

III Scientific Analysis of the Bond Between People and Cats: results summary



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Introduction, justification and objective of the study:

It has often been suggested that the bond that can form between a cat and a human is less intense and less emotional than that between a human and a dog. However, there have been no rigorous studies on our relationship with cats, either in Spain or abroad. This is why, after dedicating the last three years to studying the relationship between people and their dogs, we have now decided to focus our attention on cats.

To study our relationship with the cat we applied the theory of social exchange that gave us such good results in our study of the bond between people and dogs. According to this theory, the relationship with an animal can be divided into three dimensions: the interaction, the emotional bond and the perceived cost.

The interaction dimension describes the way in which we relate to our cat. For example: how much we pet them, how much we play with them or if we buy them presents.

The emotional bond reflects the value that living with the cat has for us from an emotional point of view. For example, if they help us to overcome moments of difficulty or if we feel bad when we are separated from them.

Finally, the dimension of perceived cost measures the impact that living with a cat has, not only from an economic point of view, but also in terms of quality of life. For example, at times caring for our cat might require us to change our plans or prevent us from taking part in activities that we enjoy, such as travelling. The three dimensions that we have just described can be quantified using the scale or measurement questionnaire that we call CORS (Cat Owner Relationship Scale), which we previously validated in collaboration with experts from the universities of London and La Trobe (Australia).

Once the measurement scale was validated, we applied it to a representative sample of cat owners among the Spanish population. We interviewed 347 cat owners, who were representative of the population in terms of factors such as gender, age, family composition and socio-economic status.

The main questions that we wanted to answer were:

- What is the relationship like between cat owners and their pets?
-]Is it true that the relationship between people and cats is more distant and less emotional than the one they have with dogs?
- Can we identify different relationship profiles?
- Is there a difference between men and women? And between families with and without children?
- Is it true that cat owners especially value their cat's independent nature?

Here we present the answers to the above questions.

2. Análisis general del vínculo en la población estudiada:

¿Cómo se relacionan las personas con sus gatos?

- Un 94% disfruta simplemente mirando a su gato.
- Un 92% acaricia a su gato con frecuencia y un 79% lo hace al menos una vez al día.
- Un 90% habla a su gato con frecuencia y un 75% lo hace cada día.
- Un 86% juega con su gato a menudo y un 65% lo hace al menos una vez al día.

¿Cómo ven las personas sus gatos?

- Un 86% declara gustarle que su gato tenga una personalidad propia.
- Un 77% afirma gustarle el temperamento independiente de su gato.

¿Cómo es el vínculo afectivo entre las personas sus gatos?

- Para un 83% su gato es una fuente de compañía constante.
- Un 67% afirma que su gato está siempre allí cuando lo necesitan.
- Un 65% declara que su gato les ayuda a superar momentos difíciles.
- Un 60% admite decir cosas a su gato que no diría a nadie más.

¿Qué coste supone para una persona convivir con un gato?

- Para un 72% cuidar de su gato es una tarea fácil.
- Un 62% nunca se plantea que convivir con un gato sea un problema.
- Un 58% declara que cuidar de su gato no interfiere nunca con todo aquello que les gusta hacer.
- Un 50% piensan que mantener a su gato no es caro.

Our interpretation:

- The main conclusion that we can draw from the above data is that the relationship between people and their cats is very close and has a strong emotional aspect to it. This evidence contrasts with the widespread perception that the relationship with cats is a distant one. In this sense, the valuations that we obtained of the emotional dimension are perfectly comparable with those that we observed upon analysing the relationship between people and their dogs.
- A large majority of owners appreciate and positively value the individuality and independent nature of their cat. This data would suggest differences in the personalities of cat owners in comparison to dog owners. In this sense, a study carried out in the United States in 2014 indicated that cat owners are generally less conformist than dog owners.
- Living with a cat enriches our social network and is a very important source of emotional support in times of difficulty. For the majority of owners, their cat is both a friend and a confidant in whom they confide things that they don't share with anybody else. Just as with a dog, living with a cat enriches our social network and helps us to overcome situations of stress or difficulty.
- One in every two owners thinks that caring for a cat is not cheap.

However, our analysis indicates that this perception is secondary to the positive aspects of the bond.

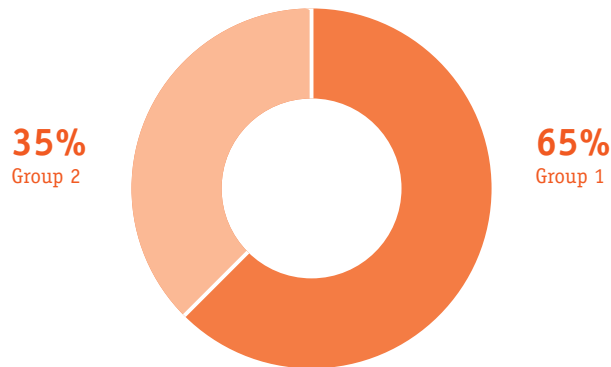
Ultimately, taking care of somebody, be it a person or an animal, involves effort and being aware of this by no means implies that the overall balance of the relationship is negative.

