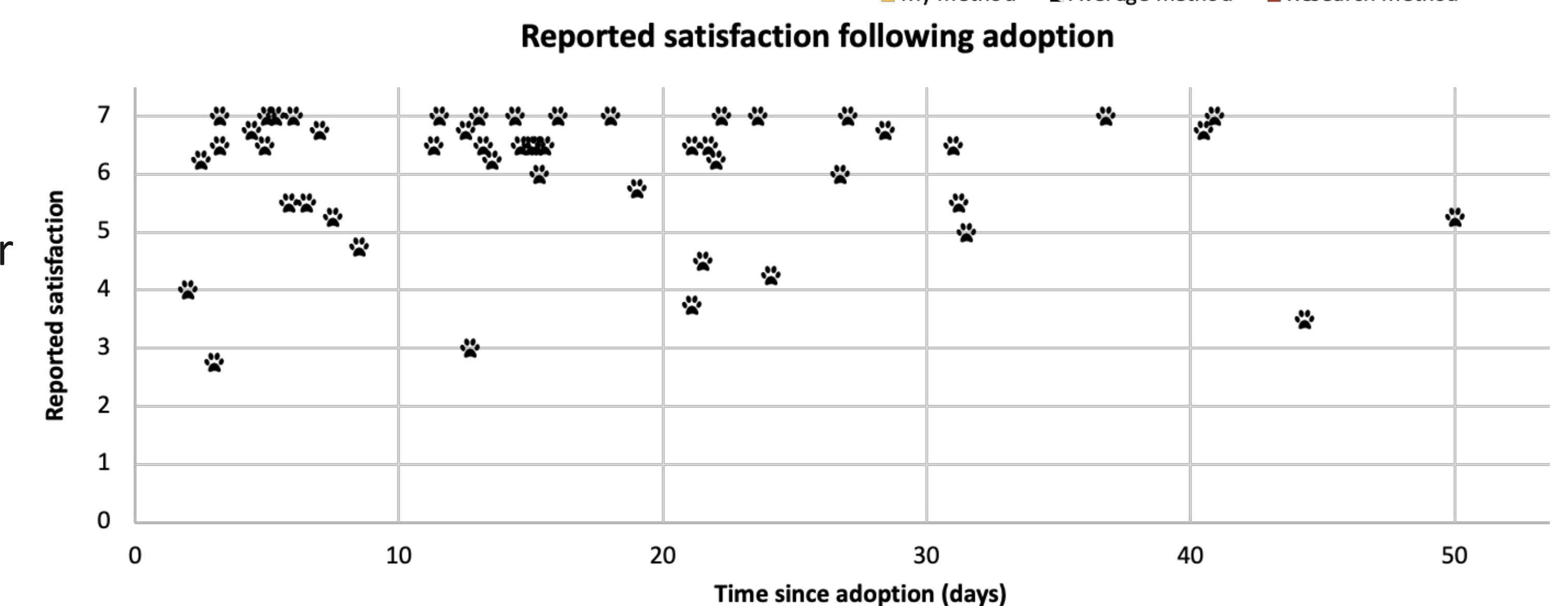
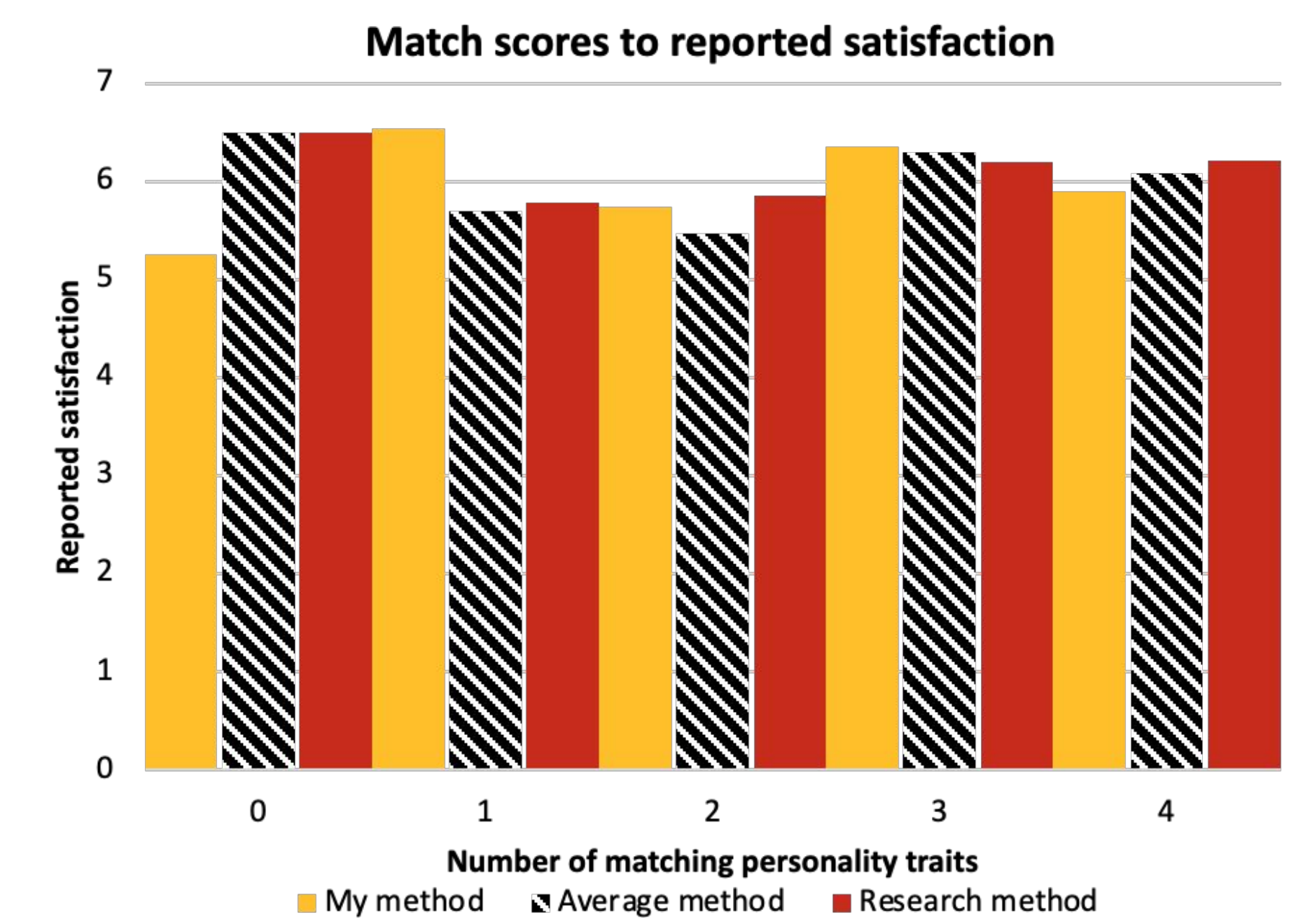
- Very few people were actually dissatisfied with their dog regardless of personality match or length of time since adoption!**

