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Hal Herzog, Ph.D., Animals and Us

Do Dog Owners REALLY Make Better Lovers?

What does science say about the connection between love, sex and owning a dog?

Posted Aug 10, 2015

This post is in response to Do Dog Owners Make Better Lovers? Some Scientific Answers by Peg Streep

At my university, I am known as “the guy who teaches the sex class,” not the guy who studies human-animal interactions. Thus I was excited by the title of a new post by Psychology Today blogger Peg Streep: “*Do Dog Owners Make Better Lovers?: Some Scientific Answers*”. I assumed the article would describe new studies showing that dog owners may make better romantic partners, and maybe even that dog people are hotter in bed. I figured my students would be interested in knowing whether they should ask potential dating partners if they are a “dog person” or a “cat person.”

To my disappointment, the title of the post was misleading, and not the first to over-hype anthrozoology – the new science of human-animal relationships. Here are some of the problems with claims about the “science” linking pet preferences with love and sex.

Basic Facts Are Wrong

The blog post starts with the sentence, “Dogs have had our backs for some 130,000 years.” The problem is there were no dogs 130,000 years ago. The claim that dogs evolved from wolves over 100,000 years ago is based on this paper that appeared in the journal *Science* in 1997. This idea, however, has been disproven. While canine researchers debate the exact time of the divergence of dogs from wolves, just about all of them now agree that it dates somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 years ago.

Selective Evidence

In her blog, Streep described the results of studies that have found, for example, that dog people tend to be more extroverted and dogs can serve as catalysts in social situations. However, research also reports that dog owners have traits that might make them less desirable as lovers. For example, this study found dog people are more competitive and have greater needs to be socially dominant. And this study found that dog people were less sensitive, more closed-minded, and less intelligent than cat people. And this large national survey reported that dog owners – for better or for worse – tended to have more conservative political attitudes.

Streep did discuss a widely-cited study by Allen McConnell of Miami University and his colleagues which reported that pets can serve as a source of social support. However, the researchers also found there were no statistically significant differences between pet owners

and non-owners in depression, happiness, or loneliness. These results are consistent with a recent review in the journal *Anthrozoos* of studies of the impact of pets on loneliness. The authors concluded that the cross-sectional studies they examined provided no convincing evidence that getting a pet reduces loneliness.

Irrelevant Research

Most importantly, none of the research Streep cites really addresses the question “do dog owners make better lovers?” For example, she discusses studies of: student impressions of psychotherapists with dogs, the effects of dogs on aggression in first graders, and research on the effects of dog ownership on leisure activities. But these studies are irrelevant or, at best, tangential to the impact of pets on the quality human romantic relationships or sex lives. The only study even remotely related to love and sex was conducted by two French social psychologists. They found that a handsome male confederate had more success convincing women to give him their phone numbers when he was with a dog. However, even this clever experiment did not address the question of whether dog owners are better lovers.

In short, there is no scientific research that bears on question posed by the blog post’s title. I am sorry, but the fact is that there is not a shred of evidence that people who own dogs make better lovers.

(While this is good news for cat people, the dog-owning students in my human sexuality class will probably be disappointed.)