

New study examines whether dogs are feline-friendly – or not

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A new study by Christy L. Hoffman, PhD, assistant professor of animal behavior, ecology and conservation (ABEC) at Canisius College, examines whether dogs' responses to cat-related sights, sounds, and smells provide clues about which dogs are cat-friendly. The study takes the first steps in identifying ways to evaluate which dogs are likely to get along with cats, without stressing any cats in the process.

Hoffman's study, entitled "Dogs' responses to visual, auditory and olfactory cat-related cues," was published in the January 2017 issue of *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*.

"When dogs are waiting for adoption at a shelter, a common question is 'what is the dog like with cats,' Hoffman says. She explains that standardized assessments exist to assess dogs' behaviors around humans and other dogs. Currently, however, there is no validated way to predict how a dog in an animal shelter will behave around cats, unless the dog's previous history is known. "Our study investigated what a cat-friendliness assessment might look like," continues Hoffman.

To do this, she and her team examined the responses of 69 [pet dogs](#), of a variety of breeds and mixed breeds, when presented with three different stimuli: a realistic-looking cat doll, recordings of cat sounds, and the smell of cat urine. Their findings revealed that dogs are more responsive to the sounds of cats than to the sights or smells of cats. Specifically, dogs with a history of killing or injuring a cat or other small animal spent longer orienting to the cat sounds than the other dogs. There was no

relationship between dogs' histories with cats and other small animals and their reactions to visual or olfactory information.

"As humans, our first thought was to test dogs' responses to the cat doll because it visually resembles a real cat. However, our findings suggest that dogs are relying more heavily on another sense, hearing. This was surprising since most behavioral assessments focus on dogs' responses to visual stimuli. Our findings suggest that employing assessments that engage other sensory modalities, especially sound, may provide additional clues about an individual dog's behavior. Indeed, it may be possible to use audio recordings of cats to assess which shelter [dogs](#) are likely to fare well in a home with [cats](#) or other [small animals](#)," Hoffman concludes.

More information: Christy L. Hoffman et al. Dogs' responses to visual, auditory, and olfactory cat-related cues, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.applanim.2016.12.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2016.12.016)

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