

Empathic Differences in Adults as a Function of Childhood and Adult Pet Ownership and Pet Type

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Abstract:

Prompted by interesting but ambiguous findings that empathic differences in children may relate to pet preference and ownership, we extended the issue to an adult population. We investigated empathic-type responses in adults who lived with cats and/or dogs in childhood (Child-Pet) and currently (Adult-Pet), using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), the Empathy Quotient (EQ), and the Animal Attitude Scale (AAS). Multivariate analyses of covariance, with Sex as the covariate (MANCOVA), revealed differences on the AAS, the IRI-Personal Distress scale, and the EQ-Social Skills factor. For the Child-Pet data, the Dog-Only and the Both (dog and cat) groups, compared with those in the Neither (no dog or cat) group, scored lower on the IRI-Personal Distress scale and higher on the EQ-Social Skills factor. On the AAS, all three pet groups (Dog-Only, Cat-Only, and Both) had higher ratings than the Neither group. For Adult-Pet data, the analyses revealed the Dog-Only group was lower on Personal Distress than the Neither group, and higher on Social Skills than the Neither group and the Cat-Only group. On the AAS, the Neither group was lower than all three pet-owning groups, like the childhood data, but strikingly, adults with both dogs and cats were higher on the AAS. The findings support research linking companion animals with empathic development. They warrant the continued exploration of the nature of empathic development (i.e., nature vs. nurture) and contribute to the increasing research field exploring the value of companion animals.

Keywords: [ADULT EMPATHY](#); [CAT-DOG DIFFERENCES](#); [COMPANION ANIMALS](#); [EMPATHIC DIFFERENCES](#); [PET OWNERSHIP](#)

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