

Stable personalities?

A new study shows that horse experts agree on the personality of horses. **FIONA LYDDY**

FEW people that have regular contact with animals would deny that some species exhibit individual differences akin to those underlying the concept of personality in humans. But how far can this anthropomorphism be taken? Can research on such differences in humans be extended to other species?

A recent study by Paul Morris and colleagues at the University of Portsmouth investigated whether people working closely with horses would agree on the personality characteristics of horses in their care. The judges were nine full-time stable staff at a naval riding school who had worked closely with the horses for an average of 2.8 years. The five mares and five geldings selected for evaluation had been at the centre for on average 5.4 years and had an average age of 15.3 years.

A questionnaire commonly used with humans (NEO-PI-FFI) was adapted for use with horses. Of the Big Five characteristics (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness) some are more obviously extendable to horses than others. extraversion and neuroticism feature in many personality inventories and appear to apply across

human cultures; these may be traits with strong biological and evolutionary origins. They also apply to other species, extraversion being displayed by approach behaviour and responsiveness to rewards, and neuroticism by avoidance and susceptibility to punishment. Agreeableness as understood in humans might have parallels in terms of aggression in horses. These three dimensions would be expected

to have higher reliability and be easier to rate in horses. In humans, conscientiousness relates to competence, order, dutifulness, achievement, striving, self-discipline and deliberation; and openness to experience relates to aesthetics, fantasy, feelings, actions and values. These characteristics may not apply so clearly to non-humans.

The judges were able to provide reliable ratings on all of the Big Five dimensions, with the strongest agreement achieved for neuroticism and extraversion. Agreement for conscientiousness and openness to experience was lower, with the agreeableness factor in between. While some judges were better than others, no one horse was more difficult to rate than the others, suggesting that the descriptors do not apply just to extreme cases. The study showed that these descriptors used for humans apply well to this particular species; this may turn out to be very useful in predicting horse behaviour and aptitudes.

Morris, P.H., Gale, A. & Duffy, K. (2002). Can judges agree on the personality of horses? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 33, 67–81.

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MISTER ED (COURTESY KOBAL COLLECTION)

The land of the free... attitudes towards guns

How UK and US students' views of handguns differ. **LAURA BRAZIER**

IT's often been said that the US and UK are divided by a common language. But a more striking division over the years has been the availability of guns in the two countries. With this in mind, John Puddifoot and Claire Cooke from the Universities of Luton and Teesside investigated differences in people's perceptions of guns.

Two groups of students, aged between 18 and 25 years, from universities in South Carolina and northeast England completed the Symbolic Nature of Guns Scale (SNGS). The SNGS measures people's view of guns, including how independent, violent or empowered guns make people feel, how dangerous guns are, the degree of freedom they provide, and so on.

They found that their American sample associated handguns with factors such as freedom, independence and protection from crime. The British sample associated them with factors such as violence, madness and with causing crime. Women associated handguns more with madness and causing crime, whereas men associated handguns more with power. There was some common agreement, with both men and women

showing similar patterns with respect to freedom, independence, protection from crime and danger.

Puddifoot and Cooke conclude that their findings suggest that there are distinctive locational views of handguns, perhaps associated with different political ideologies. Such ideologies may have a formative developmental influence on how guns are viewed, but the authors note that it is not possible to make a direct link at this stage between their findings and political ideology.

Puddifoot, J.E. & Cooke, C.A. (2002). Representations of handguns by young adults in the US and UK. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 12, 256–270.

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Light exercise

Bright lights boost mood in morning exercisers. **GEOFF LOWE**

REGULAR exercise is known to elevate mood, and can be especially effective in relieving depressive symptoms. Similarly, exposure to bright light has proved effective in patients with winter seasonal affective disorder (SAD). So, during Finland's dark winter months, researchers at the National Public Health Institute, Helsinki, set out to test whether bright-light exposure combined with physical exercise would be even more effective in boosting mood and health-related quality of life.

