

# Sexual differences in psychology and pet ownership

by Kelly Jones  
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Do males have generally different attitudes towards pets than females? This paper explores sexual differences in psychology as displayed in attitudes and behaviour towards pets, such that males reveal attitudes towards pets typical to male psychology, and females reveal attitudes towards pets typical to female psychology. It doesn't aim to prove a genetic basis of such differences, as opposed to learning them from others, but uniformity in attitudes culture-to-culture over many years is highly likely to be gene-driven. Data is taken largely from surveys and scientific studies, published in Australia, United States, Britain, Japan. It is reasonable to conclude, from this data, that women tend more than men to have pets for companionship and emotional purposes.

## Data sources

It would be preferable to have primary sources to establish general human attitudes to pets and to pets' functions for humans. But I've relied more on sources like surveys, questionnaires and studies instead for data, for two good reasons that I'll explain here.

In collecting primary source data from pet fora, in order to make associations between gender and attitudes, one comes across two reasons why secondary sources are preferable:

- (i) Most studies show that a great majority of contemporary pet owners have pets for *companionship*. They explicitly use companion animals as a way of fulfilling emotional needs they cannot fulfil through human contact. So most pet ownership fora members would probably present themselves in similar emotive ways, whether male or female.
- (ii) If there is any revelation of sex by members of pet ownership fora, it is typically the females who refer to husbands and boyfriends. Surprisingly, many do, while there are few references to wives and girlfriends.

This means, while one can positively associate the attitude of using pets for emotional purposes with females, the lack of males' self-identification makes it hard to positively prove any different attitude. All one can conclude is: either there are no male members, relatively few male members, or that male members typically don't talk about their wives and girlfriends to strangers.

For these two reasons, I've referred mostly to studies and surveys instead as data sources. Sources were top ranking results to search terms using Google, unless otherwise noted:

1. members' answers to "why did you pick your dog?" from dogforums.com
2. "gender and pet ownership" (Google)
3. "why people have pets?" (Google)
4. "why you should not have a pet"
5. pet quotes (Google)
6. "child substitute pet ownership" (Google)
7. psychological studies on pet ownership and gender published on PubMed and ScienceDirect databases.

## Data Search Results

### 1. <http://www.dogforums.com/general-dog-forum/142530-why-did-you-pick-2.html>

The following table lists general attitudes responding to the question, “Why did you pick your dog?” Most posters' sex could not be identified; those whose sex was identifiable referred to their “husband”, “wife”, “boyfriend”, “ex-boyfriend”, or “DH” (dear husband). Those who made such references were overwhelmingly female. In fact, only one male identified himself via his relationship status.

Source details	Sex	Status	Comment	Notes	Function
Dogforums.com	M	Married	Likes big, furry, wolf-like dogs	Wife chose	Appearance
	F	Married	Chooses by feelings	Husband chose	Emotions
	M		Large, black dogs, adoption		Appearance
	F	Married	“sweet, soft, little, smile”		Emotions
	F	Married	Shepherd, SAR	Can't fall pregnant	Childless
	F	Married	Small adult terriers		
	F	Married	“special heart dog”, “sluggish basset”		Emotions
	F	Married	Son started crying, couldn't live w/ her		Emotions
	F	Het rel.	Male partner's drive	M partner chose	
	F		“a ball of fluff and so sweet and cuddly and now HUGE” “I feel safe around big dogs”		Affection, safety
	F	Het rel.	“cute but ugly” “basically living by myself”		Companion
	F	Married	“desperately wanted another dog”	Puppy fever	Emotions
	F	Het rel.	“Hypoallergenic, energy level, love, intelligence”	M partner chose	
	F	Married	“active, sweet, calm personality		Emotions
	F	Married	“beautiful, elegant, sweet, aloof”		Emotions
	F	?	Working at animal shelters, pit bulls		Rescue
	F	Married	Adoption		Rescue
	F	Married	Puppy fever, adoption, “heart dog”		Emotions, rescue
	F	Married	labrador		

### 2. “gender and pet ownership”

The following were relevant excerpts from the four highest ranking results from a Google search with the given terms.

