Perceived Aggressive Tendencies and Functional Attitudes Towards Various Breeds of Dogs

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Introduction

• Little empirical research has focused on the perceived behavioral differences in breeds of dogs.
• Common misconceptions of dog behavior create serious problems for specific breeds as these perceptions lead to negative stereotypes and decreased pet ownership (Protopopova, Gilmour, Weiss, Shen, & Wynne, 2012; Wright, Smith, Daniel, & Adkins, 2007).

Does this dog look friendly or threatening? Why?

• The limited research that has investigated aggressive behaviors has found breed inconsistencies with those that have stereotypically been perceived as “aggressive” (e.g. German Shepherd, Rottweiler, American Pit Bull Terrier) (Duffy, Hsu, & Serpell, 2008; Podberscek, 1994; Wells, & Hepper, 2012).
• Alongside measures of perceived aggression for specific breeds, the current study sought to explore peoples’ functional attitudes related to such perceptions.
• To assess if these attitudes coincided with perceptions of breeds of dogs, we asked several practical questions about a person’s intended behaviors toward certain breeds.

PARTICIPANTS

• n = 274 (comprised of 2 samples)
• age 18 -77 (M = 24.63, SD = 11.10)
• female 78.47%

MATERIALS & PROCEDURE

• 30 dog breeds were selected for inclusion

Results

• A list of mean ratings for perceived aggression was produced. The 5 highest and 5 lowest perceived aggressive breeds are listed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breed</th>
<th>Mean agg. rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rottweiler</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doberman</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitscher</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Shepherd</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxer</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffordshire Terrier</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Correlation analyses were performed for the 6 functional attitudes questions (FA) and mean perceived aggression for all 30 breeds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FA1 = child</th>
<th>FA2 = park</th>
<th>FA3 = live</th>
<th>FA4 = pay</th>
<th>FA5 = exp</th>
<th>FA6 = own</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-.91**</td>
<td>-.93**</td>
<td>-.81**</td>
<td>-.79**</td>
<td>-.72**</td>
<td>-.77**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

• The current study sought to add to the existing literature by evaluating judgements of aggression for specific breeds of dogs, and functional attitudes towards those breeds.
• Our findings suggest as perceived aggression for specific breeds increases, functional attitudes about these breeds decrease.
• Specifically, a person’s level of interaction is affected by the specific breed of dog, such that people are less likely to interact with breeds that are perceived to have more aggressive tendencies.

Are “aggressive” breeds being accurately represented or do stereotyping myths exist?

• Future studies would benefit from assessing consistencies between actual measures of aggression and perceptions of dog breed behavior.

References


Acknowledgments

Breed images © the American Kennel Club (AKC), used with permission.

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