



Applying the interpersonal circumplex to the behavioral styles of dogs and cats

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the viability of the interpersonal circumplex, which was designed to examine human social behavior, as a model for considering the behavioral styles of dogs and cats. This was accomplished by recruiting 555 pet owners to report on the behavioral styles of their pets as well as their own interpersonal styles. The instrument used to assess the behavioral styles of household pets conformed to the expected circular structure for both dogs ($CI = 0.93, P < 0.001$) and cats ($CI = 0.93, P < 0.001$) which suggests that the instrument is suitable for use with at least these non-human species. The results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses found that owners reported more positive attitudes toward their pets when the behavioral styles of their pets complemented their own interpersonal styles. The owners of both dogs and cats were more satisfied when they perceived their pets as exhibiting a level of warmth that was similar to their own but this tendency was especially strong for cat owners. For dominance, however, cat owners reported more positive attitudes toward their pets when there was reciprocity between their own interpersonal styles and the perceived behavioral styles of their pets (e.g., dominant cat owners reported more positive attitudes toward their pets when they perceived their pets as submissive). Complementarity on the dominance dimension did not emerge as a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward dogs.

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1. Introduction

The study of animal personality is still in a relatively early stage, so it is not surprising that some degree of uncertainty remains within this area concerning how to best conceptualize animal personality. The most common approach has been to adapt models of human personality, such as the Five-Factor Model (McCrae and Costa, 1982; John, 1990; Goldberg, 1993), for use with animals. This approach has had considerable success. For example, there has been a relatively high degree of consistency across species suggesting that at least three of

the dimensions from the Five-Factor Model (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) are useful constructs when considering animal personality (see Gosling and John, 1999, for a review). Given the success that researchers have had in adapting the Five-Factor Model for use with non-human species, we wanted to examine whether the interpersonal circumplex (Leary, 1957) could be employed with non-human species in order to gain a better understanding of their social behavior.

Dominance and warmth have been consistently identified as the primary components of social behavior (Leary, 1957; Carson, 1969; Wiggins, 1979; Kiesler, 1983). The interpersonal circumplex integrates these dimensions in an attempt to offer a comprehensive model of social behavior. This model is defined by a two-coordinate system represented as vertical (dominance) and horizontal

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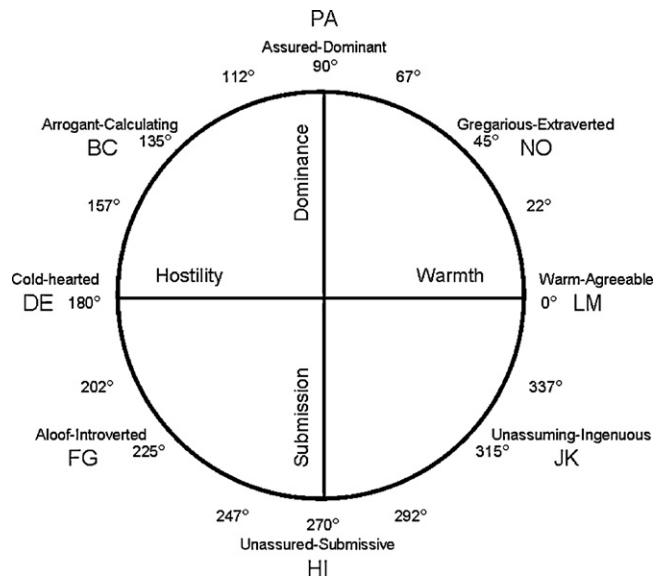


Fig. 1. The interpersonal circumplex which is comprised of eight octants (labeled around the perimeter). These octants are blends of dominance and warmth (labeled along the vertical and horizontal axes; [Wiggins et al., 1988](#)).

(warmth) axes (see [Fig. 1](#)). The circumplex is divided into eight sectors referred to as octants which represent various combinations of dominance and warmth resulting in a circular organization of interpersonal styles ([Wiggins, 1982](#); [Kiesler, 1983, 1996](#); [Gurtman and Pincus, 2003](#)). It is believed that the combinations of dominance and warmth can capture the majority of human social behaviors. The degrees located around the perimeter of the circumplex indicate the boundaries and midpoint of each octant. The labels for each octant consist of two letters (e.g., PA) derived from the original division of the interpersonal circumplex into 16 sectors labeled “A” through “P” ([Freedman et al., 1951](#)) which are commonly collapsed into the octants employed in the present study. The proximity of the octants corresponds to their interpersonal similarity such that similarity decreases as the distance between the octants increases (i.e., adjacent octants are more similar than those that are more distant). That is, social behaviors that are more similar are closer together on the circumplex such that assured-dominant behavior is more similar to gregarious-extraverted behavior than it is to warm-agreeable behavior.

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine whether the interpersonal circumplex could be applied to cats and dogs. It is important to note that we are not the first to recognize the potential benefits of applying the interpersonal circumplex to the study of animal personality because [Woodward and Bauer \(2007\)](#) employed a measure derived from the interpersonal circumplex to assess the behavioral styles of pets and their owners. Our study will extend this previous work by empirically determining whether the circular structure of the circumplex emerges in the behavioral style ratings of household pets and by examining how the perceived complementarity between the interpersonal styles of owners and their pets influence the attitudes of owners toward their pets.

Our secondary purpose for this study was to determine whether owners would report more positive attitudes toward their pets when complementarity existed between the interpersonal styles of themselves and their pets. The basic idea of complementarity is that there is a tendency for individuals to have positive interactions with each other to the extent that their interpersonal styles “fit” together ([Sullivan, 1953](#); [Leary, 1957](#); [Carson, 1969](#); [Tracey, 2004](#)). Two of the most widely discussed models of complementarity would lead to somewhat different hypotheses for the present study (see [Tracey, 2004](#) or [Markey and Markey, 2007](#) for extended discussions of complementarity). The model of complementarity proposed by [Leary \(1957\)](#), and later extended by [Carson \(1969\)](#), defines complementarity as corresponding (or similar) styles on the warmth dimension but reciprocal (or opposite) styles on the dominance dimension leading to positive interactions (see [Fig. 2](#)). In contrast, other models (e.g., [Byrne, 1971](#)) suggest that correspondence (or similarity) on both the warmth and dominance dimensions should lead to positive interactions. The Leary/Carson model and the similarity model would lead to consistent hypotheses for correspondence on the warmth dimension (i.e., greater satisfaction when warmth is met with warmth). Thus, we formed a clear hypothesis that owners would report more positive attitudes toward their pets as the degree of correspondence increased between their views of themselves and their pets on the warmth dimension. For the dominance dimension, however, these models lead to competing hypotheses. The Leary/Carson model would expect more positive attitudes with reciprocity (i.e., greater satisfaction when dominance is met with submission), whereas the similarity model would expect more positive attitudes with correspondence (i.e., greater satisfaction when dominance is met with dominance). As a result, we were uncertain whether correspondence or reciprocity on the dominance dimen-

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