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Does Having a Pet Make You More Attractive?

Harold Herzog, *Animal Studies Repository*



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Hal Herzog, Ph.D., Animals and Us

Does Having a Pet Make You More Attractive?

Research into the surprising connections between pet ownership and sex appeal.

Posted Nov 09, 2015

Can your dog or cat boost your sex appeal?

In a 2008 experiment, two French social psychologists had a handsome young Frenchman named Antoine approach 240 randomly selected women and ask them for their phone numbers so they could go on a date. The catch was that half the time Antoine was alone and half the time he was accompanied by a cute little grey dog named Gwendu.

Did the dog improve Antoine's hit rate? Absolutely!

When he was alone, only 10% of the women gave Antoine their phone numbers, compared to 30% when Gwendu accompanied him.

But do pets really affect the dating strategies of today's singles in the real world? Do men use their pets for date-bait? Are women more attracted to men who adopt a rescue dog? What happens if your pet does not like your date? And what is the sexiest pet?

These and other questions about the impact of companion animals on modern romance were asked—and answered—in an innovative study which will appear in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Anthrozoös*.

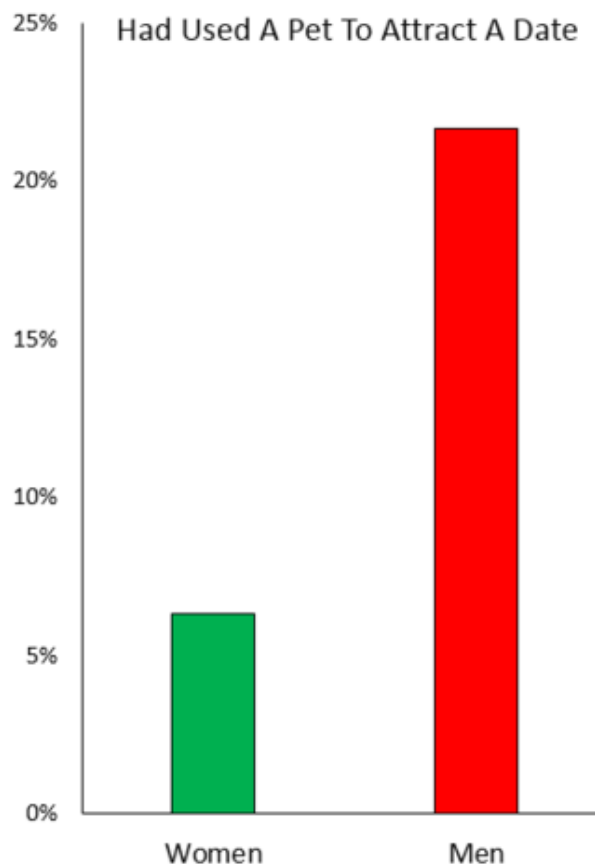
The research team was led by University of Nevada-Las Vegas anthropologist Peter Gray. They tested several hypotheses about pets, contemporary courtship, and dating rituals. A cardinal tenet of evolutionary psychology is that women tend to allocate more resources to child rearing, while men devote more time and energy to mating. Thus the researchers predicted, for example, that women should be more sensitive than men to how their dates treat their own dogs and cats. Men, on the other hand, should be more likely to use their pets to attract sexual partners. Gray and his colleagues also predicted that when it comes to signaling the qualities of a date as a potential parent, interactions with dogs would provide more salient cues than those with cats, because dogs are generally thought to require more care and attention. The researchers also investigated intergenerational differences in the roles pets play in dating. Finally, they tossed in a couple of questions for fun—for example, asking female subjects, “What is the hottest pet a guy can own?”

Match.Com: A New Source of Research Subjects

In collaboration with the pet store chain PetSmart, the researchers recruited 1,210 single pet owners through the online dating service Match.com. In the pool of participants, 60% were

women and 40% were men; 72% were dog owners and 42% cat owners. The subjects took a 21-question online survey about how pets entered into their dating lives. Here are some of the highlights:

