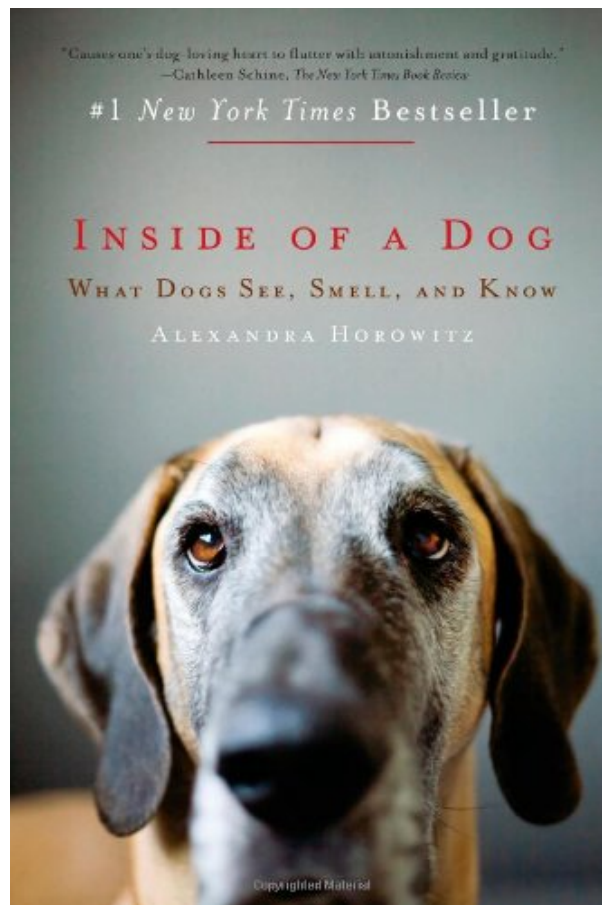


INSIDE OF A DOG: WHAT DOGS SEE, SMELL, AND KNOW BY ALEXANDRA HOROWITZ



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"Causes one's dog-loving heart to flutter with astonishment and gratitude."
—Cathleen Schine, *The New York Times Book Review*

#1 *New York Times* Bestseller

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The answers will surprise and delight you as Alexandra Horowitz, a cognitive scientist, explains how dogs perceive their daily worlds, each other, and that other quirky animal, the human. Horowitz introduces the reader to dogs' perceptual and cognitive abilities and then draws a picture of what it might be like to be a dog. What's it like to be able to smell not just every bit of open food in the house but also to smell sadness in humans, or even the passage of time? How does a tiny dog manage to play successfully with a Great Dane? What is it like to hear the bodily vibrations of insects or the hum of a fluorescent light? Why must a person on a bicycle be chased? What's it like to use your mouth as a hand? In short, what is it like for a dog to experience life from two feet off the ground, amidst the smells of the sidewalk, gazing at our ankles or knees?

Inside of a Dog explains these things and much more. The answers can be surprising—once we set aside our natural inclination to anthropomorphize dogs. Inside of a Dog also contains up-to-the-minute research—on dogs' detection of disease, the secrets of their tails, and their skill at reading our attention—that Horowitz puts into useful context.

Although not a formal training guide, Inside of a Dog has practical application for dog lovers interested in understanding why their dogs do what they do. With a light touch and the weight of science behind her, Alexandra Horowitz examines the animal we think we know best but may actually understand the least. This book is as close as you can get to knowing about dogs without being a dog yourself.

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Features

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Most helpful customer reviews

641 of 684 people found the following review helpful.

It's good, but not fantastic. Not many spoilers in this review.

By M. Carterette

After having read this book weeks ago (advanced copy), I was left a little unsatisfied. I'd give it 3.5 stars if could.

It's more of a cursory glance at canine cognitive ethology rather than a definitive volume, but if you're looking for a good introductory to canine cognitive ethology, this would be a great starter. The anecdotes are sweet and the science is pretty good, and written in a way that the regular Joe Dog Guardian can read it without breaking his brain.

HOWEVER. There is one VERY glaring "scientific" experiment that I feel she used for a bad conclusion, a conclusion whose inclusion of the flawed scientific experiment betrays the entire premise of the book itself.

