DOG AGGRESSION: CANINE BEHAVIOR AND FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO AGGRESSION TOWARDS HUMANS

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Our study focused on dog aggression toward people. The investigation involved manifestations of aggression toward unknown people and the owner or other members of owner’s household. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS 12 software. We obtained responses from 114 dog owners about their dog’s aggression toward unknown persons. More than half of the dogs surveyed (67 dogs; 58.8%) “never” exhibited aggression toward unknown persons. A higher proportion of dogs showed aggression toward the owner or another member of his/her household (no aggression was exhibited by 50 dogs (44.2%). In both cases no significant differences were observed between breeds (P = 0.57; P = 0.448). The previous ownership of a dog also appeared to be an insignificant factor in our study (P = 0.63; P = 0.779). Higher risk of biting was recorded for men compared to women. Men are at higher risk as they become more frequently the subject of dog aggression. The mean value of coded responses speaks in disfavor of the male gender (1.53 ± 0.9; minimum 1, maximum 4). Another risk group is supposed to be children up to 12 years of age but our observations revealed no significant differences for this age group.

Key words: behavior; dog aggression; questionnaire; human-animal bond

AGREEMENT AMONG EXPERTS IN RATINGS OF EMOTION IN DOGS

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To determine whether experienced dog behavior professionals would agree in their ratings of emotion in dogs, we asked eight professionals with a mean of 20 years of experience to view 30 short video clips of dogs of various breeds and ages. The professionals were mostly certified pet dog trainers (CPDT-KA), diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (DACVB), or certified applied animal behaviorists (CAAB). First, the experts rated on a nine-point bipolar scale how safe/unsafe it would be to approach each dog. In addition, they rated each dog’s arousal (calm/excited, loose/tense) and stress level (stressed/relaxed), as well as the emotional valence (positive/negative) and basic emotions experienced by each dog (happy/unhappy, sad/cheerful, angry/peaceful, fearful/bold). The midpoint of each scale was designated as “neutral.” Kendall’s coefficient of concordance (KCC), the intraclass correlation coefficient, and Krippendorff’s alpha were calculated as measures of agreement and were consistent with each other. Excellent overall agreement among experts (KCC > 0.7) was obtained in ratings for 12 of 30 dogs (40%), moderate agreement for 11 dogs (37%), and poor agreement (KCC < 0.4) for 7 dogs (23%). The 10 dogs rated with highest agreement received more extreme ratings on the nine-point scales than the 10 dogs rated with lowest agreement. In addition, among the high-agreement dogs, there were more ratings at the positive than negative ends of the scales (e.g., happy end of happy/unhappy). Selected videos have been included in a larger, ongoing study of individual differences in interspecific emotion discrimination in dogs and humans.

Key words: interrater agreement; interrater reliability; behaviorist; trainer; emotion

DOGS DO LOOK AT IMAGES - EYE TRACKING IN CANINE COGNITION RESEARCH

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The domestic dog is widely used as a model in cognition research, but its visual perception abilities are still quite unknown. Eye tracking enables the direct assessment of gazing and can reveal various cognitive processes. The aim of this study was to investigate if an eye tracker can be used in canine studies. We examined whether dogs naturally pay attention to 2D-images and if their gazing behaviour depends on the information on the images.

Six family dogs participated in the test where six digital color images (750 x 536 pixels) from four categories (human faces, dog faces, toys and alphabetic characters) were displayed from a 22” LCD-monitor for two seconds per image. The test trial was repeated three times a day, a total of eight days. In addition, baseline data, i.e., dogs watching a blank screen, was collected. The dogs fixated their gaze at the monitor for a significantly shorter duration when the screen was blank than when the images were displayed (95 ± 64 ms vs. 259 ± 64 ms,