

Personality Trait and Empathy Differences of Self-Identifying Dog-People and Cat-People

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to say “I’m more of a dog-person than a cat-person” or vice versa? According to this research, you’re likely to be significantly more neurotic if you’re a dog-person, but you’re also likely to score significantly higher in empathy, irrespective of sex differences in empathy. Additionally, there is a significant association between your environment and identification as a cat-person or dog-person.

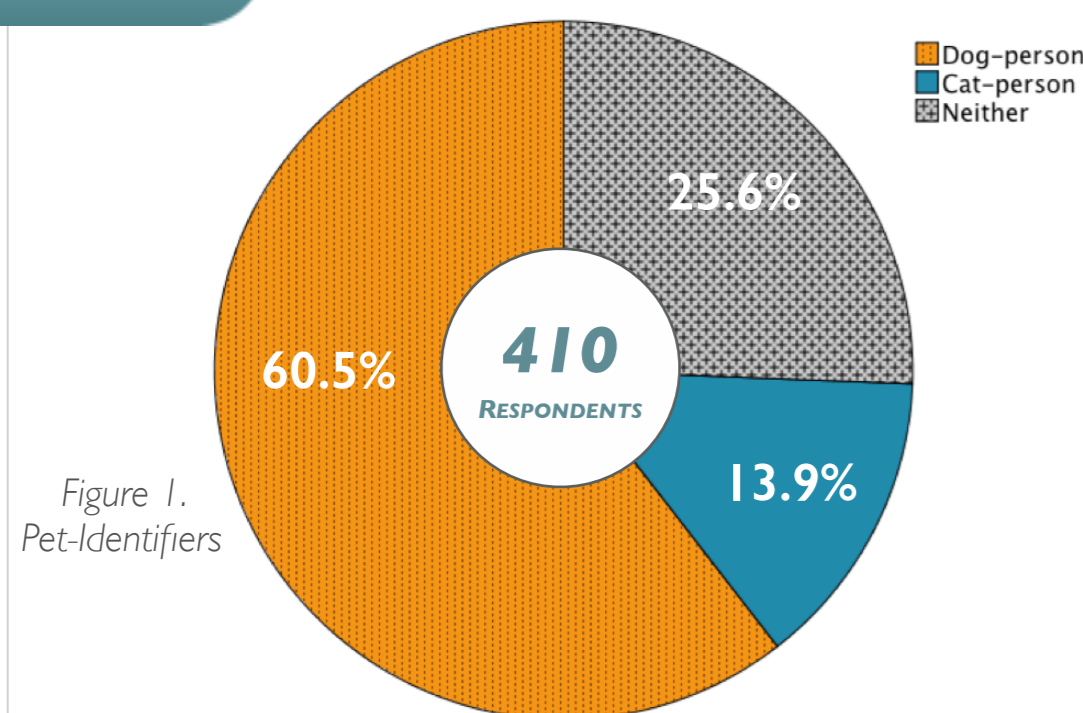
INTRODUCTION

Popular culture assigns stereotypical characteristics to dog-people and cat-people. While past research has overwhelmingly used pet ownership as a proxy for self-identification, only two previous studies^(1,2) have scientifically investigated differences in personality traits of self-identifiers. Their results converge on two distinct portraits of what self-professed dog- and cat-people tend to be like. This research tests those results for replicability and hence reliability, and further conducts novel investigation into any empathy differences between dog-people, cat-people and those who identify with neither. It additionally evaluates any significant association between type of pet-person with environment and lifestyle status.

