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HUMAN CALMING OF DOG AROUSAL

A thesis presented in partial
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ABSTRACT

Humans, by their behaviour, may wittingly or unwittingly increase arousal that triggers attacks in dogs. Equally their behaviour may have a calming effect. Based on evidence in scientific literature, and from recommendations in other writings, the experimenter approached four dogs in one of three ways. (1) Head averted while crouching (Head Turn); (2) eye blinking while crouching (Eye Blink); and (3) direct stare while standing (Direct Stare). The effects of these approaches on arousal levels in the dogs were measured. Dog arousal (an indicator of how likely the dog is to aggress) was assessed from observations of six components of dog behaviour, using scales that measured submission and fear, through relaxation and calmness, to dominance. The presence of either submission or dominance can increase the likelihood of attack. The effect of the three approaches was tested using a small-N alternating treatments design, which involved an initial baseline phase, an alternating treatments phase, a preferred treatment phase, and reversal to baseline. A further three phases were run to assess the effect of approaches on the dogs behaviour by different experimenters. Head Turn was most effective in reducing either submissive or dominant arousal in the dogs, while Direct Stare elicited the most arousal. Eye Blink produced the most variable results but was found to have some calming effect on the dogs. Differences in individual experimenters were not found to have a large effect on dog arousal. Since the dogs displayed little dominance aggression, it is not known whether these treatments are appropriate for calming this type of behaviour. In addition to the traditional methods of analysis a prototype analysis tool (PAC) was employed as an exploratory technique. The findings from PAC showed its potential for improving analysis of behaviour and provided support for the data obtained from the more traditional analysis.

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