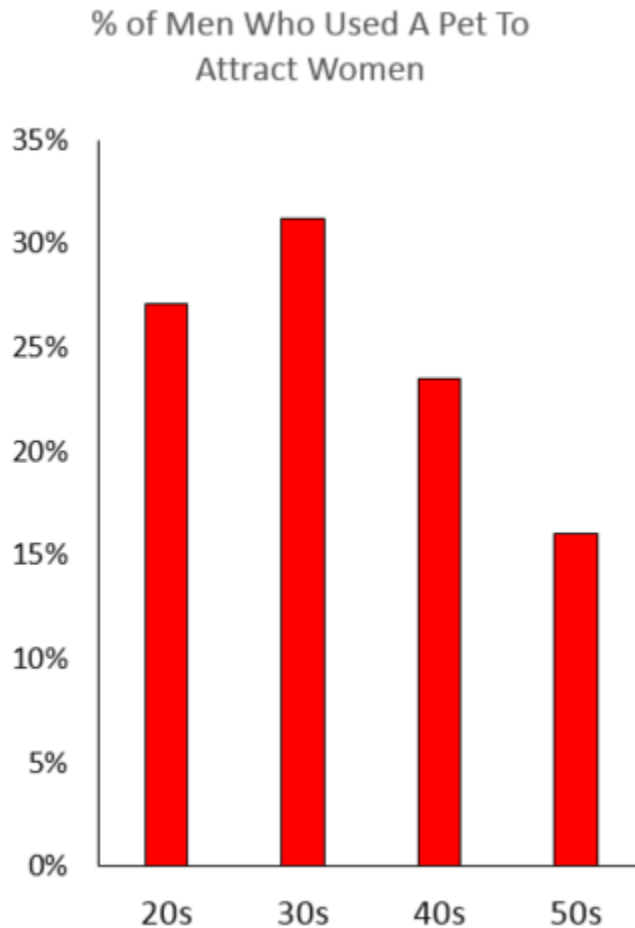
- 22% of the men—but only 6% of women—admitted they had used their pet to attract potential dates.
- 35% percent of women and 26% of men said they had been more attracted to someone because they owned a pet.
- Nearly half of the women and a quarter of the men said they judged dates based on how the person responded to their pet.
- 76% of women and 60% of men evaluated dates based on whether their own pets like the person.
- 64% of women and 49% of men said they were more attracted to a person if they owned a rescue animal.
- 75% of the women and 54% of the men said they would not date someone who did not like pets.



Source: Graph by Hal Herzog

Are Millennials Different?

During a panel discussion on cats as pets at the recent Better with Pets Summit, Purina scientist Sandra Lyn argued that the millennial generation has different relationships with their pets than baby boomers. The results of the Match.com study suggested she is right. As shown in this graph, men in their 20s and 30s were more likely to use their pets as "date-bait" than older singles. Millennials said they were particularly attracted to pet owners and more willing to evaluate dates by how their dogs and cats reacted to the person. Millennials were also more likely to find pictures of pets posted on online dating profiles a turn-on.

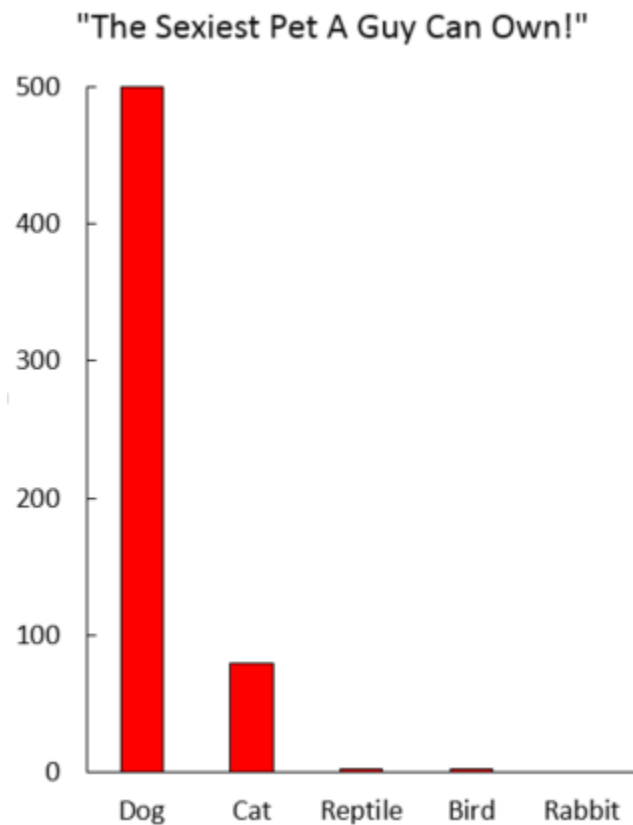


Source: Graph by Hal Herzog

Pets, Dating, and Evolutionary Psychology

Finally, the researchers' hypotheses about gender differences in the use of pets as signals of mate quality were confirmed. As predicted, women were more discriminating than men on eight of the 11 questions related to the use of pets in evaluating dating partners. (There were no gender differences for the other three questions.) Dog owners were more likely than cat owners to use pets as indicators of a date's attributes: For example, more dog people than cat people said the responses of their pet to a date was important. Dog owners were also more likely to say

that the way a date treated their own pet mattered and to believe that person's pet revealed a lot about their personality.



Source: Graph by Hal Herzog

And, oh, yeah, what is the sexiest pet a guy can own? This graph shows the responses of nearly 600 women. Dogs win by a mile. If you want to meet girls, don't get a rabbit.

References

- Gray, P., Volsche, S. L., Garcia, J. R., & Fisher, H. E. (2015). The roles of pet dogs and cats in human courtship and dating. *Anthrozoös*, 28 (4), 673-683.
- Guéguen, N., & Ciccotti, S. (2008). Domestic dogs as facilitators in social interaction: An evaluation of helping and courtship behaviors. *Anthrozoös*, 21(4), 339-349.