In the section on "Hero Dogs" (dogs that have responded to emergencies and saved the lives of their owners and people in general), Horowitz details what she calls a "clever experiment" with dogs where

"owners conspired with the researchers to feign emergencies in the presence of their dogs, in order to see how the dogs responded. In one scenario, owners were trained to fake a heart attack, complete with gasping, a clutch of the chest, and a dramatic collapse. In the second scenario, owners yelped as a bookcase (made of particleboard) descended on them and seemed to pin them on the ground. In both cases, owners' dogs were present, and the dogs had been introduced to a bystander nearby--perhaps a good person to inform if there has been an emergency.

In these contrived setups, the dogs acted with interest and devotion, but not as though there was an emergency...

...In other words, not a single dog did anything that remotely helped their owners out of the predicaments. The conclusion that one has to take from this is that dogs simply do not naturally recognize or react to an emergency situation--one that could lead to danger or death." (pp.239-240)

I really don't understand how she could have come to this conclusion after having written over 200 pages on how a dog sees, smells and relates to its world (the "umwelt" of a dog). She didn't consider that the dogs knew that their owners were faking? She wrote herself that a dog can sense the most minute changes in a person's own body chemistry, right down to sensing cancer and other things like an increase in heart rate or adrenaline. A person faking a heart attack isn't going to have the same body chemistry/physical changes that a person having a REAL heart attack is going to have, so in a sense--there is no faking a heart attack around your dog (believe me, I've tried, LOL--it was only playing/testing, but none of my dogs seemed to care if I plopped over in bed, "dead"). Same goes for adrenaline levels when you're in immediate danger, like when you're drowning (and I believe this was one of the examples she used just before this horrible "deduction" of hers; a dog saved the life of a child that was going to drown). And if a person was faking being hurt under a particleboard bookcase, I'm pretty sure that the dog could sense that, too.

Anyway. That was the only part of the book that REALLY got me going "Hmmmnnn...no." Other than that, it's a good read, but left me wanting more (a whole lot of it sucks you in, but then you're left with a little bit of an unsatisfied thirst for more science and more talk about how dogs are in the world; the end chapter seemed a little rushed to me, too).

207 of 222 people found the following review helpful.

It's a Dog's World

By Rob Hardy

Scientifically, we might know a lot more about rats than we do about dogs. There are some experimental labs that have dogs as subjects, but lab rats get a lot of scientific attention. Dogs get a lot of domestic attention, but scientific study of dogs, and the ways they get along with humans and with other dogs, has not been a high concern. That may be because we think we know dogs; they are frank and open, and we live closely with them. Alexandra Horowitz thinks we don't know enough, and some of what we know is wrong, and she is out to change our perception of dogs and to do it scientifically. She has to work at making herself a detached observer; she might be a psychologist who has studied cognition in humans, dogs, bonobos, and rhinoceroses, but among the first sentences of her book *_Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know_* (Scribner) is, "I am a dog person." Is she ever. She didn't deliberately make Pumpernickel, her mixed breed live-in friend (she is an advocate for adopting mutts), a subject of scientific study, but Pump was her entrance, for instance, to the dog park where she could film the interactions of other dogs for acute detailed study later. She gives loving anecdotes of the late Pump in every chapter to illustrate her more objective findings, nicely showing how her scientific examination of dogs paid off in her understanding of her own dog. There are people who worry that scientific examination of any phenomenon takes away the mystery and specialness of the phenomenon, and among the fine lessons in this amusing and enlightening book is that this

is far from true.

