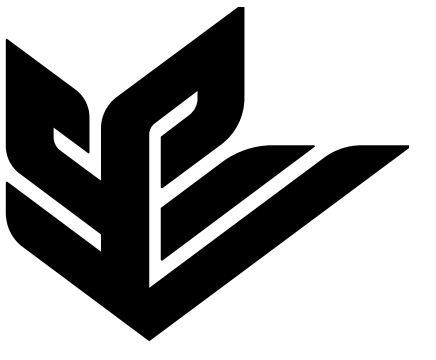


# Road to Recovery with Fido: Are pet-human bonds predictors of healthy romantic relationships after the COVID-19 Pandemic?



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## ABSTRACT

There is a growing increase in the downfall and degradation of romantic and sexual relationships, due to the multi-layered stressors and aftermath of the pandemic (Montanaro et. al, 2022) (Luetke et. al, 2020). The sudden rise of pet adoptions during the global pandemic also sparked a researching curiosity, with the opportunity to test and obtain any critical information for developing loving bonds and relationships with others. This proposal seeks to find data and information relevant to adult attachment with the inclusion of animal bonding. This includes exploration of resilience from feelings of loneliness or conflicted in a relationship. Proposed results discuss possibilities of data that may be inclusive towards supporting the hypotheses such as the demonstration of any correlation between animal bonding and thriving of romantic relationships during COVID-19. Further exploration of the topic is discussed at the end of proposal including the suggestion of extending the timeline of the research for a follow-up with participants in years ahead after the pandemic.

Keywords: loneliness, relationships, animal-human bonds, adult attachment, COVID-19, pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

There is a growing increase in the downfall and degradation of romantic and sexual relationships, due to the multi-layered stressors and aftermath of the pandemic (Montanaro et. al, 2022) (Luetke et. al, 2020). Curiously, the rise of pet owners and pet adoptions during the global pandemic also skyrocketed, thus providing opportunity for developing loving bonds and relationships. While research has provided indication of animal ownership improving mental health during the pandemic, it also reveals that those who acquired a pet during isolation and quarantine reported a decrease in feelings of loneliness among families and couples (Halbreich et. al, 2022).

Very little research has been conducted on the concept of increased loneliness, and what interventions to use or explore to reduce feelings of solitude after being used to social distancing the past two years (Dahlberg, 2021). Millions of Americans experienced a decline in mental health with having access to limited resources for connecting, saying goodbye, and grieving ambiguous losses as we struggled to fight the life-threatening COVID-19 virus.

The importance of non-human companionship has become an innovative topic to commence through exploration of past relationship research, introducing findings that stress awareness may aid couples' ability to successfully prevail during difficult moments (Neff, et. al, 2022). Therefore, this study proposal intends to link stress and loneliness resilience in relationships through the help of pet-human bonds during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

RQ1: Are pet-human bonds predictors of healthy romantic relationships after the COVID-19 Pandemic?

- Researcher hypothesizes that stronger bonds with pets will also aid in the development of strong bonds with romantic and sexual partners.
- Those who maintain healthy and loving relationships with pets will also have healthy interactional patterns and secure attachments with romantic partners.
- Avoidant and insecure bonds with pets will predict relationship distress and result in avoidant-insecure attachments and increased loneliness in relationships.
- There is a strong correlation between healthy bonds with pets and healthy romantic relationships due to the accountability and responsibility of caring for pets.

## METHODS

### Participants

- Researcher proposes to include a sample of 200-500 individuals. Those participants who are currently involved in some form of romantic relationship, residing in the U.S. Pacific Northwest area, and be open to volunteer their time to be surveyed for approximately 30 minutes, will be considered in this research.
- Two sample groups will be considered: individuals who are involved in a romantic relationship and lived in a pet-free household during the pandemic (whether they are married, are currently in a monogamous relationship with the same sex, or opposite sex) and individuals who are involved in a romantic relationship who also acquired the responsibilities of owning at least one pet during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Procedures

- Participants will be able to provide their answers and respond online through a short 30-minute survey utilizing Likert-scale options to submit. One of the demographic questions will require qualified participants to take the survey if they currently live in the Pacific Northwest area of WA State.
- Survey will include opportunity for participants to answer one of the four possible answer combinations: 1) participant did not acquire a new pet during the quarantine lockdown after March 2020, was involved in a monogamous, polyamorous or romantic relationship, and experienced feelings of loneliness and conflict with their partner(s), 2) participant became a new pet owner after March 2020 and struggled with experiencing feelings of loneliness and conflict with their partner while being involved in at least 1 monogamous relationship during the pandemic, 3) participant became a pet owner and, to this day, experiences little to no feelings of loneliness while being in at least 1 monogamous or polyamorous relationship, 4) participant possessed strong bonds with pets acquired during the pandemic and has experienced separation from their partner(s) or relationship conflict within the last 2 years while experiencing loneliness.

## MEASURES

### Relationship Satisfaction based on Loneliness during the Pandemic

- Distribute the Couple Relationship Skills Inventory (CRSI) with the Stigma of Loneliness Scale (SLS) survey questions on a Likert-scale format online.

### Relationship Satisfaction based on Pet Adoption/Ownership During the Pandemic

- The first set of sample questions will be collected in combination with demographic questions in addition to questions regarding pet ownership and adoption within the last two years.
- Responses will be collected and analyzed using ANOVA test measures to determine association across responses of strong bonds with pets, healthy or unhealthy relationships, and level of loneliness.

## RESULTS

- Responses from participants will be discussed here once data has been gathered using the appropriate assessment tools.
- The proposed research question intends to investigate whether there is an identifiable statistical significance for identifying correlations between the concept of loneliness with healthy human-pet bonds as predictors of strong and healthy relationships.
- Researcher intends to include the detailed statistical analysis results using ANOVA in this section to illustrate any statistical significance or any lack of significance in the data.
- Researcher will also identify correlations between loneliness, pet-human bonds, and relationship satisfaction.
- In the case of a lack of statistical significance, researcher will discuss detailed analysis results using ANOVA in this section and discuss possible reasonings for no correlations present in the data.

## Discussion

To conclude, the previously explained hypotheses will be discussed in detail here as to whether the included data supports or rejects each of our four predictions. As an innovative way of contributing to relationship and adult attachment research, this proposal is a step towards providing informative data of the positive or negative effects of isolation in the midst of a pandemic. Researcher strongly encourages for integration of the human-pet bond topic in future research with more diverse families and couples across the nation. Additionally, in the case that at least one of the hypotheses is supported by the results of our analyzed statistics, further research may be most beneficial in exploring levels of loneliness and pet-human bonds as Washington State returns to a near-normalcy lifestyle after experiencing stress of COVID-19 isolation and distancing mandates.

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