1. Australians and their Pets survey from Australian Companion Animal Council's *Pet Facts Book* <[http://www.acac.org.au/pdf/PetFactBook\\_June-6.pdf](http://www.acac.org.au/pdf/PetFactBook_June-6.pdf)>: **“In about two-thirds of cases a woman is the main carer and decision-maker in relation to the family pet(s).”**
2. National Pet Ownership Survey (by American Animal Hospital Association), 8 April 2010: found that people are humanizing their relationships with their pets in many ways (excerpted from article):
  - 57 percent of pet owners surveyed would want a pet as their only companion if deserted on an island.

- **80 percent of survey respondents selected companionship as the major reason for having a pet.**
- 72 percent of pet owners say that affection is their pets' most endearing trait.  
79 percent of surveyed pet owners give their pets holiday or birthday presents.  
33 percent of pet owners talk to their pets on the phone or through the answering machine.
- 21 percent of dog owners sometimes dress their pets.
- 62 percent of respondents often sign letters or cards from them and their pets.
- 55 percent of pet owners consider themselves as mom or dad to their pets.

<http://www.humanespot.org/content/national-pet-owner-survey-finds-people-prefer-pet-companionship-over-human>

3. A recent survey completed by the mega-internet shopping site, Shopzilla, asked people about their relationships with their pets. According the survey, 56% of women pet owners surveyed felt their pets were more affectionate than their partners. And 45% said their pets were cuter! On the other hand, men found only 24% of their pets cuter and 41% found their pets more affectionate than their significant others.  
<http://webcenters.netscape.comuserve.com/homerealestate/feature.jsp?story=petsforwomenormen>
4. Harris Poll, May 2011: “Examining pet ownership by various demographic categories, the poll finds **women (69%) are much more likely to own a pet than men (55%).** ...More than half of pet owners (57%) say they frequently let their pet sleep in the bed with them while less than one-quarter (23%) say they never do this. Pets also get presents. One-third of pet owners (33%) frequently purchase holiday presents for their pet, while one-quarter (27%) occasionally do so. And these gifts are not just at holiday time as one in five pet owners (20%) frequently buy their pets birthday presents and while 17% do so occasionally. ...Two-thirds of pet owners (66%) say they have never dressed their pet in some type of clothing” <http://www.marketingcharts.com/direct/3-in-5-americans-own-pets-17938/>
5. Kennel Club survey (Britain) (2000-2011): “**Forty per cent of the country’s pedigrees are registered to women, compared with only 21.5 per cent to men.** The remainder are recorded as having joint owners – the vast majority of which are couples. ... The Club conducted its breakdown of men and women owners from studying all pedigrees registered between 2000 and 2011 – a total of around 2.75 million animals. Although many of the women owners will be in relationships or married, the fact that the animal is registered in their name – rather than jointly – suggests that they consider it to be “their” pet. ... women get married later and have children later. But there is still something important in having something to love and look after. On the whole, our dogs don’t work any more. **They are for companionship, and there has been a trend to have smaller ones that are easier to handle, and can live in cities and these are the animals that women now tend to own.** ... From the data, the Club has also established which breeds have the highest proportion of men and women owners. Very few now have more male than female ones. Many of those that do appear to conform to a type – being animals traditionally seen as the most macho: such as the bull terrier, Staffordshire bull terrier, bulldog, dogue de Bordeaux, Akita and malinois, a popular guard dog. **Gender stereotypes also abound at the top of the list with the highest proportion of women owners. It is dominated by small**

**“handbag” dogs** like Chihuahuas and shih tzus, along with Pomeranians, Pekinese, dachshunds, Lhasa apsos, poodles, pugs, Yorkshire terriers, West Highland white terriers and cavalier King Charles spaniels.”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/pets/9700894/Britains-dogs-twice-as-likely-to-have-a-woman-owner-than-a-male-one.html>

### 3. “Why people have pets”

The following results were top-ranking in a Google search with the given terms.