Dogs do not sense the world we do. To take one of Horowitz's examples, a rose for humans is a thing of visual and olfactory beauty, and also has connotations of a love gift. Dogs are having none of this. It is just another plant among all the plants that surround it; it does not look attractive, and unless some dog has urinated on it recently, it does not smell attractive. Otherwise, the rose doesn't exist. The dog's world is one largely of smells. Everyone knows that dogs are better at detecting odors than we are. It isn't just that they can smell more scents, at thinner concentrations, than we; it's that they gaze at the world by sniffing, and it presents a very different world from ours. Smell, for dogs, has plenty of meanings, but one of them is time. A strong smell is new, a fading one is old. Not only that, but the future may be borne on a breeze if the dog is walking upwind. In scents, the dog doesn't just experience the current scene in an olfactory way, "...but also a snatch of the just-happened and the up-ahead. The present has a shadow of the past and a ring of the future about it." Dogs are evolutionarily descended from wolves, and sometimes dog owners are advised to treat their dogs as lower-caste members of a pack. Horowitz prescribes caution in such interpretations. Dogs are not wolves and have cast away many wolf traits during their evolution. A person (non-wolf) attempting to subdue a dog (non-wolf) in wolf fashion is missing what is special about the human-dog bond. Dogs, for instance, like eye contact; wolves avoid it. There are many experiments described here (some of which Horowitz has herself been in charge of), and one of them involves "gaze following". Dogs can look at our eyes, and can tell where we are looking, so they look over that way, too. The sections of the book that are the most fun are the ones on play. Dogs play more than wolves do, and unlike most animals, they play as adults. It is a bit of a mystery; it isn't essential for dogs to play to get their needed social skills, and it does cost energy and the risk of injury. Horowitz describes the play cues dogs give that can only be seen by humans using very slow video replays, but which keep the play non-aggressive for the participating dogs. Dogs are good at following these rules; a strapping wolfhound and a tiny Chihuahua can negotiate a play session efficiently, with the former handicapping itself to enjoy the mock aggressiveness of the latter.

Horowitz has provided a useful service in her brightly-written summary of experiments and current theories on the minds of dogs. I have an idea that people keep dogs around not just because of their goofy affection for us, or because they are so entertaining, but simply because they are interesting. It is fun to see how a creature who has evolved an intelligence different from our own gets along in the world. Horowitz's book helps explain that interest, and heighten it.

552 of 631 people found the following review helpful.

Could not finish it

By hydrophilic

I expected to love this book. Unfortunately, it leaves a lot to be desired.

First, there is surprisingly little information in it. The author touches on each subject so briefly that only the most superficial observations can be made. Dog body language gets maybe two pages and includes such revelations as the meaning of a tucked tailed (discomfort and/or submission). Is there a dog owner in the world who doesn't already know that? Note: if that's new to you and you own a dog, stop reading this review and find a dog trainer immediately. In the 250 pages I managed to read, I found two things of interest: the description of canine vision, and speculation on a potential flaw in experiments on dog intelligence (to wit: dogs know that humans are great providers of food, so if a dog that gives up on the puzzle in front of him and runs over to the researcher for help, maybe he's being smart, not dumb).

Second, the author spends way too much time bemoaning human chauvinism. Apparently, all research into animal behavior is done to shore up our belief that humans are the rightful masters of the earth.

Third, the tone of this book is insistently, forcibly whimsical. Sometimes it hits the right note, and I did find myself laughing out loud a few times, particularly at an anecdote about a doberman put to work guarding a collection of valuable teddy bears. Unfortunately, it's more often grating, and I found myself rolling my eyes at the little vignettes about the author's dog that start every chapter. It truly pains me to write that, as love between a dog and an owner is such a wonderful thing.

Fourth, the text has some odd contradictions, one which is noted by the reviewer below me. The author also starts one chapter raving about dogs' almost preternatural ability to understand our intentions -- and supports this assertion by noting how easy it is to fool a dog into thinking you've thrown a tennis ball.

Finally, I came to the point where I had to put the book down. The author begins to describe dogs' sense of personal space, which she gets almost entirely wrong. She makes a common mistake in saying that dogs have a much smaller radius of personal space than we do. This may be true of ultra-friendly, well-socialized dogs like many retrievers, but it is **not** the norm. Dogs are in fact extremely concerned with personal space, and much of what we know about their communication involves conveying the boundaries of their "bubbles".

The final straw was here: "Repeating itself on sidewalks across the country is a scene that demonstrates the clash of our sense of personal space: the sight of two dog owners as they stand six feet apart, straining to keep their leashed dogs from touching, while the dogs strain mightily to touch each other. Let them touch!" This is horribly bad advice. There are a thousand reasons why two strange dogs should not be allowed to greet each other unrestrainedly, first and foremost that lunging towards another dog is actually very aggressive behavior. Dogs have a plethora of signals indicating that their interest is respectful, including look aways, medium-to-low tail carriage, and a sideways approach. A dog that jumps straight up into another dog's business is socially inept at best, and intending harm at worst.

Instead of this book, I would recommend almost anything by Temple Grandin (who isn't always right either, but has a fascinating perspective), Turid Rugaas, Karen Pryor, or Brenda Aloff.

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