



KICKING THE DOG: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASCULINITY AND THE TREATMENT OF COMPANION ANIMALS

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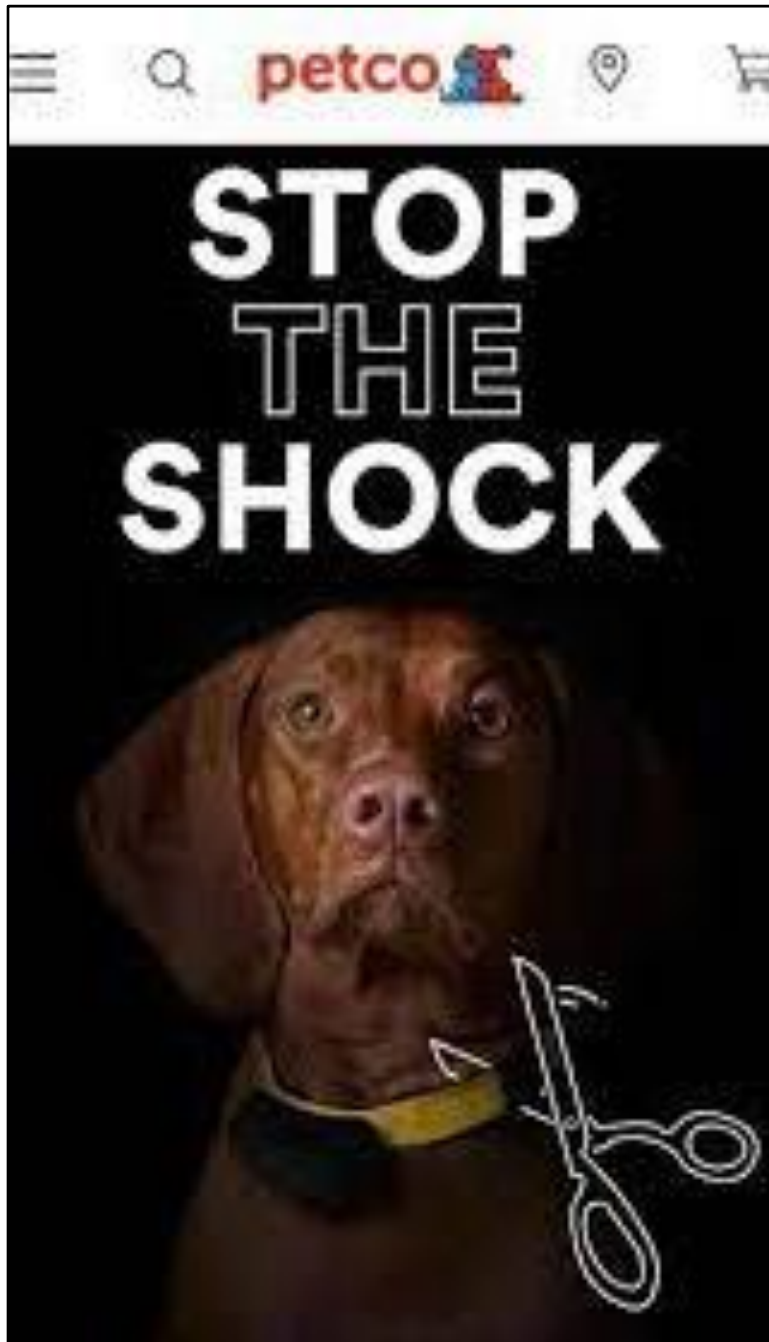
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- What is an aversive? Applying something painful, forceful, intimidating, or disliked by the animal (see Skinner, 1953)
- Common fallout effects of aversive are: Escape, Apathy, and Aggression (Adler, 1930/1970; Chance 2008, Skinner, 1953) (e.g., Learned helplessness, Seligman, 1972)
- Aversively trained dogs are more stressed and are more likely to display *aggressive behavior towards people* (especially their owners!) (Casey et al., 2013, Deldalle & Gaunet, 2014; see Ziv, 2017 for review)
- Dogs trained with aversive have lower quality relationships with their owners (i.e., less affectionate, gaze less, e.g., Viera de Castro et al., 2020; Cowan, 2011)

**Beliefs About
Dogs**

**Two Pervasive Cultural
Ideologies**

**Sociocultural
Factors**

What beliefs do people have about dominance theory and how does it impact their relationship with dogs?

