

# PET PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF LABORED SWALLOWS IN DOGS

APPLIED BEHAVIOR RESEARCH, AFB INTERNATIONAL

More and more, pet parents want to know their dog is enjoying a meal in addition to simply eating it. If a meal is perceived as enjoyable, then there is a greater likelihood of a repurchase.

We presented videos with different levels of dog feeding enjoyment (i.e., % Nose in Bowl<sup>SM</sup>) to pet parents. However, when pet parents judge “enjoyment”, they could have different expectations for how their pet should respond. An example of a difference in expectations is labored swallows, or chin thrusts, during eating. This study took a closer look at whether labored swallows are likely to be perceived as positive or negative by pet parents when describing their dog’s enjoyment of a meal.

## SURVEY DESIGN

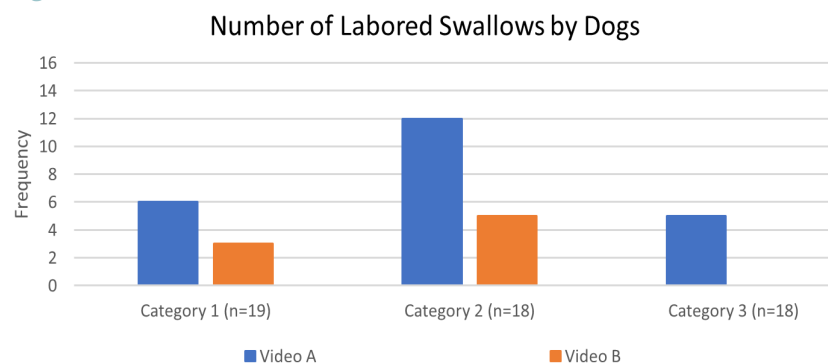
Paired video surveys were conducted at AFB International in Missouri, USA. Fifty-five survey responses were collected from dog pet parents. Each survey participant watched two videos (A and B) of a dog eating a meal. Videos A and B differed in the level of % Nose in Bowl, which is an objective measure of feeding enjoyment (i.e., the proportion of time focused on the food). Three categories of paired videos A and B represented three levels of difference in % Nose in Bowl: low 3%, medium 6% and high 12%.

**Category 1** (3% Nose in Bowl difference)= Both videos A and B contained labored swallows. Video A had double the number of examples than B.

**Category 2** (6% Nose in Bowl difference)= Both videos contained labored swallows, but A had more than double the number of examples than B.

**Category 3** (12% Nose in Bowl difference)= Video A contained labored swallows while video B had zero examples.

Figure 1



Participants were randomly assigned to video categories and were not aware that labored swallows were the focus of the study. After each viewing, participants were asked in which video (A or B) the dog enjoyed the food more. Our hypothesis was that pet parents would perceive videos containing more labored swallows as the less enjoyed meal.

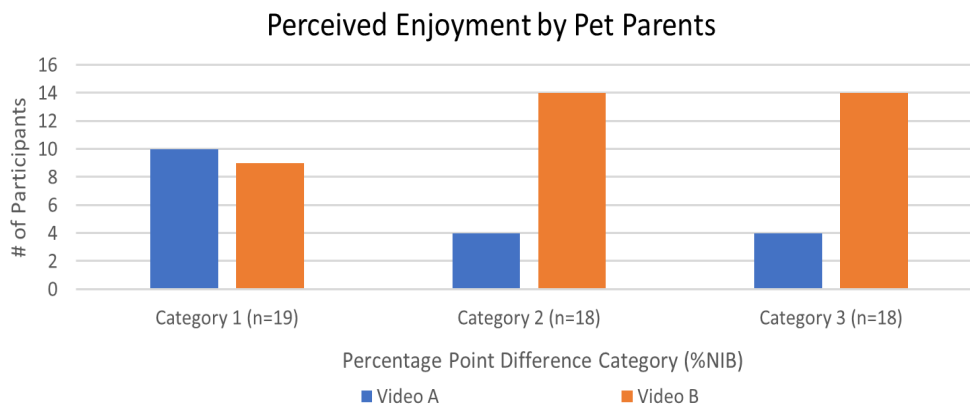
## RESULTS

For Category 1 where labored swallows occurred in both videos and % Nose in Bowl difference was low, unexpectedly, the pet parent was slightly more likely to assign labored swallows as a positive behavior (Figure 2).

In Category 2 labored swallows were present in both videos with Video A having more than double the number of video B and medium difference in % Nose in Bowl. As expected, participants rated video B with less labored swallows as more enjoyable.

In Category 3 labored swallows were only present in Video A and videos had greatest difference in % Nose in Bowl. As expected, Video B with no labored swallows was associated with more enjoyment.

Figure 2



## CONCLUSIONS

Prior to this study there wasn't a clear understanding of how labored swallows could be perceived as part of dog feeding enjoyment. Despite a small portion of participants who associated labored swallows as a positive response, most of our participants perceived labored swallows in a negative context, particularly when % Nose in Bowl differences were 6% or greater (Categories 2 and 3). Enjoyment was more difficult for pet parents to distinguish when % Nose in Bowl was similar in videos A and B even when labored swallows occurred twice as often (Category 1).

The knowledge gained from this closer look into labored swallows will guide behavioral interpretation of future feeding trials that this response is generally perceived by pet parents as a negative action.