- No statistically significant trend was found between satisfaction and personality match or time since adoption (all $p > .05$), likely due to a “ceiling effect” where adoption satisfaction was high overall.

- Unrealistic expectations are harmful to owner-dog relationships**

- The qualitative reports from owners showed that more positive, optimistic, and forgiving language was used among owners who reported higher satisfaction, even when they reported behavioral issues
- Only a few dogs were returned, each having behavioral issues and staying in the home for less than 3 weeks. Owners of these dogs often used negative, pessimistic, and conditional language

There are growing pains when it comes to adopting shelter dogs, so remember to be patient and agreeable!



References:

- Carroll, G. A., et al. (2022). *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 9, 1017954.
- Dinwoodie, I. R., et al. (2022). *Animals*, 12(17), 2264.
- Goldberg, L. R. (1990). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(6), 1216-1229.
- Gosling, S. D., et al. (2003). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(6), 1161-1169.
- Hoffman, C. L., et al. (2021). *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 8, 781403.
- Kalman, H. & Gates, A. (2023). Human Animal Support Services.
- McConnell, P. B. & London, K. B. (2011). *Love has no age limit: Welcoming an adopted dog into your home*. McConnell Publishing.
- Modelli, F., et al. (2004). *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 7(4), 253-266.
- Powell, L., et al. (2021). *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 8, 734973.
- Powell, L., et al. (2022). *Animals*, 12(9), 1053.
- Shore, E. R. (2005). *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 8(3), 187-198.