Dogs As Pets Essay, Research Paper

People across the world keep dogs as pets. These dogs are usually a big part of their owners lives and often grow up to truly be, “man’s best friend,”. What, then, can be done for a dog with behavior problems? Through recent research it has been establis hed that dogs, like many humans, do suffer from mental disorders. There is however, a variety of treatments available and a complete cure is often achieved. Dr. Nicholas Dodman, in his book, The Dog That Loved Too Much, says that, “Aggression is the most common behavior problem reported in dogs,”(10). With this said, it is important to clarify that there are many different types of aggression found in dogs a ll of which show different symptoms, have different causes, and different treatments. One type of aggression is dominance-related aggression. Dominance is mainly expressed in two ways: competition over resources and self protection (Dodman 23). Dominance-related aggression is usually directed toward those who reside with the dog which mak es affected dogs difficult to live with (Horwitz 42). According to Dodman, traditional treatments of dominance-related aggression include an increase in exercise, brushing up on obedience training, and ceasing to engage in any rough play or wrestling (35) . More recently, however, drugs such as Prozac have been used as treatment. Dodman says that Prozac is,”…extremely effective at curtailing dominance-related aggression…enabling owners to quickly gain the upper hand,”(34). Another type of aggression found in canines is seizure-related aggression. Symptoms of seizure-related aggression include a pre-aggression mood change that can last for minutes or hours before a seemingly unprovoked attack suddenly occurs (Dodman 48). Do gs with seizure-related aggression, “…may wake up from a deep sleep and immediately attack whatever is there…” (Dodman 38). In order to positively diagnose a dog with seizure-related aggression, a test known as the electroencephalographic (EEG) examin ation must be used. This test measures the electrical activity of the brain. Treatment of this disease usually includes medicating the dog with an anti-convulsant such as phenobarbital (Dodman 48). Another form of aggressive behavior is known as territorial aggression. There are two types of territorial aggression: fear-related and anxiety-related. “Dogs with fear-motivated aggression come in all sizes, shapes, and breeds…,”(Horwitz 45). Territor ial aggression is aimed at strangers who are on the dogs turf and is often directed toward those in uniform (Dodman 69). Dodman says that dogs who are looking out the window watching the postman deliver the mail are having their aggressive behavior (barki ng, growling, etc.) reinforced upon the postman’s departure (53). This unintentional reinforcement of the unwanted behavior makes it hard to treat as the dog feels that it is doing it’s job as protector of the home successfully. Treatment of territorial a ggression consists of desensitization programs where the dog is gradually exposed to its fear (i.e.-the postman), sharpening up on obedience training, limiting the dog’s urination to one spot in the yard, and, if prescribed, a medication such as propranol ol (Dodman 68). C.W. Meisterfeld, PH.D., is considered to be a pioneer in the study of canine psychology. Meisterfeld says that, “The biting behavior of a dog is a natural response to certain trigger situations,”(48). Meisterfeld sites survival instinct and improper rel ationship between owner and dog as two major reasons for biting (48-51). The survival instinct of a dog is a very complex and complicated subject. In general, however, “The survival instinct…is triggered by any action perceived…as a threat and leads t o an automatic response-flight or fight,”(Meisterfeld 48). Improper relationship between owner and dog occurs when the owner does not assert himself as leader and the dog therefore becomes dominant (Meisterfeld 51). Preventing a dog from becoming aggressive is something that must be worked on from day one of the dogs life through obedience training and consistent commands (Meisterfeld 51). However, as seen through the work of Dr. Dodman, even if your dog does become aggressive, all is not lost. There are a plethora of treatments available and most are a complete success.

Dodman, Nicholas. The Dog Who Loved Too Much. New York: Bantom Books, 1996.

Horwitz, Debra. “Recognizing Aggression.” Dog Fancy April 1996: 40-47.

Meisterfeld, C.W. “To Bite or not to Bite.” Dog Fancy April 1996: 48-51.

320