1. “According to a 2011-2012 National Pet Owners Survey, 72.9 million families in the United States have one or more pets, which is about 62% of all the U.S. Households. ... physical attractiveness...playfulness...personalities...companionship...enjoy the attachment and fun...relieve stress and loneliness...build their physical fitness...socializing ...increase our sense of responsibility...watching fish swimming in an aquarium has a calming effect...children growing in families with cats or dogs are less likely to develop allergies but will have a higher immune system down the road...pets help boost their keepers’ self-esteem because pets are not “snobbish” or “prejudiced” against their owners by their social status or their appearance. Whether we are rich or poor, good-looking or “ugly,” overweight or underweight, our pets just do not care. Their unconditional loyalty gives us a sense of satisfaction and pleasure.”  
<http://petskeepersguide.com/why-do-people-have-pets/>
2. “The most common reasons for keeping pets are: company, socializing, they are beautiful, nice and interesting, status, something to do”  
[http://www.animalfreedom.org/english/opinion/pets/why\\_do\\_people\\_want\\_pets.html](http://www.animalfreedom.org/english/opinion/pets/why_do_people_want_pets.html)
3. [Among other things:] **I need her love.** When my family and friends neglect to spend time with me, or they are too busy with their own lives and I’m feeling lonely, Baby curls up with me and lets me know how much she cares.”  
<http://mary615.hubpages.com/hub/Why-do-people-have-pets>
4. Roughly the same as #1: [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-12/pets/31451613\\_1\\_pets-dog-owners-unconditional-love](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-12/pets/31451613_1_pets-dog-owners-unconditional-love)
5. A range of responses posted on <http://www.guardian.co.uk/notesandqueries/query/0,-9725,00.html>:
  1. “when the matter is considered rationally, only sad, inadequate human individuals would wish to keep members of other species as captives.”
  2. “Wouldn't anyone want a partner who worshipped them, always welcomed them home enthusiastically, ate gratefully at every meal, was content with cheap outings and presents and gave lifelong loyalty and protection? **I read last year that a large number of US women wished they could marry their dogs!** Try that lot for a start. “
  3. “Several points: 1)I don't own my cat, my cat owns me. 2)My cat is in many ways a baby substitute. I'm 41 & a spinster, & need to be needed. 3)got the cat during a very stressful period in my life. It's been proved that stroking an animal lowers your blood pressure.”

4. "Smart cats do not have staff - they have slaves"! "
5. "Why do people keep pets but eat animals? Is there really a difference between "pets" and other animals?"
6. "The cubs at a young ages have the same appeal and innocence as our own young and so became intertwined with our own development."
7. "People, sometimes, smile in your face then stab you in the back. Animals don't, and thereby provide a welcome respite from having to watch your back ... "

#### 4. Why not to have a pet

The following demonstrates the arguments of a humane attitude to pet ownership. It was discovered via the previous Google search, "Why people have pets".

1. "A lot of people justify the fact that they keep a [pet](#) with arguments that aren't correct. **These arguments are being made up to get a clear conscience or show that they have a disability in engaging social contacts.** [E.g.,] animals are more loyal than people, an animal is enthusiastic when it sees you, with animals you can be yourself, animals don't argue and reproach, animals are thankful when you take good care of them, animals feel how I am... **Petting animals does not result in lower blood pressure** A [Dutch](#) Health Insurance Company (De Friesland) wondered if petting animals can help to lower your blood pressure. The company did a number of "humorous" tests and arrived at the conclusion that petting animals does not, in fact, help against high blood pressure."  
<http://www.animalfreedom.org/english/opinion/badreason.html>

