

Training Dogs and Training Humans: Symbolic Interaction and Dog Training

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Abstract:

The way we train our dogs reflects our perceptions of human-nonhuman animal relationships. The methods and training skills used by dog trainers differ by philosophy on dog behavior and human responsibility. Yet, all trainers agree that training is a critical component in ending the cycle of acquisition and relinquishment of unwanted dogs due to behavioral problems. This ethnographic study uses the theory of symbolic interaction to study human-dog relationships by analyzing two different types of dog training. The "traditional" dominance-based method of training endorses obedience by using a *human-centric* approach that places dogs in a subordinate position in order to maintain a space in the family. The "reward-based" behavior modification method promotes a *dog-centric* approach that highlights companionship over dominance and promotes a balance of human and dog desires and needs. Through the process of training, dogs learn proper behavior and their role in the family. In addition, while guardians may expect to be schooled in skills, they also learn how to treat dogs physically and symbolically through the guidance of dog trainers.

Keywords: [DOG TRAINING](#); [HUMAN-DOG RELATIONSHIPS](#); [SYMBOLIC INTERACTION](#)

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