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Acculturation – Perceptions of breed differences in behavior of the dog (Canis familiaris)

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This study borrows the concept of acculturation from Social Anthropology to explore human perception of breed behavior in domestic dogs. A core component of acculturation studies is the contact hypothesis. This concept proposes that once culturally diverse individuals come into contact with each other and are able to develop an understanding of their differing cultures, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination should be reduced resulting in more positive interactions in the future. Accordingly it is hypothesized that people with more limited contact with dogs will be more likely to accept breed stereotypes and less likely to recognize the significance of individual variation within breeds. Items within a survey were developed to investigate if personal perception of breed-typical behavior is associated with the informant's experience with dogs. This was tested with reference to response to three statements premised on somatotyping assumptions (the tendency to link behavior with certain types of physical characteristic). The results were consistent with the prediction that level and quality of contact are major influences on the tendency to believe popular breed stereotypes, despite scientific evidence which challenges the justification for such generalizations. These results are of scientific, ethical, and practical significance since they suggest breed stereotyping in dogs is a similar phenomenon to the racial stereotyping of people.

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