Cats and their Owners: Singing a Different Tune

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Part 1: The Truth about Cats and Dogs
- Most popular pets
- Distantly related carnivores
- Adapted to living with humans
- Highly anthropomorphized

Overview
1. What is unique about the domestic cat?
2. The cat-human relationship and characteristics of the cat owner
3. Applying this to your practice (i.e. “difficult clients”)

Cats and Dogs have...
- Different evolutionary & domestication history
- Different physiology
- Different behavioral needs
So why do we expect them to be the same?
Domestication

Dogs
• 18,000-32,000 years ago
• Europe
• Pre-agriculture
• Scavengers with benefits
• May be inclined toward sociality
• Dogs: had a common ancestor with wolves
• Differences from wolves: socialization period later for dogs

Cats
• 9,000 years ago
• Middle East
• Pest control for grain stores
• Closest wild relative (Near East Wildcat) is highly tameable
• “Solitary hunters”
• Genetic changes related to memory, reward response, and fear
• Socialization period similar to that of wolves

Biology

Prefrontal cortex
– Problem solving
– Emotion
– Complex thought
– Attention
– Memory
– Learning associations
– Behavior regulation
– Insight

Vision
Cats: Front facing eyes, larger>dogs
Cats: better for night/low light
Dogs: better peripheral vision

Olfaction
Dogs: more receptors for MOB
social, short-term, face to face
Cats: more receptors for pheromones – long-term, long-distance

Cognition

• Searching for hidden objects
• String pulling task
• Numeracy

West, R. E., & Young, R. J. (2009).
Interactions with humans

- Recognition of owners
- Human pointing gesture
- Help solving a problem
- Both selected for trainability and friendliness


Attachment to humans?

- Attachment paradigm
- Multiple studies on dogs
- Dogs respond similarly as secure human infants
- Only one study on cats (unpublished)

Dr. Daniel Mills (unpublished) – University of Lincoln

Do the differences matter?

When you are at home but cannot pay full attention to your kitty, confine her to a small, short-term confinement area (cat carrying crate) with a couple of stuffed chewtoys and dangly cat toys. Confining your kitty prevents any mistakes around the house, maximizes the likelihood she will learn to play with her toys, and allows you to predict when she would like to relieve herself. Knowing when your kitty wants to go makes litterbox training easy, because all you have to do is show her where to go and reward her for going. Closely confining a kitty temporarily inhibits elimination. Give her hourly access to the litterbox, and she will promptly pee (and sometimes poop). Then voice gentle appreciation and give her 3 liver treats as a reward.
When you are at home but cannot pay full attention to your puppy, confine her to a small, short-term confinement area (doggy den or dog crate) with a couple of stuffed chew toys. Confining your puppy to a den prevents any mistakes around the house, maximizes the likelihood your puppy will learn to chew chew toys, and allows you to predict when your puppy would like to relieve herself. Knowing when your puppy wants to go makes housetraining easy because now you can show her where to go and reward her for going in the right spot. Confining a pup to a den temporarily inhibits elimination, so that every hour you can take her to an appropriate toilet area. When she promptly pees (and sometimes poops), give her 3 liver treats as a reward.

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Cats are not small dogs: Other “Dog-isms”

- Resource guarding
- “Alpha”
- Soft mouth
- Physical play
- Nice cats = “dog-like”

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Summary: Part 1

There are many differences between cats and dogs:
Behavioral, physiological, developmental, cognitive, and historical

Know your species-specific needs!

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Part 2: Cat-Human Relationships

Cat Owners

• Spend less on their pets
• Less likely to take cats to the vet
• Less likely to consider cats part of the family (Zasloff 1995)
• Have less structured support/fewer resources

Adoption Fees

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<th>Cats</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>$225</td>
<td>$50</td>
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<tr>
<td>$250-450</td>
<td>$150 or FREE</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Puppies</th>
<th>Kittens</th>
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How do people relate to their pets?

Dogs as mirror, cats as twin
• mirroring - acceptance/affirmation
• twinship - likeness, connection

Dogs provide more social support than cats
More reported negative interactions with dogs than cats
Pet ownership is not a substitute for human relationships

Human-Cat Interactions

Better interactions when:
cat is in control
cats are indoors only
smaller households
owner is female

Owner more attached to cat(s) when:
perceived affection and support of the cat is high
there are more cats

Owner less attached to cat when:
more humans in home
more emotional support from other sources

Adamelli, Marinelli, Normando & Bono (2005);
What do people like/dislike about their cats?

What people like about their cats:
- ease of care
- affection
- personality
- companionship
- purring

dislike:
- annoying behaviors (59%)
- destructive or aggressive (44%)
- not affectionate (24%)
- shedding/hairballs (21%)
- feeding problems (20%)
- fights with other pets (20%)
- litterbox problems (17%)
- difficult to medicate or groom (8%)


Are Emotionally Attached Companion Animal Caregivers Conscientious and Neurotic?

Factors that Affect the Human-Companion Animal Relationship


Pet ownership & self-identification

- Self-identification as a “cat person” or “dog person” common
- Are they really so different?
- What about those who identify as “both” or “neither?”

Personality

Openness to experience
Conscientiousness
Extraversion
Agreeableness
Neuroticism


Personality and Pet Person Type

Cat People Higher on:
- Openness
- Neuroticism
- Intelligence?

Dog People Higher on:
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness


Attachment Theory

- Originally used to describe parent-child relationship
- Desire to be close to caregiver
- May impact future adult relationships
- Avoidant/anxiety scales


Attachment Theory & Pets

- Proximity maintenance
- Emotional support
- Secure base
- Suffering separation distress

Conclusion: Pets may serve as attachment figures for people!

