

I like my dog, does my dog like me?

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Abstract

In this study, the possibility of there being an association between how an owner perceives his/her relationship to their dog and the way the dog experiences the relationship to its owner was investigated using two well-established methods within the anthrozoology literature. Twenty dog–owner dyads participated in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP), to evaluate the bond on the dog's part, and the Monash Dog Owner Relationship Scale (MDORS) was used to investigate the strength of the relationship from the owner's view. Six attachment variables were created based on changes in the dogs' behaviour when it was with the owner vs. when it was with the stranger in the SSP. These were: changes in exploration, passive behaviour, independent play, social play, physical contact and tail wagging. The magnitude of these changes in the dogs' behaviour was then tested for correlations with the owners' scores in the MDORS. Only two correlations were found and both were with the MDORS subscale that measures "Dog–owner interaction". They suggested that owners who interact more frequently with their dog, have dogs showing more proximity-seeking behaviour upon reunion ($\rho = 0.56$, $P = 0.01$, $N = 20$) and less independent play behaviour ($\rho = -0.52$, $P = 0.02$, $N = 20$). This might be a consequence of dogs being positively reinforced for close interaction by the owner, or these dogs may have developed an attachment style similar to insecurely attached children. No correlation was found between any of the six attachment variables in the SSP and the overall MDORS score, the MDORS subscale "Perceived costs" and, more importantly, no correlation to "Perceived emotional closeness". In summary, there is no support from this study for the view that the strength of the relationship an owner feels to his/her dog is mirrored in the strength of the bond of the dog to its owner.

Keywords

Canine; Human–animal relationship; MDORS; Strange Situation Procedure; Behaviour; Animal welfare