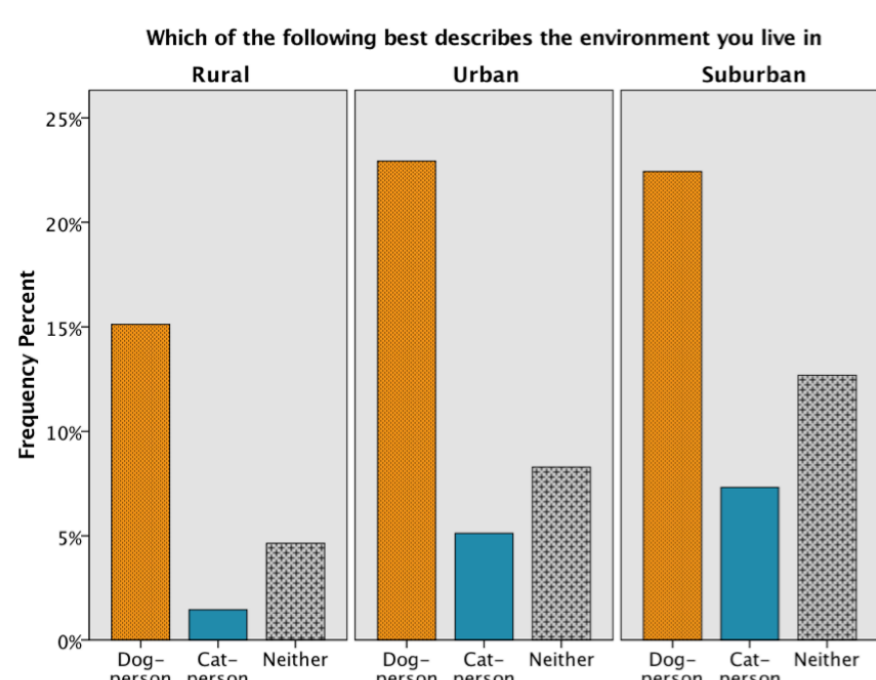
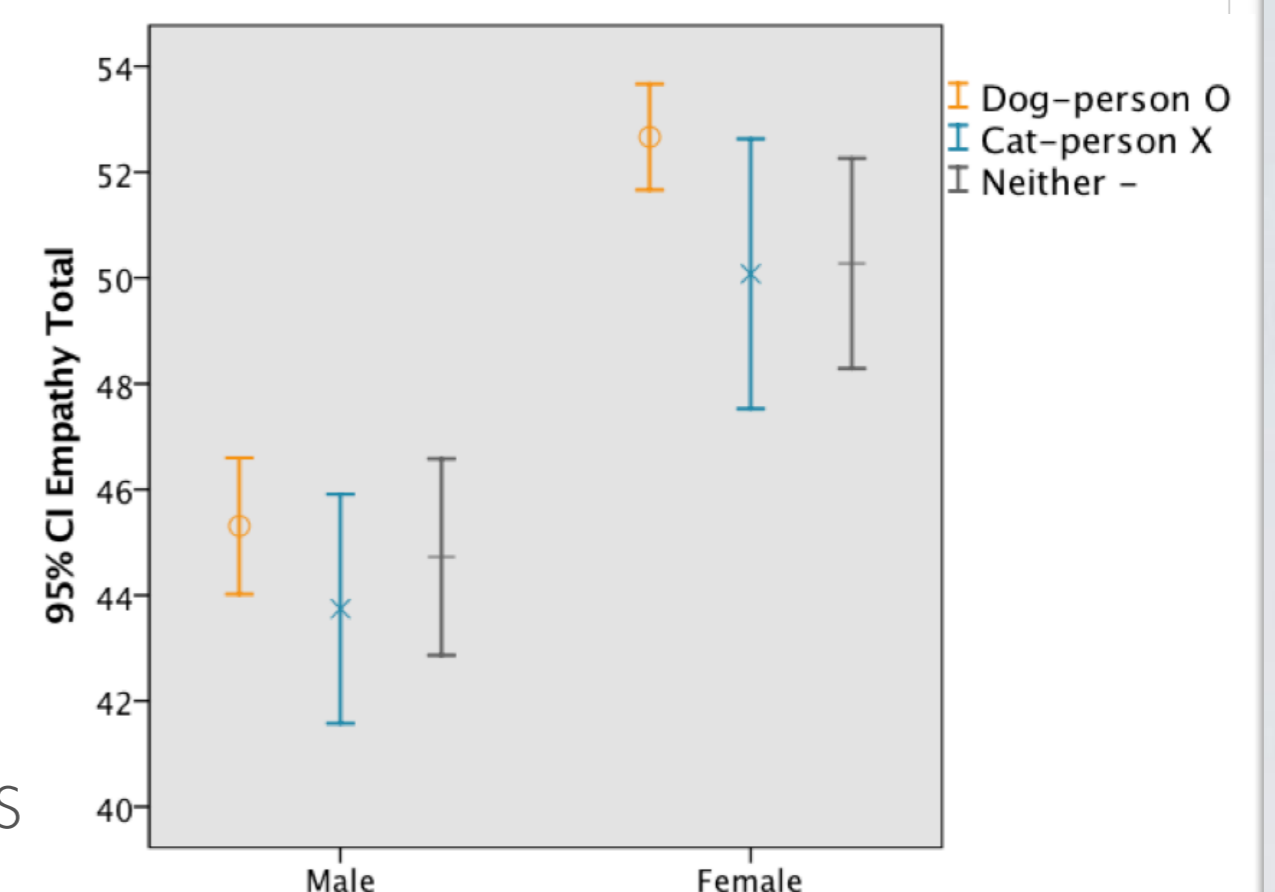
METHODS