#### 5. Quotes about pets

These are from a Google search and are exhaustive enough for me. The link is:

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/pets>

1. "Owners of dogs will have noticed that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they will think you are god. Whereas owners of cats are compelled to realize that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they draw the conclusion that *they* are gods."  
 — [Christopher Hitchens](#), [The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever](#)
2. "Our perfect companions never have fewer than four feet."  
 — [Colette](#)
3. "Cats are the lap-dancers of the animal world. Soon as you stop shelling out, they move on, find another lap. They're furry little sociopaths. Pretty and slick -- in love with themselves. When's the last time you saw a seeing-eye cat?"  
 — [Andrew Vachss](#), [Safe House](#)
4. "when I am feeling / low / all i have to do is / watch my cats / and my / courage / returns"  
 — [Charles Bukowski](#)
5. "My philosophy when it came to pets was much like that of having children: You got what you got, and you loved them unconditionally regardless of whatever their personalities or flaws turned out to be. "

- [Gwen Cooper](#), [Homer's Odyssey](#)
6. I hope one day to react to something with as much pure ecstasy as I see in Chuck's face every time I throw the ball. Sometimes he looks so happy, it reminds me of the way blind people smile way too big because they can't see themselves. And if none of this links to anything in you, well... I think you don't know who I am.”  
— [Merrill Markoe](#), [Walking in Circles Before Lying Down](#)
7. “Did I ever tell you my pet peeve?”  
'No,' I said.  
'People who dress up their pets to look like Little Lord Fauntleroy or cowboys, clowns, ballerinas. As if it's not enough just to be a dog or cat or turtle.”  
— [Jerry Spinelli](#), [Love, Stargirl](#)
8. Pets devour the loneliness. They give us purpose, responsibility, a reason for getting up in the morning, and a reason to look to the future. They ground us, help us escape the grief, make us laugh, and take full advantage of our weakness by exploiting our furniture, our beds, and our refrigerator. We wouldn't have it any other way. Pets are our seat belts on the emotional roller coaster of life...— [Nick Trout](#), [Tell Me Where It Hurts: A Day of Humor, Healing and Hope in My Life as an Animal Surgeon](#)
9. “A strongly accentuated zoophilism, such as an inordinate love of horses or dogs, throws the emotional nature out of balance; and those who are possessed by it are not likely to care very much for people.”  
— [W.E. Woodward](#), [Meet General Grant](#)
10. “I don't understand people who don't touch their pets. Their cat or dog is called a pet for a reason.”  
— [Jarod Kintz](#)

## 6. “child substitute pet ownership”

The following results are relevant excerpts from the top ranking results from a Google search with the above terms.

1. **A Melbourne survey showed 30-40% of people said their dog was a child to them** (Salmon, P. 1980. The psychology of animal ownership in the Australian environment. In J.A.C.O.P.I.S. Inaugural Seminar, Essendon Civic Centre, Victoria, Australia. <http://animalbehaviour.net/JudithKBlackshaw/Chapter8.ht>
2. “WOMEN admit they treat their pets like children as a substitute for having BABIES, a study revealed. Doting ‘mums’ confess to dressing their cats and dogs in cute outfits, framing photos of them, and lavishing them with gifts on birthdays and at Christmas. **The survey by insurer Petplan found 77 per cent of Scots women sought a pet for companionship.** One in four have adapted their home for pets, and 75 per cent buy them presents. *Claire Walker, 36, from Edinburgh, who has a terrier Dolly, said: “I love her as much as I would any child. I think I'd dress her up if I could get away with it.”* And Helen Ross, 33, from Inverness, says her English Pointer Islay is her “baby girl”. She added: “Because we haven't got any children she is it.” The poll of 10,000 UK pet owners also found 75 per cent feel guilty leaving them alone when they go to work. **Psychologist Dr Deborah Wells, at Queens University, Belfast. said: “Pets can**



