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Dogs, Cats, and Meaning in Life

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Pet ownership is related to well-being and personality traits (Boa & Schreer, 2016). Research has not examined the potential link between pet ownership and meaning in life. Meaning in life consists of 3 facets: the sense that one's life matters (significance), that it is goal-driven (purpose), and that it makes sense (coherence). Although sometimes considered a particularly profound experience, meaning in life is related to common experiences such as being in a good mood or engaging in daily routines (King & Hicks, 2020). The present study examined how pet ownership relates to meaning in life and its facets. We predicted that pet ownership would be linked to higher subjective well-being and meaning in life. We also predicted that pet ownership would have significantly higher reports of significance, compared to purpose and coherence. In addition, we expected dog ownership to be especially related to a higher sense of significance compared to cat ownership. Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (N=799; 634 pet owners, 165 non-pet owners) completed measures of subjective well-being, meaning in life (Costin & Vignoles, 2019), personality traits (Big Five; John, et al., 1991), and whether they were a cat person (n=256) or a dog person (n=542). A series of t-tests showed pet owners reported higher subjective well-being, and higher sense of purpose and coherence. Cat owners and dog owners reported significantly higher subjective well-being and meaning life and significance (all p 's $< .01$). Not surprisingly, self-identified dog people and cat people were more likely to own dogs and cats, respectively, $\chi^2(2) = 399, p < .001$. These data will be used to design an experiment probing how exposure to pictures of dogs and cats might influence mood and meaning in life. We also plan to further examine the personality traits of dog and cat people in future studies