**Why do
people use
aversive
methods to
train dogs?**

How do ideologies like, hegemonic masculinity, influence relationships with dogs?

*There are likely other reasons people use aversive methods but these are the two areas of focus in this research

AVSAB

American Veterinary Society
of Animal Behavior



No Prong Collars

DOMINANCE THEORY CONTROVERSY

+P POSITIVE PUNISHMENT
ADDING BAD STUFF TO
DECREASE A BEHAVIOR



What is “Dominance Theory”?

- A lay theory about the social behavior of dogs & wolves that emphasizes the achievement of a singular “Alpha” status via competition & confrontation as the primary mechanisms for the resolution of status discrepancies (e.g., Włodarczyk, 2017)
 - “Dominance theory” as it operates in popular culture is different and disparate from nuanced scientific discourse in ethology & animal behavior
 - My research focuses on how the general public perceives “dominance theory”, how it is defined in *popular culture*, and how it influences their relationship with animals
- Posits that for successful human-canine cohabitation, humans must establish “dominance” over their dog and they focus on the act of dominating via aggression and competition

Hegemonic Masculinity & Social Dominance

- **Definition:** A social construct of “manhood”, being a man, or “becoming a man” that relies on traditional gender roles & idealized versions of “a real man” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Mankowski & Maton, 2010)
- Establishing dominance and control is central to achieving the idealized status of a “real man” (Knuttila, 2016; Levant et al., 2010)
- Interpersonal aggression/hostility is one way to maintain status and to establish oneself as “dominant” (e.g., Fighting after an insult to manhood; see Vescio et al., 2021 for review)

TABLE 1
THE MASCULINE AND FEMININE BSRI ITEMS

Masculine Items	Feminine Items
Acts as a leader	Affectionate
Aggressive	Cheerful
Ambitious	Childlike
Analytical	Compassionate
Assertive	Does not use harsh language
Athletic	Eager to soothe hurt feelings
Competitive	Feminine
Defends own beliefs	Flatterable
Dominant	Gentle
Forceful	Gullible
Has leadership abilities	Loves children
Independent	Loyal
Individualistic	Sensitive to the needs of others
Makes decisions easily	Shy
Masculine	Soft spoken
Self-reliant	Sympathetic
Self-sufficient	Tender
Strong personality	Understanding
Willing to take a stand	Warm
Willing to take risks	Yielding


Source: Bem (1974)

strong

money fights stud lover Successful manliness provider
violence leader Tough
muscular protection guarded controlling strength pants integrity Machismo
Dependable Honest serious Protective Hardworking workers independent aggressive
stoic emotionally providers rational chivalrous maker violent power
fighters takers smooth
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mas·cu·line

/ˈmɑːskyələn/ 

adjective

1. having qualities or appearance traditionally associated with men, especially strength and aggressiveness.
"he is outstandingly handsome and robust, very masculine"
synonyms: virile, macho, manly, muscular, muscly, strong, strapping, well built, rugged, robust, brawny, heavily built, powerful, red-blooded, vigorous; More

2. **GRAMMAR**

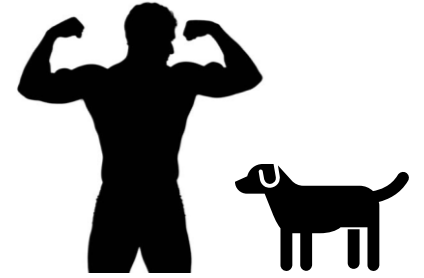
of or denoting a gender of nouns and adjectives, conventionally regarded as male.

noun

1. the male sex or gender.
"the masculine as the norm"

*There are different types of beliefs about masculinity and hegemonic masculinity is a specific type

Relationships Between Men and Dogs



- Men are more likely to report using aversive, force, or other confrontational techniques on companion animals and especially dogs (e.g., Blackwell et al., 2012; Dodman et al., 2018; Woodward et al., 2021)
- Men who endorse hegemonic masculinity (traditional male role norms) underreport and mask their affection towards their dogs (Blazina & Kogan, 2019)
- Men are more likely to abuse animals than women: “One of the most consistent factors associated with perpetration of animal abuse is gender. Almost all abusers are males....” (Flynn, 2001)

