

Do 99% Of Dogs Really Have Behavior Problems? Unpacking The Truth Behind Claims And What You Can Do

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Over the weekend, I saw a social influencer with a post that read, 'New study shows there may be no such thing as a well-behaved dog. With over 99 percent of US dogs reported to have moderate or severe behavioral issues.' And a very recent scientific journal article was cited.

So, I thought we'd do a deep dive into that article and to the statement, do 99 percent of all dogs actually have serious behavioral problems?

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. [The article that I'm referring](#) to appeared in the Journal of Veterinary Behavior, and it was presented by Bonnie Beaver from the Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences at the College of Veterinary Medicine, Texas, in College Station, Texas.

And so, before I get into details about the article, let me just share my response to that big, broad, 'Hey, 99.9 percent of all dogs have a behavior problem.' The first thing I thought was, Oh, great. You are telling people, "It's okay. Don't do anything about it. Your dog is completely normal if it's got, there was a listing of the problems, attachment or [separation anxiety](#), [fears](#), [aggression](#). And so, every dog's got it out there. So, you know, just live with it. It's okay."

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So, my first thought was, crap, we're giving people permission to not dig deeper into the 'Why their dogs are behaving and what they could do about it.' Maybe it's a nutritional problem. Maybe it's the dogs in pain. Maybe it's a tick-borne illness. These are three biggies that could be the reason why your dog is behaving a little bit off kilter.

My next thought was if they did a study of humans, do you think 99.9 percent of all of us would come up as behavioral problems? Like, don't we all have some sort of "behavioral issue." My follow up thought when I dismissed humans, and let's be kind to everybody, was I believe it's true that every [puppy or rescue dog](#) that anybody brings into their home at some point will show a behavioral challenge.

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It's what happens next that decides if that family and that dog are going to be dealing with that behavioral problem for a lifetime. Because the truth is often when people get a dog into their house, they do it because they've read too many happy ever after books, or they've watched too many Disney movies, and they have this belief that dogs come into their life, and they can do remarkable things.

They are fluent in English. They understand all of the needs and the wants of all humans. They retrieve children from wells and all kinds of miraculous events. And the truth is that people have these [high expectations of new puppies or dogs](#).

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I'm going to give you an example. Just last week on social media, somebody commented in one of our pages, "My 15-week-old [puppy is biting my children](#). That needs to stop." That is an unrealistic expectation. Can we minimize the amount a 15-week-old puppy is biting?



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Yes, but it's very probable that there's contributing factors to [why that puppy is biting](#). But I digress. People on the whole often expect way too much of a new puppy or a rescue dog or their dog in their house and way too little of themselves.

They don't believe that they have a role. Either the dog is a good dog or they're not a good dog. "Oh, I didn't get a good dog this time." "Oh, my neighbor got a good dog." And the truth is, I believe there are no naturally good dogs.

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There are dogs who happened into a home that is going to be patient and are going to do all they can to bring out the best in that dog, that are going to do all they can to help build that dog's confidence and give that dog the best life possible.

But sadly, not all dogs end up in those sort of homes. So, when you have a behavioral challenge like the study cited, aggression, separation anxiety, attachment, they actually named house toiling, but it was only 4 percent of the respondents on the questionnaire so not a big deal, but fear and anxiety was up there as one of the biggies that they mentioned.

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So, when you have one of these challenges, there's three options for everybody. You can ignore it/just hope they'll grow out of it. You can manage it, AKA, don't let the dog near the thing that they're afraid of. Don't let the dog near the thing it wants to bite. Or you can do some dog training. Meaning, you can get curious. You can find a mentor that can help you overcome the challenges that you're facing at this point.

Because most puppies, most rescue dogs are going to give you challenges. [My four-year-old dog This!](#) as I've shared in [previous Shaped by Dog episodes](#) had terrible [separation anxiety](#) as a young puppy. She then went through a period with [massive resource guarding](#) to the point of attacking other dogs in her house.

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All of these challenges I know either would have been non-existent or would have been much easier to work through had I known she had a serious digestion/nutritional challenge. So, I'm not denying there's a possibility that these problems might be out there.

