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The Effect of Pets and Nature on Environmental Identity and Connection to Animals

Vicotria Whitaker

Illinois Wesleyan University

Kellye Kohn

Illinois Wesleyan University

Alice Fontana

Illinois Wesleyan University

Linda Kunce, Faculty Advisor

Illinois Wesleyan University

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The Effect of Animals on Connection to the Environment

Victoria Whitaker, Kellye Kohn, Alice Fontana, and Linda Kuncze*
 Department of Psychology, Illinois Wesleyan University

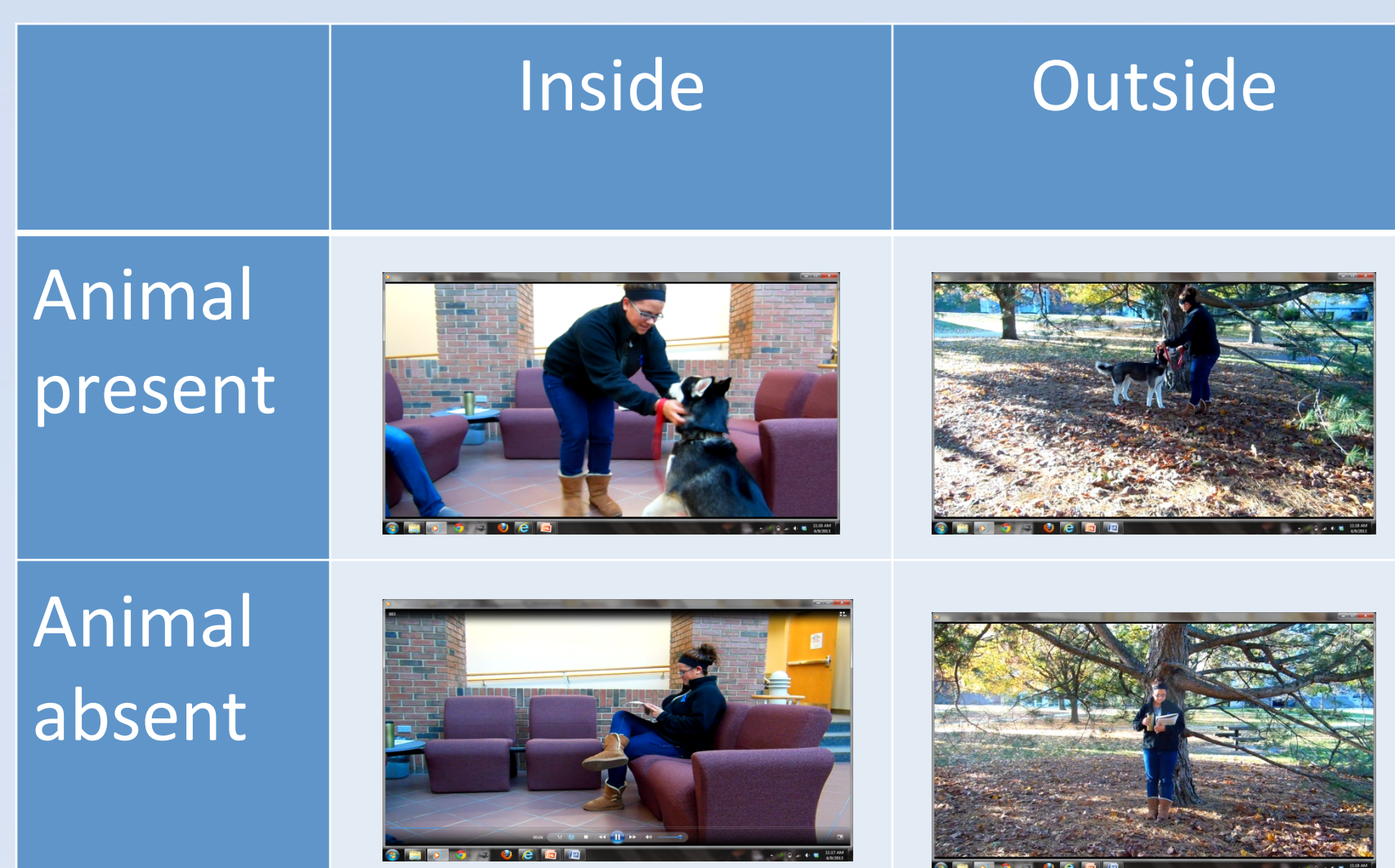
Introduction

Because we are facing a multitude of environmental issues, it is vital to discover how to strengthen human connections with nature (Koger & Winter, 2010). Previous research has found that exposure to nature--whether through time spent in natural settings or through exposure to animals--is associated with increased identification with nature and pro-environmental behaviors (Myers & Saunders, 2002; Paul & Serpell, 1993; Vining, 2003). The goal of this study were to

- replicate findings that childhood pet ownership is positively correlated with environmental identity
- determine whether connection to nature could be manipulated through exposure to an animal and/or the outdoors

Method

- Participants
 - 138 undergraduate students
 - **83.3% owned pets**
- Procedure:
 - Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in an online study.



