

"Black Dog Syndrome"

Dogs are left behind in shelters because of their appearance. We humans fall in love with a dog based upon our visual impressions of them - it is natural for us because our sense of sight is our predominant sense, followed by hearing and then smell.

Overall, black dogs are usually the last to be adopted and the first to be euthanized. And if they also have black eyes, it is the kiss of death for a shelter dog.

To win someone's heart, a black dog has to be EXTREMELY outgoing and friendly... tail wagging, coming to the front of the kennel, "cutish" with a trick or maybe placing a paw on the chain link fence that separates them... something - they have to have something to save their life and avoid euthanasia.

Part of the 'black dog syndrome' is the superstitions surrounding the color black. Things are either "black" (evil) or "white" (good).

But some of it is inbred and fear-based in humans. Many of the highly aggressive dogs are black (or a combination of black, tan, etc. or predominantly black).

Others will tell you they don't adopt a black dog because it is too ordinary or non-descript. And it is VERY difficult to photograph a black dog without a photographer's specialized lighting and tools! Many shelters can barely get a new dog photographed, let alone going back to make sure the dog is being shown in its best possible pose to be adopted. If you look to the lower left, you will see the photograph of Paris - were it not for the white in her ears, you (as a human) would not be able to immediately place where her eyes are - and we humans connect with eyes first!

Finally, there have been scientific studies that prove we as humans are visual creatures and we need to 'connect' via eye contact. Peering down into a dog's eyes is 'alpha dominance' in dog language. Most dogs who don't know the person will immediately back up a bit or hesitate, reading the language as a potential challenge. The human gets bad vibes, the dog doesn't get adopted.

Along with the black color problem, many Chihuahuas will not be bred true black (black EVERYWHERE) for it is a difficult color to breed to. White on the chest can easily accompany white whiskers, white tip on the tail and/or white tipped toes. People see the white on the whiskers and immediately believe the dog is old.

Chihuahuas actually have 16 different colors and types. Then we have the 'non-descript tan Chihuahua' that flourishes in the shelters. What is tan to the average person could really be a red, a cream or a tan to a knowledgeable Chi lover. Browns can be herringbone, chocolate, etc. but the colors are all lumped together by many.

And in rescue? We say anything with pointed ears, small and a curled tail is labeled as a Chihuahua! If the person is put off by the reputation of the Chihuahua and a dog is mislabeled, the dog doesn't get adopted. Rat Terriers, Toy Fox Terriers, Manchester Terriers and Chihuahuas look very much alike to many but their temperaments and needs vary greatly.

Other resources to read on this topic:

- [Black Dog Syndrome](http://www.blackpearldogs.com) (www.blackpearldogs.com) Internet hoax or well known phenomena in rescue or humane circles?
- [Black Dog Rescue Project](http://www.blackdogrescueproject.com/black-dog-syndrome.html) (http://www.blackdogrescueproject.com/black-dog-syndrome.html): Other sides of this same issue
- [Black Dogs Face Doggie Discrimination](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/23472518/#.TosOAnKt2so) (http://www.nbcnews.com/id/23472518/#.TosOAnKt2so) from msnbc.com