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Raising canine: Cross-species Parallels in Parental Investment

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Parental investment tends to vary as a function of parental status, i.e., biological/adoptive parents tend to invest more in their children than stepparents. Given the similarities in some of the ways humans interact with children versus pet dogs, the current study investigated whether dog keepers' "parental" status predicts parental response toward their dogs. More specifically, differences in parental response were examined in 863 participants who were grouped as follows: 701 who chose to acquire a dog (i.e., "adoptive" dog keepers), 89 whose dog was acquired by a relative such as a parent or sibling (i.e., "relative" dog keepers), and 73 whose dog was acquired by a significant other (i.e., "stepparent" dog keepers). Pen-and-paper and online surveys were administered to measure four dimensions of parental response: attachment, investment, abuse, and anthropomorphism with respect to individuals' pet dogs. In addition, attitudes towards dogs in general were assessed. Results indicated that adoptive dog keepers exhibit significantly greater attachment and investment in their dogs than stepparent dog keepers. No differences in abuse or anthropomorphism appeared among groups. The findings have implications for the welfare of dogs and further our understanding of human-dog interactions by highlighting a similarity between parental investment in children versus dogs.

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