Masculinity: Social Identity & Cultural Ideology

- **Masculinity as Social Identity:** Masculinity is important to men's identity and proven through behaviors and attitudes (Vandello & Bosson, 2013)
 - Training based on establishing dominance and control may be appealing to people with beliefs in hegemonic masculinity
- **Masculinity as Cultural Ideology:** Masculinity is culturally valued by both men and women therefore existing within our social and political institutions (Connell, 1995; also Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

Current Work: Study 1 Research Questions

What are people's beliefs about establishing dominance over dogs?

Is it conceptualized as benevolent or adversarial leadership?

What is the relationship between masculinity & dominance theory & the use of aversive methods?

What other factors are related to our relationships with animals (e.g., speciesism, human supremacy, empathy towards animals)?

Does resistance to traditional gender roles (e.g., feminist beliefs) predicts an inverse relationship?

Study 1a and 1b

- 1a: Develop a scale to measure beliefs in dominance theory *as it operates culturally* to address whether these beliefs have a causal relationship with aversive methods in preparation for study 2 & 3
- 1b: Preliminarily examine the relationships between masculinity, feminism, empathy towards pets and wild animals, human supremacy, dominance theory, and endorsement of aversive methods.
 - Scale development
 - Relationships between variables

Study 1a: Scale development

- Develop a scale to measure beliefs in using dominance theory as it operates in popular culture
- Participants were asked about their beliefs and experiences with dominance theory and establishing dominance over dogs
- Items were created using qualitative responses from lay people; 2 samples of $N= 80$ and literature on dominance theory (e.g., Eaton, 2010)
- Items for the scale focused on beliefs and attitudes and perceptions
 - Avoided the inclusion of items that included information about training techniques
 - Attitudes and beliefs (e.g., “Humans must be dominant over their pet dogs”, “Dogs do not compete with their owners for dominance”)

What can statistics (and the qualitative data & experimental) tell us in this study?

- General trends, *group behavior*
- Cannot predict any one person's behavior
- Do not inform us about other variables not included in the study
- Study 1 = not an experiment, relationships between variables, qual data = details about beliefs
- Study 2 = experiment, can something lead to or cause a specific outcome

Study 1b: Factor Analysis and Regressions

- Based on an a-priori power analysis, we collected ($N= 261$, 66% women) participants to complete an online survey
- Scale development for dominance beliefs scale ($\alpha = 0.80$)
 - Examine psychometric properties via confirmatory factor analysis for scale development
- Gather preliminary evidence and understanding about the relationship between different variables (e.g., masculinity and dominance theory)
 - These tests tell us about general trends and cannot predict any one person's behavior
 - Regression determines how variables predict another variable (strength & direction)
 - Mediation helps us determine the mechanistic properties the relationship between two variables (e.g., variable A predicts variable B because of variable C)
 - Moderated Mediation: Shows how another variable impacts the strength and direction of the different relationships of a mediation

Measures

Beliefs in Dominance Theory (e.g., “Dogs and wolves are very different”, “It is important for the owner to be the Alpha over their dog”)

Male Role Norms Inventory, (short version; McDermott, 2019) (e.g., “Men should always be the boss”, “Boys should prefer to play with trucks rather than dolls”)

Attitudes towards punishment (e.g., adapted from Dodman et al., 2018) (e.g., “I would hit a dog”, “I would use a prong collar”)

Likelihood to use rewards-based training or aversive-punishment methods (Dinwoodie et al., 2021)

Feminist Identification (e.g., “I would consider myself to be a feminist”) (Rudman & Fairchild, 2007)


Empathy towards pets and wild animals (Paul, 2000) (“Seeing an animal in pain upsets me”; “So long as they’re warm and well fed, I don’t think zoo animals mind being kept in cages.”)

Beliefs in Human Supremacy (Dhont et al., 2014) (e.g., “It is important that we treat other animal species more equally”)

Specisism (Dhont et al., 2014) (e.g., “Animal research cannot be justified and should be stopped.”; “I think that human economic gain is more important than setting aside land for wildlife.”)