Research Question

What are the characteristics of the most attached pet owners?
- High affection
- Low avoidance

Personality + pet-person type + favorite pet → attachment to pets


doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2011.04.001
Methods

- Internet survey
- Identification as a pet person
- Favorite pet
- Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS)
- Pet Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ-ANX, PAQ-AV)
- Demographic Questions

Our sample

1098 valid questionnaires

209 (19%) Cat people
419 (38.4%) Dog people

Both: 424 (38.6%)
Neither: 39 (3.5%)
No answer: 7 (<.5%)

Cat people with pets:
17% have dogs and cats, 83% have cats only

Dog people with pets:
18% have dogs and cats, ~81% have dogs only

Both people with pets:
~55% have cats & dogs, 21% dogs, 24% cats

Of all 1017 people in the study with pets:
33% both
40% just dogs
27% just cats

Big 5 Results – by pet & person type

- Openness: Both & Cat > Dog
- Conscientiousness: No group differences
- Extraversion: Both & Dog > Cat
- Agreeableness: Both & Dog > Cat
- Neuroticism: Cat > Dog

- People who identify as Both share some characteristics of Dog AND Cat people
**Affection for Pets (LAPS)**

- Both & Dog > Neither
- No effect of pet type found
- Conscientiousness, Neuroticism increase LAPS score
- Females score higher

**Anxious Attachment (PAQ-ANX)**

- Age reduces
- Choosing a dog as a favorite pet reduces anxious attachment
- Neuroticism increases anxious attachment

**Avoidant Attachment (PAQ-AV)**

- Longer time owning pet reduces
- Being female reduces
- Higher scores on Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Openness reduce
- Neuroticism may reduce
- Choosing Neither as a pet person type increases avoidant attachment

**Discussion**

- Females, dog people more affectionate
- Dog owners less anxious
- More effects of “person type” than “pet type”
- Further research needed on relationship with pets that are not cats or dogs
Discussion

• Conscientiousness increases affection, reduces avoidance
• Correlated with good health & relationships
• Could Neuroticism have benefits?

Neuroticism

• Not good for human parenting
• Conscientiousness + Neuroticism = good combo?
• High affection & anxious attachment to pet
• May lead to more attention to pet

Future Directions

• Better measures of human-pet relationship
• Does attachment lead to better care?
• What facets of Neuroticism (e.g. depression, anxiety, hostility) predict attachment?
• How can we use this information to aid pet owners?

Summary: Part 2

• There are challenges for cats and their owners
• Cat, dog and “both” people have distinct personality traits
• Not all human-pet relationships are the same
• Quality of relationships is tricky to measure; more work is still needed!
Part 3: Dealing with Difficult Clients

Working with animals = Working with people

Your business could be at stake

Your sanity could be at stake

Let’s Talk about Neuroticism (Emotional Stability)

• Anxiety worry about things/relaxed most of the time
• Hostility get angry easily/rarely get irritated
• Depression often feel blue/feel comfortable with myself
• Self-consciousness am easily intimidated/am not embarrassed easily
• Impulsiveness immoderation/easily resist temptations
• Vulnerability panic easily/remain calm under pressure

Anxiety
worry about things/relaxed most of the time

How would you help this client?
Depression
often feel blue/feel comfortable with myself

Hostility
get angry easily/rarely get irritated

What do you do with clients like this?

Manifestations

- Anxiety – overwhelmed, can’t listen
- Depression – no use trying
- Self-consciousness – hesitant to share
- Hostility – may not listen
- Impulsivity – may try things without thinking through
- Vulnerability – “the sky is falling”
Be Aware Of...
• Your body language
• Your tone of voice

Are you...
• listening?
• rambling?
• using “jargon”?
• maintaining your composure?

Do you...
• Stay calm?
• Let clients express their fear/anger?
• Focus on problem-solving and facts?
• Show empathy and concern?
• Say thank you?
• Follow up with your clients?

Dos...
• Recognize your limitations
• Be honest
• Give people the benefit of the doubt
• Adjust your recommendations to the situation and client
• Follow up, follow up, follow up
• Have a colleague to talk to!

...and Don’ts
• Become defensive
• Reward undesirable behavior
• Overwhelm your client
• Take on “toxic clients”
Summary: Part 3

• You will likely work with humans as much as animals
• Humans are more difficult
• Have plenty of tools in your kit to work with challenges!

Conclusions

• Cats are not small dogs
• Cat owners are not the same as dog owners
• Difficulty is everywhere
• You can help cats and their humans!

Thank you!

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Resources – Cat Behavior

• Manual of Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Dogs and Cats, 1e - Karen Overall
• The Behaviour of the Domestic Cat – John Bradshaw
• Cat Behaviour – Paul Leyhausen
• The Domestic Cat – Turner and Bateson
• Pet Behavior Protocols – Suzanne Hetts
Resources – Working with Clients

- Evans Guide for Counseling Dog Owners - Job Michael Evans
- It's Not the Dogs, It's the People! A Dog Trainer's Guide to Training Humans – Nicole Wilde
- Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People – Renee Evanson
- Dealing with Difficult People – Roberta Cava
- Coping with Difficult People – Robert Bramson
- The Other End of the Leash – Patricia McConnell
- CAABchats.com - Helping Pet Owners Follow Through With Behavior Intervention

Cat and Dog Cognition


Human-Pet relationships


