



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.

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1. Introduction

There is an increasing interest in factors associated with the quality of the dog–owner relationship and how relationships may vary between different dog–owner dyads (e.g. Hart, 1995; Kotrschal et al., 2009; Topál et al., 1998; Wedl et al., 2010). Most previous studies on the dog–owner

relationship rely on questionnaire studies investigating humans' attitudes towards dogs or correlations between the owner's personality/attachment pattern and his/her affectional bond with the dog. Based on such questionnaires, the relationship has been described in several ways, ranging from looking upon it like a master–slave relationship, to considering the dog as part of the family or saying it constitutes a child–parent bond (Barker and Barker, 1988; Sable, 2013; Serpell, 1995). It has also been reported that the presence of a pet dog may function as social support during performance of a stressful task (Allen et al., 1991; Beetz et al., 2011) and even as a substitute for human support and a source of comfort when emotionally distressed

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(Kurdek, 2009). Dogs are also suggested to act as social facilitators, in that owners feel more confident to engage in social interactions with other humans when accompanied by their dog (Messent, 1985) or due to the fact that dogs may attract other people to initiate a conversation with the owner (Guéguen and Ciccotti, 2008). Other studies have shown that owners provide a sense of security for their dogs and act as a buffer against stress (Gácsi et al., 2013) which may be even stronger than that of the presence of a companion dog (Tuber et al., 1996). These findings indicate a strong emotional bond between dogs and humans and *vice versa*.

Most owners live together with their pet dogs for a long time, allowing the formation of a stable (long-term) relationship. Human research has shown, that during the formation and continuation of stable social relationships, the behaviour of each individual in the dyad affects the types (or expectations) of future interactions (Berscheid and Peplau, 1983) as well as the quality of the relationship (Hinde, 1976). In order to describe properties of a relationship between two people however, it is important to consider *each* individual's perception or experience of the relationship, since these may differ between the two individuals (Hinde et al., 2001). In dog–human literature, effects of specific characteristics in the owner's personality on the relationship with their dog have been studied. For example, owners scoring high on a neuroticism scale report that they are strongly attached to their dogs (Kotrschal et al., 2009). There is also evidence indicating that dogs are more socially attracted to owners who are more 'neurotic' (Wedl et al., 2010), as shown by the level of approach and proximity seeking behaviour by dogs in the so called 'picture viewing test'. The test is performed in a novel environment during which time the owner's attention is diverted to pictures on the walls while the dog's behaviour is observed. More 'neurotic' owners also seem to use more gestural and verbal commands while interacting with their dogs (Kis et al., 2012). Interestingly, as in close human relationships (Monotoya et al., 2008), there is some evidence

that the personality of dogs and their owners are similar to each other, as perceived by the owner anyway (Turcsán et al., 2012). To our knowledge however, characteristics of both individuals within the same dyad have rarely been measured in order to evaluate particular dog–owner relationships, excepting the work of Wedl et al. (2010). It seems reasonable to assume that a dog belonging to an owner who has a positive view of their relationship, which probably leads to a higher frequency of positive interactions, also experiences a close relationship to its owner. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate whether the owner's perception of his/her relationship with the dog could be reflected in the dog's behaviour during an attachment test.

The Monash Dog Owner Relationship Scale (MDORS) is a multi-dimensional questionnaire developed to specifically investigate the dog–owner relationship from the owner's point of view (Dwyer et al., 2006). The MDORS questionnaire consists of 28 questions, the answers of which contribute to an evaluation of the relationship according to three characteristics (subscales): dog–owner interaction (subscale 1), perceived emotional closeness (subscale 2) and perceived costs (subscale 3). The questionnaire has been validated and tested for reliability, resulting in Cronbach's coefficient alphas of 0.67, 0.84 and 0.84 ($N = 1125$) for subscales 1–3 (for details see Dwyer, 2004). It has been used in other studies investigating the dog–owner relationship with respect to, e.g. the occurrence of behavioural problems (Bennett and Rohlf, 2007), endocrine responses during interaction between owner and dog (Handlin et al., 2012) and responsible dog management among owners (Rohlf et al., 2010).

The Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure (ASSP) was developed within human developmental psychology to investigate attachment between toddlers and their parents (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970). The test includes challenging events aimed to activate the attachment system, an innate and adaptive motivational system that predisposes infants to seek the proximity of their attachment figure in times of distress (Bowlby, 1958). The balance between

Table 1

Information about breed, sex and age (years) of the participating dogs, gender of their owners as well as the length of their relationship (in months).

Breed	Sex	Age (years)	Owner's gender	Length of relationship (months)
Australian Kelpie	Male	3.0	Woman	34
Belgian Malinois	Male	2.5	Woman	29
Border Terrier	Neutered male	6.0	Woman	69
Cane Corso	Female	4.0	Woman	23
Cross bred	Neutered female	2.5	Woman	12
Dalmatian	Neutered male	7.0	Man	80
Dalmatian	Female	2.5	Woman	26
German Shepherd	Male	2.0	Man	21
German Shepherd	Male	4.0	Woman	45
German Shepherd	Male	4.5	Man	53
German Shepherd	Female	4.5	Woman	52
German Shepherd	Female	4.0	Woman	14
German Shepherd	Male	4.5	Man	50
Labrador Retriever	Male	4.5	Woman	54
Miniature Poodle	Female	4.0	Woman	20
Miniature Schnauzer	Female	4.0	Woman	14
Norwegian Lundehund	Male	2.0	Woman	22
Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen	Male	5.5	Woman	49
Tibetan Spaniel	Male	5.0	Woman	58
Toy Poodle	Female	8.5	Woman	100

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