**serve as a child ‘substitute’ offering an outlet for emotional attachment and nurturing behaviour.”**

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/scottishnews/3068483/Study-reveals-women-treat-pets-as-a-baby-substitute.html>

3. *Why Japan prefers pets to parenthood*, Ruth Evans & Roland Buerk, 8 June 2012.  
**“Official estimates put the pet population at 22 million or more, but there are only 16.6 million children under 15.** "In Japanese society, it's really hard for women to have a baby and keep a job ... so my girlfriend decided against having a baby, and that's why we have a dog instead." Akiba says he thinks this makes economic sense, given the cost of living in Tokyo, high taxes and static salaries following two decades of recession. Despite the economic stagnation, people seem happy to spend any spare money on photo sessions, massages and treats for their four-legged "babies".  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/jun/08/why-japan-prefers-pets-to-parenthood>
4. [Response by Gwen Dewar, biological anthropologist, to #3: ““Pampered” pets aren’t being respected for their distinctly different, non-human needs. They’re being used for entertainment, and that’s not real parenting. That’s pretend play.”  
[http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom\\_stories/are-pet-owners-parents/](http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom_stories/are-pet-owners-parents/)
5. Hahn Y, Wang LC, Yang H-S (2012), “Child vs. Pet: The Effect of Abortion Legalization on the Demand for Pets”, Monash University Department of Economics Discussion Paper 57/12 [ISSN 1441-5429]. **“We find that the demand for pets is affected by liberalization of birth control methods, suggesting a substitutable property of pets for children.** The probability of women affected by abortion legalization owning any pet is 9.6 percentage points higher than for non-affected women. Affected women spend, on average, 8 minutes more per day on pets than do other non-affected women. Our reduced form estimate, together with the estimated effect of legalization on completed fertility by Ananat et al. (2007), suggests that for every one-child decrease, the demand for pets increases by 0.2.”  
<http://www.buseco.monash.edu.au/eco/research/papers/2012/5712childvspethahnwangyang.pdf>

## **7. Psychology, gender, and pet ownership**

Studies on links between psychology, gender, and pet ownership. These results were verified by or collected from scientific study databases like Science Direct and PubMed.

1. Study by psychologist Professor Herzog, reported by Tom Leonard in Daily Mail (9 November 2009): “Our body chemistry plays a crucial role in other ways, he says. While tests show men with high testosterone levels are more prone to mistreating their dogs, the effect of a hormone called oxytocin has the opposite effect. This is a chemical that switches on maternal instincts, and some experts believe pets are major producers of the hormone. ‘It’s a combination of nature and nurture,’ said Professor Herzog, of Western Carolina University. **‘Recent studies show women are biologically more susceptible to cute animals, that their brains respond differently to these creatures with big eyes and round, soft faces than do men.’** Furthermore, the attraction is heightened by hormones, he said. ‘Women who are taking hormonal birth

control act differently from women who are not taking birth control. **And those who are particularly sensitive to cuteness are women of reproductive age.'**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1327919/Why-women-best-pet-owners-men-worst-animal-abusers.html>