Sami Leppämäki's team recruited healthy people who routinely hated the dark winter months. One group embarked on an eight-week regular exercise routine in bright light; another group exercised in normal room illumination. The morning gym sessions typically started at 8am, from the end of November to the end of January, when there are only about six to seven hours of daylight. Participants completed mood and depression

DAVE ROBERTS

scales and health surveys at baseline, at mid-stage (four weeks) and at the end of the eight-week schedule.

All of the measured dimensions of health-related functioning improved in the bright light group, but general health perception, perceived pain and emotional problems failed to improve in the normal light group.

Physical exercise was effective in reducing depressive symptoms both in normal indoor illumination and in bright light. The reduction was significantly greater in those exercising in bright light – and was most marked in the so-called atypical depressive symptoms (morning fatigue, carbohydrate craving, increased

appetite, increased need for sleep).

'This positive effect was already apparent after the first four weeks,' said Leppämäki, 'and improved still further during the second half.'

The mechanism of action most likely involves light's effect on the body's circadian (24-hour) rhythms. In patients with SAD, the circadian rest-activity rhythm seems to be disrupted, possibly owing to behavioural patterns such as physical inactivity in the morning and carbohydrate craving in the evening. 'As both exercise and bright light can help with the synchronization of the disturbed circadian clockwork, this might partly explain their additive effect on mood observed in our study.'

Leppämäki, S., Partonen, T. & Lönnqvist, J. (2002). Bright-light exposure combined with physical exercise elevates mood. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 72, 139–144.

■ Dr Geoff Lowe is at the University of Hull.

Pained expressions

How good are people at inferring emotion in faces?

FIONA LYDDY

ONE of the main means of expressing emotion is via the face. Some psychologists suggest that there are at least six universally recognised emotional expressions, as well as distinct facial expressions associated with emotional states such as pain. There is, however, considerable variation in the interpretation of the different facial expressions.

A recent study by Judith Kappesser of the University of Bath and Amanda Williams of the University of London examined differences in the judgement of facial expressions of negative emotions (sadness, fear, anger, surprise, disgust, anger, embarrassment) and of pain. Sixty healthcare professionals evaluated photographs of faces, naming the expression, and making similarity judgements with respect to pain expressions. Pain expression had the lowest identification rate of the expressions tested, with a 59 per cent hit rate. Sadness produced the highest hit rate at 92 per cent, followed by surprise (81 per cent), embarrassment (79 per cent), anger (73 per cent), disgust (67 per cent) and fear (61 per cent). Conclusions are limited as expressions were posed, by one model. Better performance might be expected in naturalistic emotional expression, where prominence tends to be given to the left side of the face.

Kappesser, J. & de C. Williams, A.C. (2002). Pain and negative emotions in the face: Judgements by health care professionals. *Pain*, 99, 197–206.

Brand new word

Are brand names processed differently to common nouns? **NEIL MARTIN**

FOR those who want more than oranges and a bag of walnuts in their Christmas stockings, the gift of choice is usually known by brand name. A new study from the University of California at Los Angeles suggests that we might process these names differently to nouns, nonwords or proper names. What is so special about them?

Possidonia F.D. Gontijo and the LA-based researchers measured people's ability to recognise brand names, common nouns and normal and unusual nonwords as the words were flashed to the left or right visual

field. As is typical in visual field experiments, there was a right visual field advantage found for all of the stimuli (indicating left hemisphere processing). But although the brand names were recognised more quickly and accurately than nonwords, they were recognised more slowly than nouns. Brand names were also recognised much more quickly in capital letters than in lower case, a finding that might be due to the way in which brand names (and proper names with which they share this peculiarity) are usually seen.

So are brand names perceived differently to common nouns, and treated more like nonwords or proper nouns? The authors are undecided. 'The hemispheric lexical status of the brand names is mixed,' they say, 'they behave like words in some respects and like nonwords in others.' There was clearly more to Hai Karate than met the eye.

Gontijo, P.F.D., Rayman, J., Zhang, S. & Zaidel, E. (2002). How brand names are special: Brands, words and hemispheres. *Brain and Language*, 82, 327–343.

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