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Exploring Differences in Compassionate Traits Within Adult Virtual-Pet Hobbyists

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Tsai and Kaufman (2010) demonstrated that caring for virtual pets (i.e., consistent interactions between children and a virtual pet dog) led to greater empathetic/humane behavior. This study examined compassionate behavior in adult fans of virtual pets (V-Pets) by examining how differences in playing behavior may be connected to participants' levels of compassion. A survey was sent out to online spaces dedicated to V-Pet hobbyists (e.g., websites and discussion forums), asking participants ($N = 303$) about their favorite parts of interacting with V-pets, followed by the 5-point Compassion Scale (2019). Findings show overall high total compassion scores ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.47$). Those who reported caretaking as a preferred way of play scored significantly lower on the common humanity subscale ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.58$) than those who did not ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.54$), $F(1, 301) = 4.48$, $p < .05$. Common humanity scores were also influenced by how they reported playing with V-Pets; those who used both sites and devices showed the lowest mean common humanity scores ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.64$), followed by just devices ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.59$), with V-Pet site players having the highest common humanity scores ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.53$), $F(2, 300) = 4.76$, $p < .01$. These findings suggest that higher

common humanity scores may impact how adults choose to interact with V-pets, and the preference of V-pet sites, which have more inherent human interaction, over devices, which can be operated individually and without additional social interaction.

Keywords: virtual pets, compassion, social interaction

References

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