2. "But what never seem to make the headlines are the many studies which showed pets to have no effects, or even adverse effects, on their owners' health and happiness. For instance, Deborah Wells at Queen's University Belfast, UK, reported that pet-owners with chronic fatigue syndrome were convinced that their companion animals provided them with a host of psychological and physical benefits, but objective measures showed they were just as tired, depressed, worried and unhappy as CFS sufferers without animals. **Epidemiologists in Finland found that pet ownership was associated with high blood pressure, kidney disease, arthritis, sciatica, migraines, panic disorders and obesity. Researchers at the Australian National University in Canberra reported that adults aged 60-plus who lived with pets were more likely to be depressed, take pain medication and generally be in worse mental and physical shape than pet-free people.** And a recent study from the University of Western Australia in Perth found that while acquiring a dog increased the frequency of recreational walking by their owners, the total amount of exercise they got each week did not change.... I have tentatively concluded that, on the whole, **pets are probably a healthy pleasure, though not to the degree that the pet industry would have us believe.** The challenge for researchers is to figure out to what extent interacting with animals can benefit human health and why. The extent question is made difficult by the fact that negative results are seldom published – the "file-drawer effect". At last year's meeting of the International Society of Anthrozoology I attended a session which illustrated this phenomenon. Presentations of three studies on the effects of animals on psychological well-being in groups such as college students and people living in nursing homes all clearly showed that pets had no effect, yet researchers told me they did not plan to submit their results to a journal. ... A decade ago, researchers in Pretoria, South Africa, reported that levels of oxytocin (dubbed the "love hormone") increased when people pet dogs. Even though there were only 18 subjects, the study has been widely used as proof that the hormone is the chemical glue that cements the bonds between people and pets. **Three research groups have tried to replicate the original study. One found the effect only in women, another only among people who gazed at their dogs, and the third found that petting dogs had no influence on oxytocin levels. (This last study was not published.)** ... For now, I'd say be careful about uncritically accepting claims about the miraculous healing powers of pets – and don't forget to walk the dog!" Hal Herzog, *New Scientist*, 6 November 2010. [http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0262407910627583/1-s2.0-S0262407910627583-main.pdf?\\_tid=a45e6d92-862e-11e2-b14d-00000aab0f02&acdnat=1362554745\\_e312a38b77a51742a99506bd7927ebf8](http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0262407910627583/1-s2.0-S0262407910627583-main.pdf?_tid=a45e6d92-862e-11e2-b14d-00000aab0f02&acdnat=1362554745_e312a38b77a51742a99506bd7927ebf8)
3. "Male owners of "aggressive" dogs were found to be less neurotic than women who kept "aggressive" or "non-aggressive" breeds. Findings suggest that dog breed ownership is related to recognisable individual traits." [The personality of "aggressive" and "non-aggressive" dog owners](#)  
*Personality and Individual Differences, Volume 53, Issue 6, October 2012, Pages 770-773*  
Deborah L. Wells, Peter G. Hepper



4. “Higher [pet] attachment was associated with being a woman and having no children in the household. Attachment and knowledge were not related to ethnicity.” [Companion animal knowledge, attachment and pet cat care and their associations with household demographics for residents of a rural Texas town](#) *Preventive Veterinary Medicine*, Volume 94, Issues 3–4, 1 May 2010, Pages 251-263 Melanie E. Ramón, Margaret R. Slater, Michael P. Ward
5. “Dogs showed a threat more often ( $P < 0.05$ ) and they bit another dog more than four times more often ( $P < 0.05$ ) when both owners were men than when they were women.” [Factors affecting dog–dog interactions on walks with their owners](#) *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, Volume 134, Issues 3–4, 15 November 2011, Pages 170-176 Petr Řezáč, Petra Viziová, Michaela Dobešová, Zdeněk Havlíček, Dagmar Pospíšilová
6. “Male gender, belonging to an older age group (>25 years) and having no education are predictors of low awareness about rabies in urban slums.” [Community perception regarding rabies prevention and stray dog control in urban slums in India](#) *Journal of Infection and Public Health*, Volume 5, Issue 6, December 2012, Pages 374-380 Mrudu Herbert, Riyaz Basha S, Selvi Thangaraj
7. “Ten percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the sample identified their role as a pet owner as being helpful in managing their HIV disease. Pets were a primary source of support and pleasure.” [The Relationship Between Social Roles and Self-Management Behavior in Women Living with HIV/AIDS](#) *Women’s Health Issues*, Volume 22, Issue 1, January–February 2012, Pages e27-e33 Allison R. Webel, Patricia A. Higgins
8. “a trend of a higher attachment in search and rescue dogs existed. It can be concluded that in carefully owned dogs, the level of attachment is increased by working as a search and rescue dog, but the difference does not lead to statistically relevant results.” [Dog attachment to man: A comparison between pet and working dogs](#) *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research*, **In Press, Corrected Proof**, Available online 26 October 2012 Chiara Mariti, Eva Ricci, Beatrice Carlone, Jane L. Moore, Claudio Sighieri, Angelo Gazzano
9. “City of residence, good self-rated health, low educational attainment, and not owning a car were associated with taking  $\geq 10,000$  steps/day in men, whereas employed status and dog ownership were associated with walking  $\geq 10,000$  steps/day in women.” [Sociodemographic Determinants of Pedometer-Determined Physical Activity Among Japanese Adults](#) *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 40, Issue 5, May 2011, Pages 566-571 Shigeru Inoue, Yumiko Ohya, Yuko Odagiri, Tomoko Takamiya, Kenichi Suijo, Masamitsu Kamada, Shinpei Okada, Catrine Tudor-Locke, Teruichi Shimomitsu