Using a quantitative, quasi-experimental design, a snowball sample of 410 adults (46% male, 54% female) completed an online survey circulated via social media. The questionnaire accrued basic demographic information and self-report measures of Personality Trait and Empathy with a final pet-identification question. Respondents were told the survey investigated ‘personality and animal instinct’ so as to avoid response bias. They completed the Big Five⁽³⁾ 44-item measure of personality traits, the 16-item Toronto Empathy Quotient⁽⁴⁾, and 4 multiple choice demographic questions; sex, living environment {rural/urban/suburban}, lifestyle {out of home for more than / less than 8 hours per day}, whether they consider themselves to be a cat-person/dog-person/neither and gave their age. A series of Independent t-tests, ANOVAs and a three-way cross-tab and Chi Square test statistically analysed 7 hypotheses for differences between IVs {Pet-preference groups} and DVs {Personality Trait scores, Empathy scores and Environment & Lifestyle status}.

RESULTS



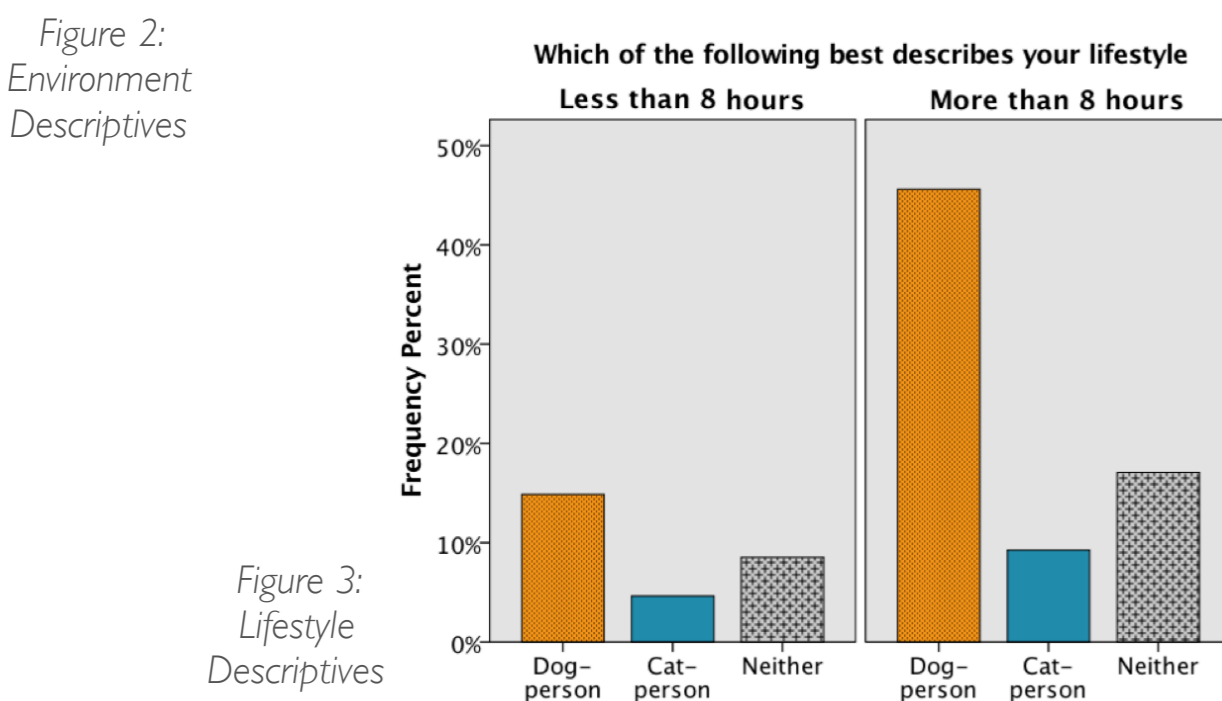
Hypotheses: 1| Dog-People will score higher on Extraversion and lower on Neuroticism than Cat-People. 2| Cat-People will score higher on Openness and lower on Agreeableness than Dog-People. 3| Dog-People will score higher on Conscientiousness than Cat-People. 4| Pet-People will score higher on Empathy than the neither group. 5| Dog-People will score higher on Empathy than both Cat-People and Neither groups. 6| Females will score higher on Empathy than males. 7| There will be a significant association between self-identifying Cat-People and urban environment with lifestyles demanding absence from home of more than 8 hours per day.



