

# Psychological Perspective on Behavioural and Cognitive Problems

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## Introduction

According to a recent study published in the journal *Psychological Science*, dogs exhibit the human-like emotion of envy [1]. In this study, dogs that saw their owner engage with another dog displayed jealousy behaviour, but did not do so when their owner interacted with a fake dog. While this conclusion may come as no surprise to dog owners, the study's significance stems from the fact that it establishes that dogs, like humans, develop mental abstractions of social interactions. It also raises intriguing concerns about how to better understand behaviour in dogs and other species, including humans. The work of the pioneering animal learning theorists, particularly B.F. Skinner, enthralled me as an undergraduate psychology major. Beyond *Freedom and Dignity*, Skinner's book, had just come out, in which he argued against attributing behaviour to interior states in animals or humans [2].

The gist of his thesis was that it was pointless to forecast and regulate behaviour using unobservable internal variables like motivation or cognition. Instead, he advised psychologists to concentrate on observable actions, their causes, and their effects. Skinner contended that using internal states to explain behaviour was circular. A dog does not eat because he is hungry, implying that he is motivated internally. The amount of hours of food deprivation is the best predictor of eating behaviour. The circularity of attributing behaviour to an internal state is avoided. (The dog eats to satisfy its hunger.) How can we tell whether it's hungry? Because it consumes!

I went on to complete my doctorate in experimental psychology, focused on animal learning, after being inspired by Skinner. My strong adherence to Skinnerian concepts began to fade as I learned more about the field. The cognitive revolution was displacing radical behaviourism. The scientific study of interior states including memory, emotion, and attention became possible because to new theoretical approaches, research methods, and technologies. Researchers were able to analyze healthy brains in humans and animals because to new brain imaging technologies. Psychology was broadening its scope, and it was also a lot more enjoyable than Skinnerian behaviorism's stodgy restrictions.

I'm no longer a behaviourist, but I've been studying human character for the past 20 years. Peterson and Seligman's categorization of 24 character strengths into one of six overarching moral virtues guided and informed most of my study (knowledge and wisdom, courage, justice, humanity, temperance, and transcendence) [3]. Character qualities like grit can be used to predict success in a range of situations. These characteristics are a cornerstone of good leadership and can be measured and fostered to improve affect. To live a productive and fulfilling life, you must learn to cultivate and express these positive character traits. The latent behaviourist in me dislikes the idea of character qualities being applied to animals. Nonetheless, studies such as the one cited above provide scientific proof that dogs can experience human-like emotions. Is it possible to give positive character attributes to dogs (and other species)

without resorting to gross anthropomorphizing if they are capable of human-like emotions?

Anyone who spends time with dogs will quickly see that they have vastly different affects, motivations, social attachments, and "personalities." Some of Peterson and Seligman's 24 character traits may apply to dogs as well as people. Anecdotal evidence suggests that dogs differ in their love of learning, boldness, persistence, leadership, affection, social intelligence, self-regulation, gratitude, and sense of humour. Of fact, not all of the 24 attributes apply to dogs, and dogs undoubtedly show character traits in different ways than humans. Over the course of my life, I've "owned" over a dozen dogs. It would be simple to rank order each of them based on these characteristics. One was obstinate to an extreme, while the other soon lost interest in things. Others preferred to learn new things, while others were pleased to live their lives as they were. Some were extremely sensitive to social signs offered by their humans, while others were not.

According to evolutionary theory, qualities and abilities that aid in the proliferation of the species are passed down the generations. This might happen as a result of natural selection or through selective breeding. Domestic dogs are closely related to their wild cousins, wolves. Currently, the American Kennel Club recognizes 197 different dog breeds. Despite being of the same species, they have such a wide range of morphological and behavioural characteristics. Compare a chihuahua's size and temperament to those of a Saint Bernard. It's tough to tell if they're from the same species.

Selective breeding has resulted in significant variances in temperament and behaviour in different breeds, just as it has in size and physical structure. Dogs differ in" features terms of sociability, friendliness, bravery, tenacity, and other characteristics that humans call character. Dogs vary in "character even within the same breed. A hunter does not choose her bird dog from a litter of puppies at random. Puppies, like human infants, have different individual differences.

The question isn't whether dogs have character traits, but rather whether they have behavioural traits that can be considered character traits. The crucial question is how psychologists should approach comprehending these distinctions. The remedy, according to Skinner and the behaviourists, was to concentrate on behaviour and its antecedents rather than relying on unobservable intervening variables to explain behaviour. To better understand canine behaviour, modern techniques may be more open to postulating internal mediators, such as character. This may not come as a surprise to dog trainers and owners, but building systematic, empirically accurate theories of behaviour (in dogs and other animals) is critical to the advancement of psychology science [4].

I'm not going to change my research focus from human behaviour to canine behaviour. However, it's entertaining to consider the concept of canine personality. Which conceptual model is the most effective? What can be done to quantify it? Is it possible to teach and acquire particular personality qualities, or are they set in genetic stone? Character plays a significant role in human adjustment and achievement. Is it crazy to believe that it would matter in dogs as well?

I had other ideas, but my chihuahua has been begging me to go for a walk for the past half hour. He is a lot more persistent than my poodle mix. He isn't the type of dog who will accept no for an answer.

## References

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