## Analysing Results

- **America:**
  - 80% of pet owners choose them for companionship
  - 72% of pet owners choose them for affection
  - 21%-33% of pet owners sometimes dress their pets
  - 69% of women own a pet, compared to 55% of men
  - women of reproductive age are biologically more susceptible to cute animals
  - childless women more likely to own dogs and be attached to pet
- **Britain:**
  - women owners of dogs are double the number of men owners
  - dogs are typically for companionship
  - most popular dogs are “handbag dogs”, and women tend to own these
- **Scotland:**
  - 77% of women have a pet for companionship
- **Ireland:**
  - CFS sufferers who own pets do not show any physical or psychological benefits from their pet ownership, contrary to their beliefs.
- **Finland:**
  - pet ownership is associated with high blood pressure, kidney disease, arthritis, sciatica, migraines, panic disorders and obesity
- **Japan:**
  - Ratio of children to pets is 1:1.3
  - Women walk more if they own a dog
- **India:**
  - Older, uneducated males in Indian urban slums tend not to understand rabies
- **Australia:**
  - two-thirds of main decision-makers and carers of pets are female
  - 30-40% see a pet as a child
  - Using pets as child substitutes is a real phenomenon
  - elderly pet owners are more likely to be depressed, take pain medication and generally be in worse mental and physical shape than pet-free people
  - pets do not increase overall activity levels of pet owners
- **South Africa:**
  - A study reporting higher oxytocin levels of pet owners fails to be replicated
- **Internet-based:**
  - 56% of women believe their pets are more affectionate than their partners
  - 41% of men believe their pets are more affectionate than their partners
  - 45% of women believe their pets are cuter than their partners
  - 24% of men believe their pets are cuter than their partners
- **Not associated with a country:**
  - dog owners' traits are related to the dog breed they select
  - male owners of aggressive dogs less neurotic than female owners of any dog types
  - dog-dog interactions with male-male owners more likely to bite
  - 10% of women with HIV/AIDS use pet ownership to manage psychologically

## **Conclusions**

The trend through four nations is that women outnumber men as pet owners, and that pet ownership is overwhelmingly for companionship and affection. Roughly a third of pet owners perceive their pets as child-substitutes, and women are more likely to own baby-like dogs, and engage in more pet-related activity, when they are childless. These general facts support the hypothesis that sexual differences in psychology influence attitudes to pets, where women are more likely than men to use pets as companions and child substitutes.

Attention ought to be paid to the controversy pointed out by Hal Herzog with regards to the supposed health benefits, physical and psychological, of pet ownership. As he states, such benefits are controversial, with a number of studies failing to replicate, or else disproving, certain “facts”. He also mentions witnessing how scientists suppress negative reports that do not support or replicate other studies, arguably because such reports will not be popular, and/or will not receive sponsorship by pet companies. If he is correct, then women's tendency towards using pets for psychological and physical health benefits is a the faith-based attitude, and emotional wish-thinking.