Do looks matter?

No evidence of posture effects elicited by "modified" dog morphology

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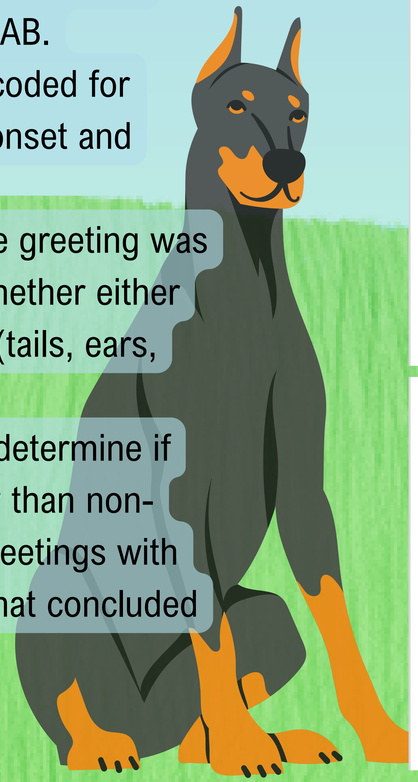
Introduction

- Dogs use ears, tails, and facial expressions to communicate with other dogs. If these features are modified, through breeding or surgery, is dog communication negatively affected? Little research exists to answer this question.
- Some researchers and dog professionals have suggested that modified morphology may result in communication difficulties between dogs.
- We conducted this study to provide preliminary evidence about whether modifications affect dog greeting behaviours.

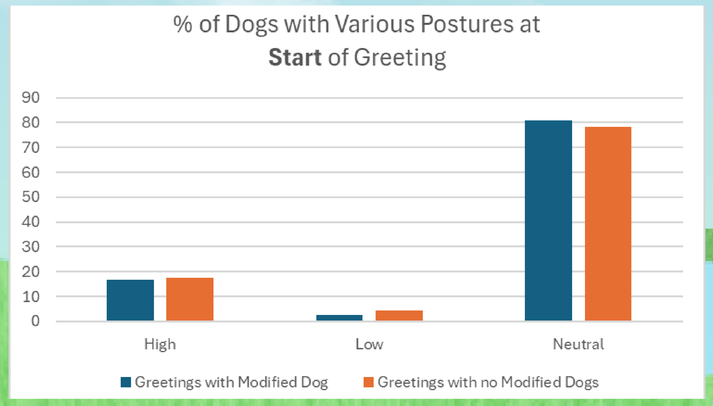
Methods

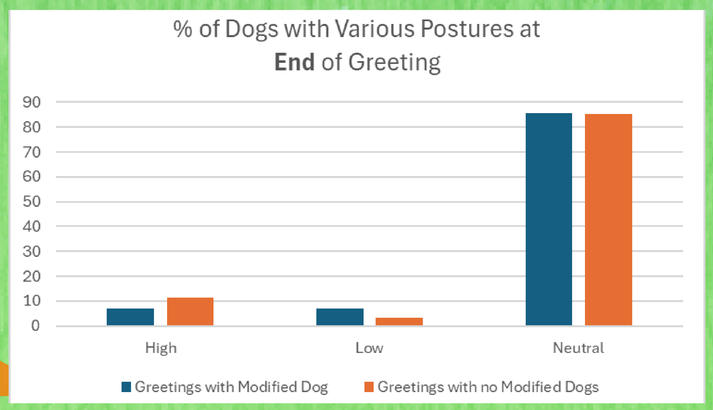
- Expanded on research by Ward (2020).
- Analysed 154 off-leash dog greetings via video recordings of 1-on-1 encounters in public dog parks in Edmonton, AB.
- Dogs in each interaction were coded for posture (low, neutral, high) at onset and offset of the greeting.
- Play and/or aggression after the greeting was also documented, as well as whether either dog had modified morphology (tails, ears, brachycephalic faces).
- Chi-square tests were used to determine if modified dogs were more likely than non-modified dogs to experience greetings with non-neutral body postures or that concluded in aggression.



Results

- No effect of modifications on posture of dogs, at onset or offset of greeting.
- Modified dogs did <u>not</u> elicit negative reactions from non-modified dogs.
- Modified dogs were not more likely to exhibit non-neutral body postures.
- Interrater agreement averaged 90% when coding for postures, modifications, and outcomes of greetings.





Discussion

- Our results <u>do not support</u> the hypothesis that modified morphology results in poor greetings in off-leash environments.
- Results do not imply support for modifications on dogs.
- Results may demonstrate that modified dogs are able to socially interact with other dogs with little to no negative consequences.
- Dog professionals and guardians do not have to assume that modifications will compromise communication.

Limitations

- Our sample was small and self-selected. Larger and more generalizable samples are needed for robustness.
- Small sample meant we could not analyse effects of specific modifications (e.g., cropped tails vs ears).
- Data was collected from April to August, restricted timeframe resulted in a limited amount of collected data.
- Modified dogs who do struggle with communication may not be brought to dog parks, limiting our sample.

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