3. Identification of relationship patterns:

Can we identify different relationship profiles with cats?

We identified two large ownership groups according to their relationship patterns with their cat (Fig. 1).

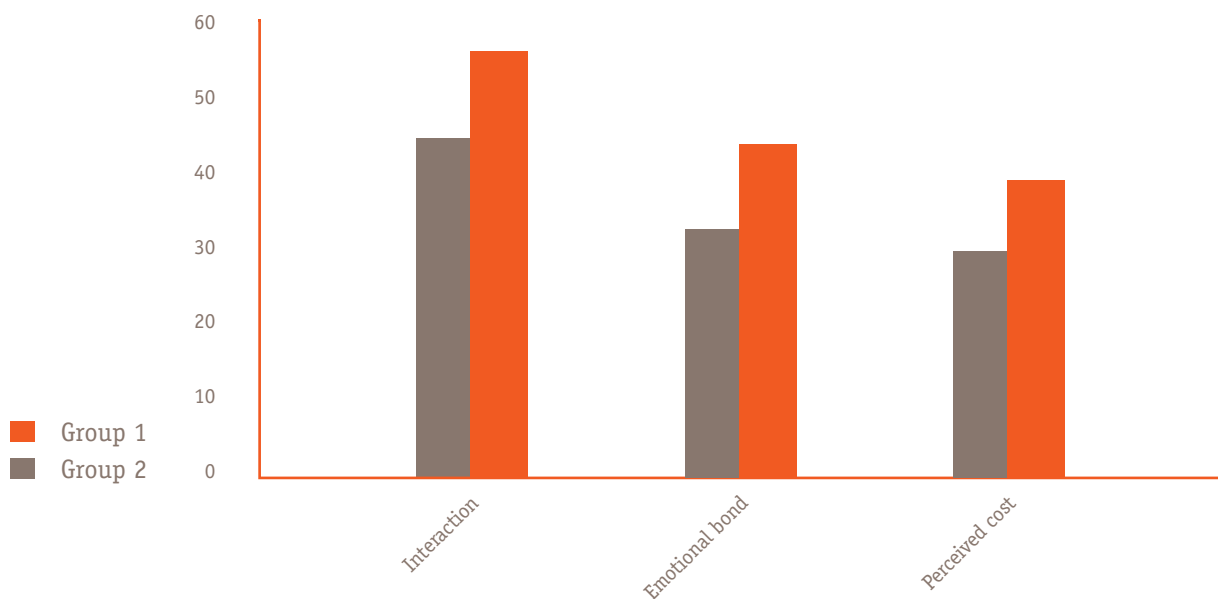
Figure 1. Distribution of the two main relationship patterns



The first group is comprised of 65% of owners and is characterised by an intense relationship, both in terms of interaction and emotional bond (Fig. 2).

The second group is made up of the remaining 35% of owners and, from an emotional point of view, reflects a more distant relationship (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Scores of the two ownership groups for the three relationship dimensions. It is important to point out that the elevated scores of perceived cost indicate the perception of a lower cost.



What specific factors differentiate one group from the other?

Table 1 illustrates a comparison between the two groups based on concrete aspects of the relationship. The percentages reflect the proportion of owners of each of the two groups who responded to each of the questions.

Table 1. Comparison between the results obtained for the two relationship groups.

	Group 1	Group 2
Enjoy looking at their cat	100%	85%
Regularly stroke their cat	100%	79%
Regularly talk to their cat	99%	74%
Often play with their cat	98%	64%
Like that their cat has its own personality	99%	63%
Like their cat's independent temperament	90%	52%
Consider their cat to be a constant source of company	98%	55%
Agree their cat is always there when they need it	88%	29%
Say their cat helps them to overcome moments of difficulty	81%	37%
Tell their cat things they don't tell anybody else	75%	34%
Think caring for their cat is easy	84%	49%
Never consider caring for their cat to be a problem	77%	35%
State that caring for their cat never interferes with what they like	68%	39%
Think maintaining their cat is not expensive	62%	29%

Our interpretation:

