

POSTER

AN ANIMAL'S MIND: WHICH CATEGORIES SHAPE OUR PERCEPTION OF ANIMALS' COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL ABILITIES?

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ABSTRACT

Social cognition is often erroneously viewed as pertinent only to interactions between two members of the same species. However, different animals play a role not only in our lives, as pets, sources of food, or work partners, but have played a role in virtually all ecologies of any animal alive today. Through fMRI and Eyetracking, we can investigate what humans, and dogs, think and perceive when interacting with others. I will briefly present some of my research on human perception of canines, their interactions with conspecifics and humans, as well as how dogs process their own species and humans in social interactions. Importantly, I want to use the opportunity to present a research proposal with which I want to investigate which characteristics of animals determine which animals we feel more empathy towards. Approaching empathy towards animals from two perspectives, the cognitive domain of visual perspective taking, and the emotional domain of effort to avoid pain for an animal, I hope to shed light on the question why we turn some animals into our beloved pets, but have no qualms slaughtering others for our consumption, despite their large similarities in terms of brains.