Predictions: All were supported


Male Role Norms

 Punishment/Aversive training, belief in human supremacy, speciesism, beliefs in dominance theory

 Rewards-based training & Empathy

Feminist Identity

 Rewards-based training & Empathy

 Punishment/Aversive training, belief in human supremacy, speciesism, beliefs in dominance theory

Dominance theory → Endorsement of Male Role Norms → Aversive Training Methods
*Among Men

Study 2: Determining Causality of Dominance Theory

- (N= 358) 52% men, 70% white
- Does exposure to dominance theory LEAD to greater endorsement of aversives methods?
 - Does endorsement of hegemonic masculinity explain the relationship between dominance theory and the use of aversives in an experiment?
 - *External validity*
- Participants randomly assigned 1 of 3 articles:
 - Control (dog vision)
 - Article A: Establishing dominance over dogs is important
 - Article B: Establishing dominance is not so important
 - Pilot tested materials:
 - Credible, Negative, Positive, Interesting, Easy to understand, Easy to remember, Length

Study 2 Aims: A test of the AVSAB claims

Unsupported

Is there a causal relationship between beliefs in dominance theory and the use of aversives?

- Does exposure to dominance theory *lead* to a greater willingness to use aversives (compared to a control and contrary information)?
- Does “debunking” dominance theory lead to a decrease willingness to use aversives?

Supported

What is the relationship between masculinity, dominance theory, and using aversive methods?

- Do beliefs in traditional male role norms mediate (explain) the relationship between exposure to dominance theory and willingness to use aversives?
- Replication of findings from Study 1

Supported

Does endorsement of dominance theory and hegemonic masculinity impact other areas of the human animal bond?

- ↓ Empathy towards Pets and Wild Animals (Paul, 2000)
- ↓ Attitudes towards dogs (Coleman, 2016)
- ↑ Human supremacy
 - Replication of findings from Study 1

Results

- Because condition doesn't predict the endorsement of aversives, this suggests that mere exposure to this ideology alone might not be leading to the use of aversives and giving people more nuanced information – doesn't change their willingness to use aversives (unfortunately)
 - We found the same mediation model as in Study 1 – dominance theory predicts attitudes towards aversives, *but it does so because of the endorsement of hegemonic masculinity*
- Endorsement of masculinity is predicting above and beyond dominance theory: 1) greater endorsement of aversives 2) lower empathy towards pets 3) greater beliefs in human supremacy 4) more negative attitudes towards dogs 5) more negative attitudes towards pets in general 6) lower endorsement of rewards-based methods
- Note: Not everyone who endorses hegemonic masculinity uses aversives and vice versa– there are likely other variables impacting this relationship that this study does not address

Study 3: What is the role of hegemonic masculinity?

- Determining causal relationship between hegemonic masculinity and the willingness to use aversives
 - We've seen a lot of evidence for the relationship and now it is time to determine whether beliefs in hegemonic masculinity *lead to* or *cause* the willingness to use aversives

Conclusion and Take-aways

- Dominance theory does predict the endorsement of aversives but masculinity is a stronger predictor and explains the relationship between dominance theory and the willingness to use aversives.
 - *Many people interpret dominance theory as establishing status through force and using aversive methods is the primary mechanism to do that. However, their willingness to use aversives is impacted by their endorsement of HM*
- Regardless of gender, the endorsement of male role norms (hegemonic masculinity) is related to stronger hostile attitudes and behaviors towards animals and pets and weaker empathy and lower endorsement of rewards-based training methods. *Traditional gender roles matter in terms of training methods your client is willing to use*
- Regardless of gender, feminist identification is related to stronger endorsement of rewards-based training and greater empathy and weaker hostile ideologies towards pets and animals as well as willingness to use aversive training techniques.
- Neither exposure to more nuanced information about the social arrangements of dogs (e.g., social dominance isn't all about competition & aggression) nor information about the importance of establishing dominance changes attitudes towards punishment
 - *Presenting information about dominance theory alone will not change attitudes towards aversives because of the impact of hegemonic masculinity*