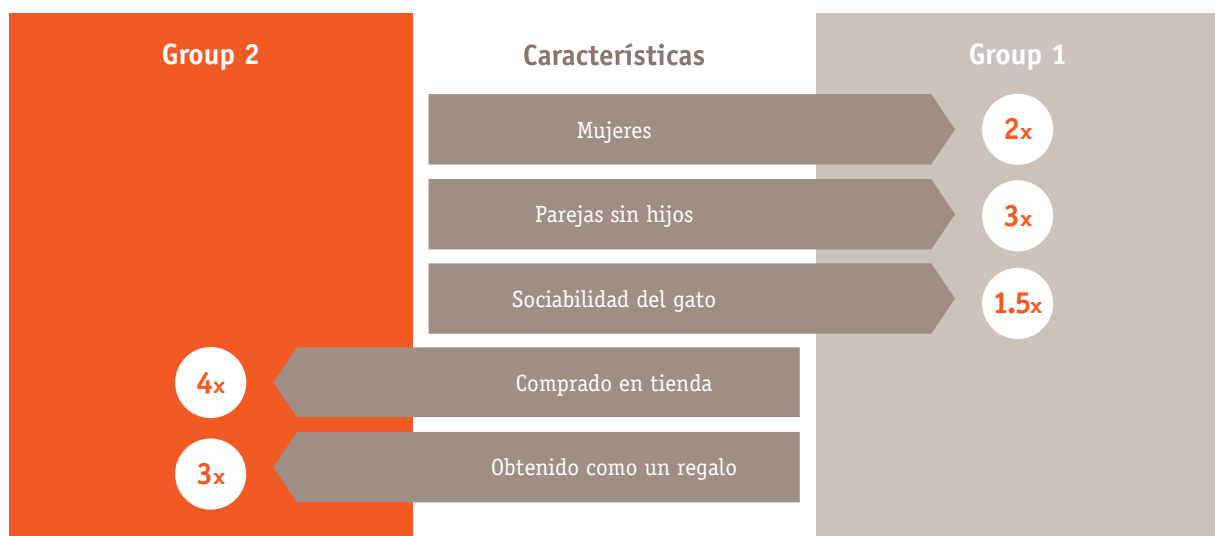
- The results allow us to confirm that, according to the relationship that they have with their cats, there are two different groups of owners. In other words, any cat owner in Spain can be assigned to one of these two large relationship groups.
- We can confirm that the emotional dimension is the most significant when placing somebody in either the first or second relationship group.
- Our analysis by groups breaks the stereotypical image that cat owners often have, as a person who enjoys their pet but maintains a certain emotional distance.
- In some ways, owner group two corresponds to this profile. However, this group only makes up 35% of the population. 65% describe an owner that has a relationship with their cat that is very intense from an emotional point of view.

The most interesting thing is that they do so whilst still admiring the independent nature and personality of their cat.

Which factors influence belonging to one group or the other?

- Which factors influence belonging to one group or the other?
- Women are twice as likely to be part of group 1 as men are (Fig. 3).
- Parents without children are three times more likely to find themselves in group 1 than families with children (Fig. 3).
- Owners of sociable cats are much more likely to be in group 1 than those who live with a less sociable cat (Fig. 3).
- Cats which come from a pet shop are four times more likely to be found in group 2 than those which come from elsewhere (fig. 3).
- Cats which were given as gifts are three times more likely to be found in group 2 than those which come from elsewhere (fig. 3).

Figura 3. Factores que más contribuyen a la pertenencia al grupo 1 o al grupo 2.



Our interpretation:

- Women show a greater tendency to develop very close relationships with their cats, in which the emotional aspect is very significant.
- Couples without children seem to form a more intense relationship with their cat in comparison to those who dedicate a large amount of their time caring for their children.
- More sociable cats are able to facilitate the establishment of closer relationships, both from an interactive and emotional point of view. It is important to point out that in our study we always discuss the sociability of the cat as perceived by the owner, which could be subjective. Are the cats from group 2 less sociable or do they simply not fit with their owner's perspectives? This question demands further study, through which we can assess the real sociability of the cat in a more precise way.
- The cats that were bought in shops or received as gifts are more likely to find themselves in relationship group 2. In our opinion, this result strengthens the often-repeated idea that a cat is a living being, whose acquisition should be preceded by deep reflection on the part of the future owners.

4. Main conclusions of the study:

- La inmensa mayoría de propietarios españoles establece un fuerte vínculo afectivo con su gato.
- Existen dos perfiles globales de relación con el gato. Uno caracterizado por un fuerte componente emocional y otro más pragmático, en la línea del estereotipo existente sobre la persona que convive con un gato.
- Este es el primer estudio poblacional realizado en todo el mundo sobre la relación que existe entre las personas y los gatos.

Fuentes de datos

Datos basados en la investigación realizada durante 2015 mediante las escalas validadas PAS (Pet Attitude Scale) y CORS (Cat Owner Relationship Scale).



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