

Tag: paul zak

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In the perpetual debate over which makes a better pet — dog or cat — cats have been taking a drubbing lately.

It's a silly argument to begin with: Why must we deem one species superior? What possible good does that serve? And it's mostly a waste of time. Converting a dyed-in-the-wool dog lover to a staunch cat lover is about as likely as getting someone to switch from Donald to Hillary.

Yet, conflict seems to be something we humans require, or at least enjoy. And the endless argument does provide fodder for bloggers. And, every now and then, something interesting comes up.

In the past year, scientific and semi-scientific studies comparing dogs and cats have come down more squarely on the side of dogs — enough so that you've got to wonder if some cat-hater is behind it all.

(For the record, we confess a personal preference for dog right here at the start, though we like cats, too.)

One such study was conducted as part of a new BBC2 documentary called “[Cats v. Dogs: Which is Better](#)” — a silly concept for a TV show, though we admit some of what they bring to light is thought provoking.

Dr. Paul Zak, a California neuroscientist, compared how much oxytocin dogs produce compared to cats, and he concluded that dogs love humans more than cats do. Five times as much to be exact.

It has been well documented that bonding, petting and having eye contact with your dog produces increased levels of the oxytocin, also known as the love hormone, in both dog and human.

“It’s one of the chemical measures of love in mammals,” Zak said. “Humans produce the hormone in our brains when we care about someone. For example, when we see our spouse or child the levels in our bloodstream typically rise by 40-60 percent.”

The neuroscientist checked the oxytocin levels in both cats and dogs, taking saliva samples from 10 cats and 10 dogs on two occasions – 10 minutes before a playtime session with their owners and immediately after.

“I was really surprised to discover that dogs produced such high levels of oxytocin .. The dog level of 57.2 percent is a very powerful response. It shows these dogs really care about their owners,” he said.



Zak said he was surprised to find any oxytocin at all in cats, which he said had never been tested for the hormone before.

Zak, also known as “Dr.Love,” believes upping our oxytocin (and hugging more) could change the world. He once took blood from an entire wedding party and a sampling of guests, to see how their oxytocin levels went up during the ceremony.

He also spent two years trying to get the Food and Drug Administration to approve his use of oxytocin inhalers on experimental subjects. (In the meantime, as reported in [The Guardian](#), he used one on himself.)

Zak’s determination that canines love us more than felines do was just the latest bit of bad press for cats.

Another recent study, at Manhattanville College in New York, found canines provide humans with [more benefits](#) than cats.

The research suggested dog owners are more conscientious, less neurotic and more agreeable than cat owners. Dog owners scored higher in well-being than cat owners on all measures.

Last year, a study at the University of California, Berkeley, found, through web-based surveying, that cat owners were more anxious than dog owners.

If you still don’t believe cats have been getting some bad press, check out this headline on a story about a study of cats last year: “[Study: Your cat might be trying to kill you](#) .”

The story dealt with a study by researchers from the University of Edinburgh and the Bronx Zoo that compared the personality of the domestic cat with bigger, wilder members of the cat species.

The headline ... well, it’s what happens when you try to condense [a 40-page study](#) into eight catchy words.

So if you find yourself reading/listening to/watching the latest account of which is better, cats or dogs — whether it’s labeled science or not — be at least a little wary.

And if it stresses you out, go pet your dog. Or cat.

