

SAMPLE

NATURE AND SCOPE OF CANINE PSYCHOLOGY

Lesson Aim

Describe how canine animals think and discuss the relevance of understanding canine psychology to people.

NATURE AND SCOPE OF CANINE PSYCHOLOGY

An understanding of canine psychology and behaviour is vitally important for anyone who works with dogs or keeps them as a companion animal. Understanding how the domesticated dog has developed anatomically and physiologically from its wild counterpart, the wolf, will help us to understand behaviours commonly seen in today's domesticated dog and therefore allows us to provide an environment in which the dog remains a happy and healthy companion.

INTRODUCTION TO CANINE BEHAVIOUR

It is widely accepted that the domestic dog descended from the wolf. As the relationship between humans and dogs developed, dogs would have been valued as scavengers, partners in hunting, a source of warmth at night and as guards. One of the key features that link the wolf and the domestic dog is that they are both highly social animals that like to live within a pack, be it a pack of other wolves or dogs or a human pack. This feature has a great influence on their psychology and behaviour.

It has been suggested that characteristics of fear, aggressiveness, submissiveness and dominance have determined the social behaviour of dogs. These behaviours have proven to be the best strategies for dogs to use at particular times. In addition to this, through their association with humans, dogs have developed social awareness in that they are aware of other dogs or people around them.

So let's look briefly at the history of domestication of dogs. Thousands of years ago, domestication of dogs began with the domestication of the grey wolf – *Canis lupus*. Archaeological and genetic evidence tells us that humans domesticated wolves approximately 15000 years ago.

It is unclear how the domestication began, but there are some theories as follows.

Food and Self-Domestication

Researchers have suggested that wolves were scavengers, stealing rubbish from human campsites. One researcher argues those wolves which interacted better with the humans, would pass these characteristics on to their offspring, which eventually resulted in a tamer dog that was more trusted by the humans. The researcher also argues that wild animals have a "flight distance" – how close they will let a human or other animal get to them before they run away. The researcher suggests that some wolves would have a lesser flight distance, thus allowed humans closer to them when they were eating. Again, this meant that eventually they were willing to be near and eat in the presence of humans, which is something a wild wolf would never do. So the characteristics of the wolf/dogs would diverge. Some wolves would remain wild, hunting and staying away from the humans, whilst others would scavenge around the human settlements reaping the benefits, and eventually would become comfortable in the presence of humans. Over time, the village wolves would breed and their characteristics of remaining near the human would increase. The wilder wolves would breed with other wild wolves and continue in their wilder exist. Simply explained, but this would result in the wild wolf continuing and the increase in the more domesticated dog.

Wolf Cub Orphans

Some researchers suggest that wolf cubs may have been orphaned and found by humans. They were easily tamed and then socialised. Adult wolves have been successfully socialised. After the age of 21 days, the socialisation can be very time consuming and is not necessarily always successful. Pups would be easier to socialise, as you may expect.

Then when the first wolves that were socialised started to breed amongst themselves, the more tame characteristics would be bred until, over generations, the wolf became more dog-like.

Archaeologists have found inconclusive evidence that as early as 30,000 BC, and more definite evidence at around 7,000BC, which suggests that dogs were first domesticated in East Asia. It is hard to truly determine when dogs were domesticated but a dog and human were found buried together in Germany in a grave dated 14,000 years ago and then later, 12,000 years ago in Palestine. Remains of a dog from 33,000 years ago were found in Southern Siberia. A skeleton was also found in the Czech Republic. It was thought to be around 27,000 years old and had been buried with a mammoth bone in its mouth; thought to assist the dog in its afterlife. Material from the Goyet Cave in Belgium found a dog that is estimated to be 31,700 years old. It was large and powerful and was thought to be part of the Aurignacian culture that created art in the Chavet Cave.

The domestication of wolves produced changes in their bodies.

These included:

- Reduction in brain size.
- Reduced cranial capacity (in particular, dogs are thought to have reductions in their sensory processing and alertness compared to wolves. These cognitive skills are obviously more important in the wild than to a domestic dog).
- Reduction in overall size.
- Changes to the colour of their coat.
- Changes to markings on their coat.
- Shorter jaw.
- Development of a vertical drop in front of the forehead – brachycephaly.
- Smaller sized teeth.
- Dogs have also stopped certain behaviours of wolves. Dogs no longer regurgitate partially digested food for the young, for example.