What I'm saying is it's what happens when those problems are presented, what is the attitude of the dog owner? And with sensational campaigns saying, 'All dogs have behavioral problems, don't worry about it.' Which, in all fairness, that's not what the post said. It was just saying all dogs have behavior problems. It may be harder to get people to take action and try to work through those problems.

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But I want to minimize this just a little. I don't want people to be afraid to get a dog or a new puppy because 99.9 percent of all dogs have behavior problems. I want to dig into this article a little bit more.

They cited that these conclusions were drawn by surveying 40,000 plus dog owners in the United States. And they gave them a series of questions or statements and the people had to score them on a score of one - it just wasn't a problem, up to four - it was a serious problem. And I believe two was moderate and three was like intensely moderate so getting towards more serious. But some of the sentences, I'm like, I don't have a dog in my house that's going to pass.



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And actually, I don't think I would pass for some of these. I'm going to give you an example. Under the category of aggression was, 'Does your dog at any time show aggression if somebody tries to take their food while they're eating, or if somebody tries to take a bone while they're chewing on it?'

Now, that's not a problem with any of the dogs in my house, but had I not done a lot of great conditioning when they were youngsters, I bet it could have been.

Another statement that I'm like, oh, this is going to be a tough one for anyone to say no to. 'Does your dog show any type of aggression when somebody walks by your window or knocks on your door or delivers something?'

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Well, I think most dogs are going to bark at the door when a delivery guy or delivery gal comes, aren't they? So, if that's considered moderate aggression, then that contributes to what they found to be 55.6 percent of all dogs surveyed show aggression.

Okay, now let's go down to the topic of separation anxiety or attachment, which were grouped into one category. 'Does your dog follow you from room to room?' Yeah. I don't know a time I've ever gone to the bathroom without a dog there.

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Another question. 'Does your dog like to sit near you when you sit down?' So, that is considered a separation or attachment problem. And that contributes to the more than 85 percent of the dogs they classified.

And if they scored them as a three, like my two red Border Collie boys always want to be wherever I am, they would be scored at least a three, maybe even a four. Then that is considered an attachment or separation anxiety problem.

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Now under the category of fear, were 49.9 percent of all of these 43,000 respondents said, "Yeah, my dog is fearful." because your dog responds to a sudden noise, like a car backfiring when you're out walking or somebody dropping some loud object.

Well, yeah, all of my dogs are going to show a sign of fear like, "Oh, what's that?!" And so am I. So, my point is, don't take headlines at face value. Do a little bit of digging. At very least, don't repeat broad statements without at least some investigation.

And if your dog does have a challenge, not that they show a little bit of fear at the sound of a car backfiring, because honestly, I don't even know, maybe service dogs won't, but they would have to be trained not to, I would imagine in most cases.

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But if your dog has some [behavioral challenge](#), please don't just ignore it. Please don't hope it will get better. Please help that dog live their best life by saying, "Together we can help make this better." I'm not saying all behavior problems can be 100 percent solved.

But the vast majority of them can be made much, much better than they are presenting initially. But all of us who own those dogs, we have to fall in love with a process. Fall in love with the process of being curious.





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Fall in love with the process of seeking out a mentor that can help you in the way that you want your dog to be trained. And fall in love with questioning headlines and saying, "Well, if that's not true, what else could possibly be true? Let me do some further reading."

Because there are no perfect dogs. There are just puppies and dogs that come into the perfect home for them to be able to live their best life and have people that help them shine. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Article: The prevalence of behavior problems in dogs in the United States](#)

[Podcast Episode 200: Solve Your Dog's Separation Anxiety With FRIDA: Expanding Calm With Functional Relaxation](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Fearful Dogs Help with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Reactive or Aggressive Dogs: Key Insights with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Helping Your Rescue Dog After Adoption: Success Strategies for Rehomed Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 250: Expectations Vs Reality: Navigating The Path To Dog Training Success](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Puppy Biting Help with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Video: WHY Do Puppies Bite?](#)

[Podcast Episode 203: Reactive, Unmotivated and Fearful: Finding Resiliency For This! Beyond Dog Training Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 204: Dog Behavior And Diet: Recovery For This! Beyond Dog Training Part 2](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Resource Guarding In Dogs and Puppies](#)

[Podcast Episode 189: All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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