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Self Control In Dogs

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Poster Presentation P1

SELF CONTROL IN DOGS

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We explored self-control in dogs to determine whether (a) individual differences exist and (b) self-control predicts behavioral outcomes. We adapted methods from Bramlett and colleagues (2012) work with capuchin monkeys and created a self-control task to test dogs' self-control--a wheel spins, bringing food close to a window where the dog can access it. A less preferred reward approaches the window before a preferred reward. If dogs eat the first reward the wheel stops spinning and they cannot access the preferred food. However, if they allow the less preferred reward to pass they can access the preferred food. While most dogs readily wait for the more-preferred treat and let the less-preferred treat pass, there are limitations to dog self-control: dogs do not allow immediate preferred treat to pass in order to receive 4 or even 8 of the same preferred treat later. Further, owner self-reports of dog behavior relate to dogs' abilities to wait for the preferred treat -- dogs whose owners report more behavior problems perform worse on the self-control task. Thus, dogs, like humans, have self-control, and the amount of self-control is limited and varies between each individual dog. Finally, preliminary evidence suggests that self-control may be related to behavioral outcomes in dogs that could predict significant outcomes such as whether the dog will be surrendered to a shelter and/or euthanized.