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Behavioural Therapy Success and the Effect of Socialisation on Subsequent Behaviour in Dogs.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Veterinary Studies at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Mathew Roger Ward
2003
“YOU KNOW WHAT HERMAN MELVILLE SAID?"

“HE SAID 'TO PRODUCE A MIGHTY BOOK YOU MUST CHOOSE A MIGHTY THEME.'"

THE DOG
Recommended amendments

The following amendments were suggested by the examiners of the thesis and accepted as being well advised. As they were minor amendments the thesis was not modified.

In the section Aims of the Thesis (page 35-36) the word ‘investigate’ should be replaced by either ‘assess’ or ‘report’.

The term ‘report’ should be used rather than ‘assess’ in the first aim of the Socialisation Study (page 35).

Mat Ward
29-9-2003
Abstract

The success of a three-week “in-clinic” behaviour modification program for the treatment of behaviour problems in dogs was investigated. This form of therapy was found to be an effective treatment for a variety of canine behaviour problems. The practicality of the consultant’s recommendations for continuing therapy at home was the factor most closely associated with therapy success. Improvement in obedience was linked with therapy success for dogs that attended the clinic for problems other than obedience. The use of a remote-activated electronic collar was found to be very effective for the treatment of undesirable behaviour. There was some regression to pre-therapy behaviour once use of the collars was discontinued. Use of electronic collars did not result in any negative changes to behaviour or personality for most dogs, although negative effects were reported in some dogs. Use of electronic collars was found to be very effective in stopping inappropriate predatory behaviour towards sheep in the long term; this was not the case for predatory behaviour towards cats.

The early socialisation experience of dogs was compared with their adult behaviour. The mean level of socialisation before 12 weeks of age was found to be 3 to 4 new people a week, 1 new dog a week, and 2 to 3 new environments a week. The amount of social and environmental exposure a puppy receives was found to be positively correlated with measures of sociability, and negatively correlated with measures of fear and aggression. The amount of socialisation “in general” was the measure of early experience found to be most closely associated with desirable behaviour in adulthood. Socialisation with other species was negatively correlated with inappropriate predatory behaviour. Dogs that attended puppy socialisation class were found to be less fearful, less aggressive, and more social. No differences were found between attendees and non-attendees of socialisation classes in measures of obedience, or fear of novel stimuli, novel environments or veterinary clinics. Dogs that attended puppy socialisation classes before 10 weeks of age were less fearful of strange dogs than dogs that attended after 10 weeks. Female dogs were more aggressive and less sociable. Spayed female dogs were more likely than entire females to snap at familiar dogs. The data highlights the importance of early socialisation in the development of a well-adjusted dog.
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