Before DNA tests were available, researchers had argued that the dog was an ancestor of wolves or of coyotes and jackals. But DNA revealed that the wolf was the canine ancestor. There is some puzzling evidence regarding dogs and wolves though. The evidence suggests that dogs and wolves began to become molecularly different more than we would expect in the ten to twenty thousand years of domestication. The process of domestication only appeared later in this time period also, however, evidence has been found of wolves near to humans in archaeological sites of over 100,000 years ago. A suggestion is that tamed wolves may have followed the hunter-gatherer humans, without changing in the dramatic way that dogs later did.

Why were dogs domesticated? The domestic dog would provide humans with a source of fur, food and also be a guard, warning them of approaching danger. This process of domestication has not ended though. It is an ongoing process, with cross-breeding and artificial selection used to create new breeds of dogs.

When humans began to use more advanced agriculture, dogs were selected for different tasks. Their wolf-like characteristics would then have been a disadvantage to them, particularly if they were guards or herding animals. So humans began to have different needs for dogs; no longer only for protection, fur and food, but also to herd animals and guard other animals.

Neoteny or paedomorphism are used to explain the rapid evolution from wolves to dogs.

Paedomorphism is when adults retain traits previously only seen in juveniles. An example is the larger eyes and larger heads that dogs have maintained. This would have been seen in juvenile wolves. **Neoteny** is a way in

which paedomorphism arises. This is when the physiological development of the animal is slowed down or delayed. This compares to another process - progenesis, where sexual development occurs faster, but can also result in paedomorphism. This process therefore results in the adults of the species retaining juvenile or neonatal-like characteristics.

The young wolves who became involved with humans were likely to be more sociable and less dominant than the adults. Genetic selection (deliberate or otherwise) would have led to dogs that were more juvenile in their characteristics than adult wolves and later dogs. This paedomorphic form of selection means that the physical characteristics of the juvenile dog/wolf are also more likely to be retained.

Such as:

- Rounder torsos
- Softer fuzzier hair
- Larger eyes
- Larger head
- Down hanging ears

These characteristics are similar to many juvenile mammals, including human babies, so can elicit protective and nurturing behaviour in mammals, including adult humans.

Dog Fact

Wolves do not make good guard dogs because they are naturally afraid of the unfamiliar and will hide from visitors rather than bark at them.

CANINE INDUSTRIES

Dogs fill a variety of roles in our current human society. Working dogs can carry out a variety of jobs from herding sheep, helping the lives of physically impaired and blind people, or seeking out and detecting explosives and drugs.

In most countries around the world, the most common role of domesticated dogs is as a companion animal to humans. There are a wide variety of ancillary industries that rely on this companion animal market.

Some examples include:

- Breeding enterprises
- Grooming enterprises
- Training enterprises
- Boarding or kennel enterprises
- Dog walking and pet sitting
- Pet shops sell a range of products and equipment
- Canine behaviour therapists
- Complimentary medicines and therapies

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN HEALTH AND BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES

With any course on the psychology of dogs, it is important to consider that not all behaviour is a result of a dog's mental capabilities. Some behaviour can be the result of their health and nutrition. For example, a previously friendly dog may suddenly start to growl or bite when someone comes near them. They may be in pain or feel ill and not want to be hurt. They may be anxious, for example, a dog who is scared of fireworks may become increasingly anxious and then snap at a child who makes a noise near them.

If a dog starts to display any behaviour that is unusual for them, there is probably a good reason behind it. If a dog has always had an aggressive nature, that is one thing, but if a usually friendly dog suddenly becomes aggressive, that is can signify a more serious problem. If a dog's behaviour changes in any way that is not obvious at first, then it can be worthwhile getting a veterinarian to look them over for any health issues. If there is not a health issue, then behavioural issues can be considered more.

Dog Fact

Currently, there are 50,000 wolves in Canada; 6,500 in Alaska; and 3,500 in the Lower 48 States. In Europe, Italy has fewer than 300; Spain around 2,000; and Norway and Sweden combined have fewer than 80. There are about 700 wolves in Poland and 70,000 in Russia (These figures are approximate).

SET TASK

Observe one or more dogs when they are interacting socially with people and/or other dogs e.g. in parks, beaches or on streets. Note any similarities and differences that you observe in their behaviour when compared to human social behaviour.