

Study: Cats Love Us Five Times Less Than Dogs Do

A new documentary discusses the differences between dogs and cats when it comes to affection (and everything else).

Erika Sorocco

Posted: January 30, 2016, 7 a.m. PST

Mark and Willow

How does your cat love thee? Well, according to a new study completed for the upcoming BBC Documentary "Cats v. Dogs," your feline loves you five times less than her canine counterpart. And there's proof!

The show, hosted by animal experts Chris Packham and Liz Bonnin, is all about discovering which species has the upper-hand – persnickety felines, or loyal canines. One of the first topics tackled: l-o-v-e.

Scientists already know that canines and humans release the love hormone known as oxytocin when they're together, but does the same apply to cats? US neuroscientist Dr. Paul Zak tackled that topic, and the findings were quite eye-opening.

"We have pretty good evidence that dogs actually love their humans," Dr. Zak said. "A couple of small-scale studies have shown that when owners interact with their dogs, the human and their dog appear to release oxytocin. It's one of the chemical measures of love in mammals. 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%."

For the study, Dr. Zak took saliva samples from 10 cats and 10 dogs prior to a 10-minute playtime session with their owners. He then proceeded to take another saliva sample from all of the participants after their playtime encounter, testing it for the presence of oxytocin, and the results were astounding.

According to Dr. Zak's results, a 57.2% increase of the hormone oxytocin was found in dogs; whereas a 12% increase of the hormone was found in cats. Meaning?

"From this sample it's true to say that these dogs love their owners five times more than the cats do," said Dr. Zak. "I was really surprised to discover that dogs produced such high levels of oxytocin... the dog level of 57.2 per cent is a very powerful response. It shows these dogs really care about their owners. It was also a nice surprise to discover that cats produce any at all. At least some of the time, cats seem to bond with their owners."

Straight from the mouths of scientists: cats love us, just not nearly as much as dogs.

Catch "Cats v. Dogs" on BBC premiering Feb. 4. In the meantime, what do you think? Do dogs truly love us more than cats?