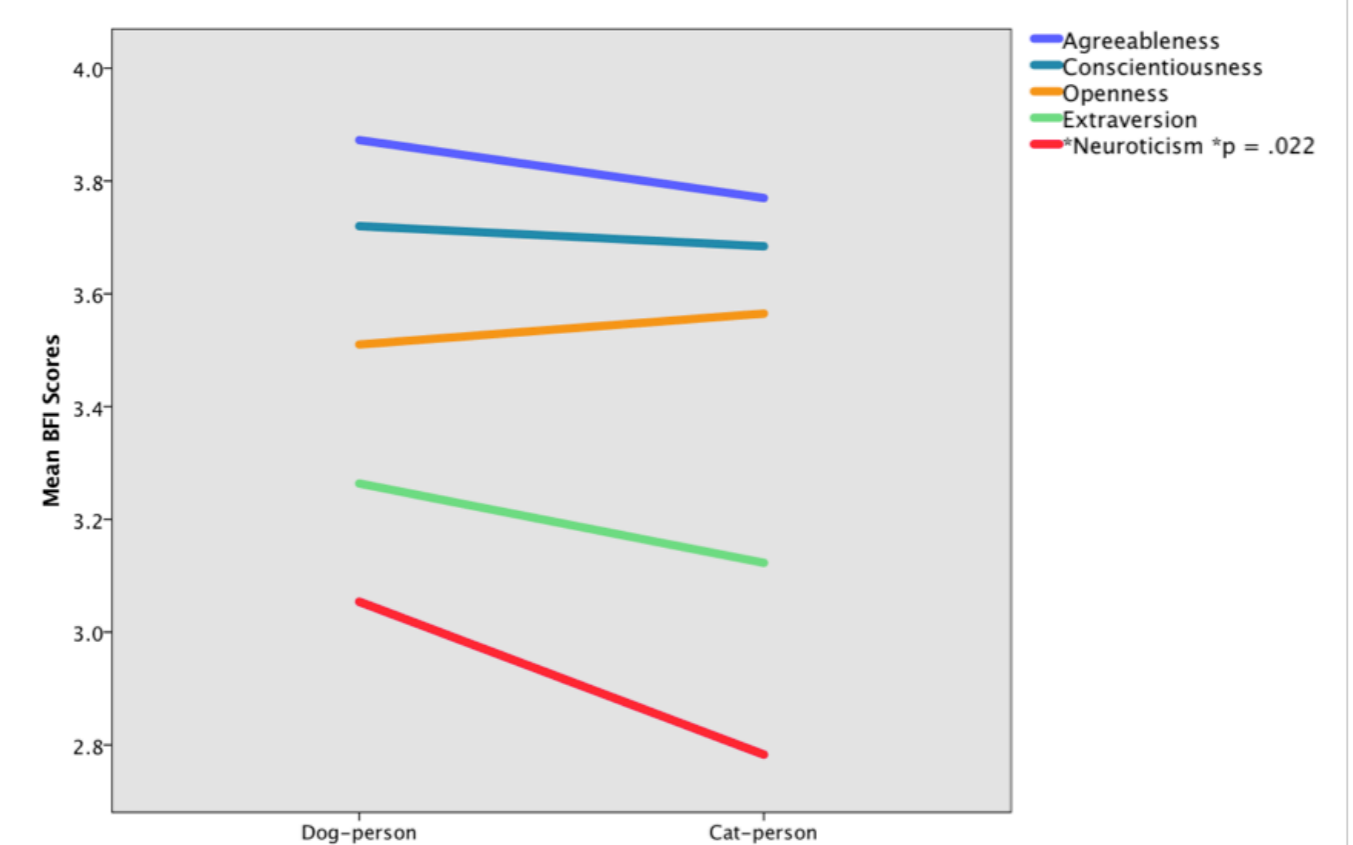
DESCRIPTIVES



INFERENTIALS



Significant results: H1| Partial significance but contrary to predicted direction, Dog-People scored significantly higher on Neuroticism than Cat-People. H5| Dog-People scored significantly higher on Empathy than both Cat-People and Neither groups. H6| Females scored significantly higher than males on Empathy. H7| A significant association was revealed between type of pet-person in suburban and rural environments.



CONCLUSION

Despite an established cultural practice of stereotyping the characteristics of ‘dog-people’ and ‘cat-people’, little scientific research exists to ground perceived differences in empirical evidence. The current study failed to replicate all significant differences in Big Five personality trait dimensions detected by Gosling et al. (2010), however mean score differences were broadly reflected. Consistent but not significant, mean scores for the dimensions of Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were higher in dog-people than cat-people and cat-people scored higher than dog-people on Openness. Inconsistently, dog-people scored significantly higher on Neuroticism than cat-people. Given this broad trait alignment (barring trait Neuroticism) these results support a distinct flavour of the differential traits of cat- and dog-people. In the novel investigation, dog-people scored significantly higher on Empathy than both cat-people and a neither group. Further, these differences showed no interaction effects with sex differences. A significant association was also detected between environment and type of pet-person. The current research cautions against accepting definitive proof on the strength of any one body of research. Instead, it argues against the systemic bias for novel, positive results, and heralds the value of careful, responsible metascience, adhering in as much as is possible to replication protocols for a consistent picture to emerge.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study appeals to the merit of reproducibility in psychological science. A revision of emphasis from exclusive focus on novel research to robust reproducible findings enhances the rigour and yield of the scientific method. Novelty and certainty need not be mutually exclusive. Research can be designed for both. Since significance was detected in Neuroticism with approximations of mean score differences in the four other BFI traits, true effect sizes in personality trait if they stably exist may be unearthed with multiple replications. Moreover, since significant empathy differences were revealed herein this study suggests merit in novel exploration of attitudinal and value based differences between pet-identifiers. Interesting associations between pet-identification processes and the environment were also tentatively revealed. This poses exciting future investigation prospects for studying the abstraction and imaginative capacities of the person relative to their built and natural environment. Aggregations of robust data will facilitate firm conclusions.

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