•After viewing one of four brief videos, participants completed the measures.

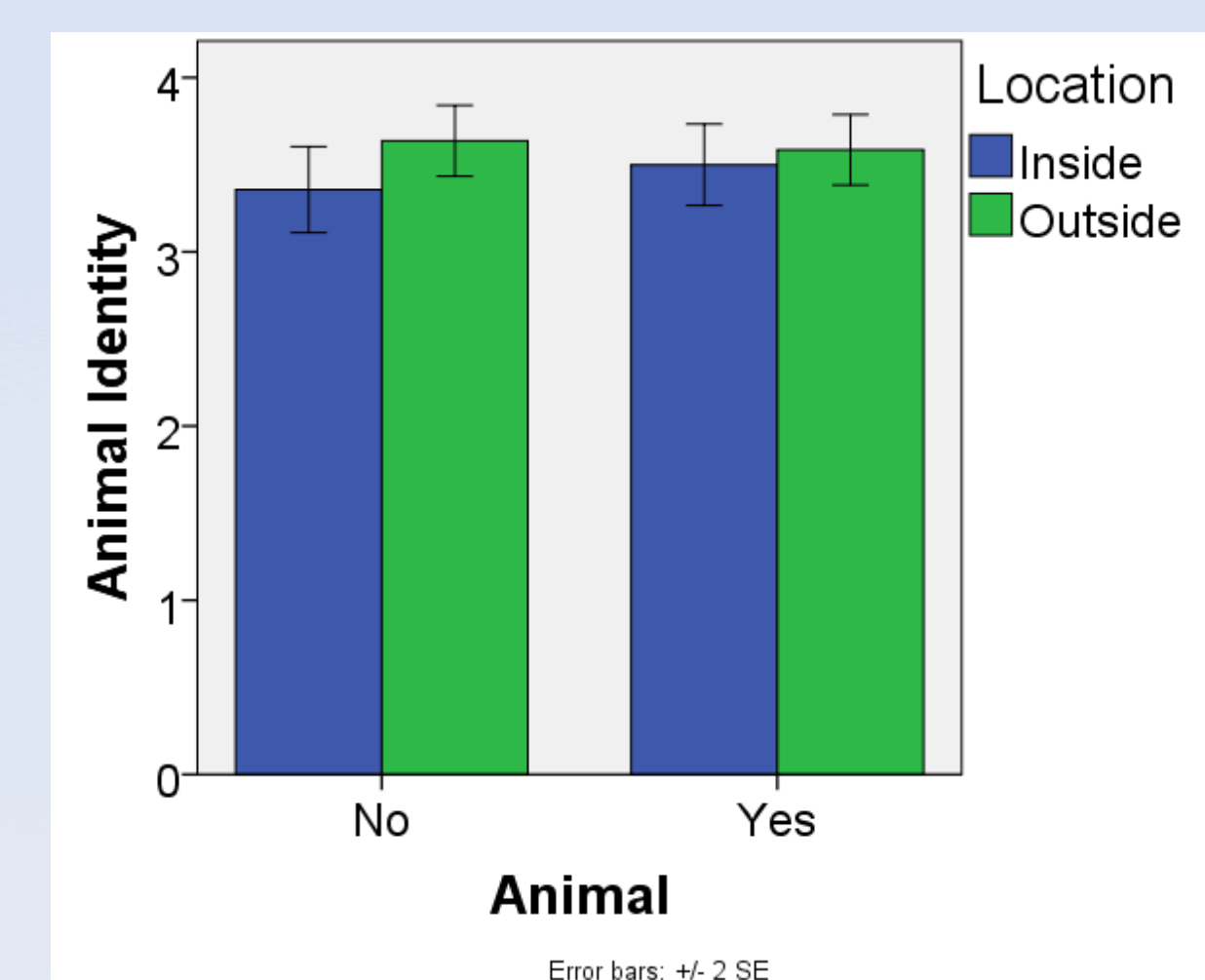
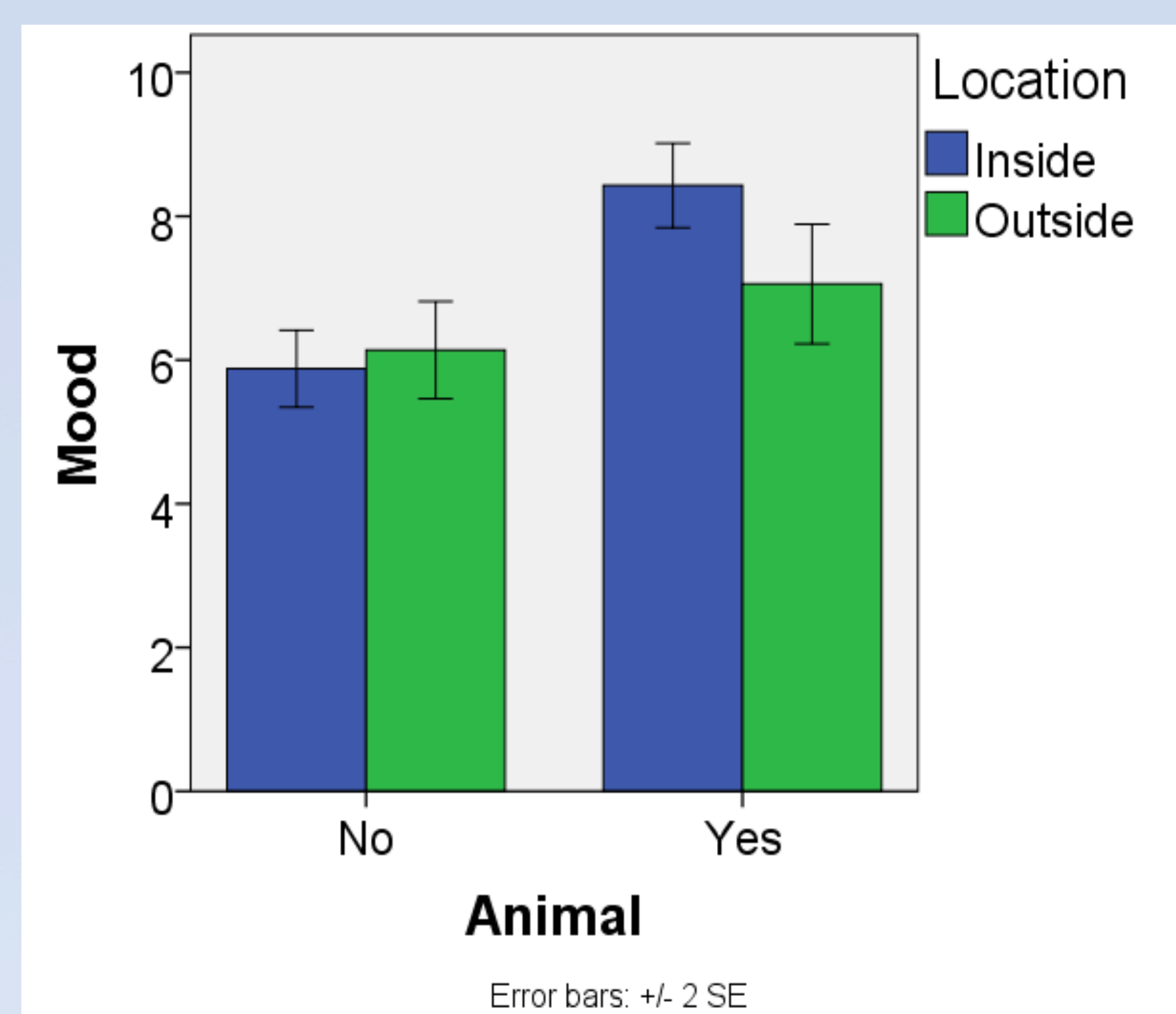
Method

- Measures:
 - Mood**: scale ranging from 1-10, 1=much worse, 10=much better
 - Environmental Identity Scale** (EID; Clayton, 2003) $\alpha = .92$
 - Animal Connectedness Scale** (ACS) created by the research team, modeled after the EID. $\alpha = .91$

Results

Scale	Had pet as child	Did not own pet	t(132)
EID	3.38 (.55)	2.88 (.70)	3.59**
ACS	3.62 (.60)	3.08 (.77)	3.55**

** $p < .01$



Discussion

- Results support our hypotheses that people who owned pets during childhood would:
 - Report higher environmental identity
 - Report greater connectedness to animals
- Experimental manipulations yielded:
 - significant effects for mood
 - Overall, the presence of an animal led to a greater increase in mood
 - The animal had a greater effect inside compared with outside
 - No significant impact for location
 - No significant effects for location or animal for neither environmental identity nor connectedness to animals.
- Interpretation
 - Animals have a positive effect on people
 - Childhood experiences may have long-lasting consequences with animals playing a role in EID and connectedness to animals
 - Animals may have a positive short-term effect on mood
 - Why didn't location have an impact?
 - Demographics
 - EID measure – trait versus state
 - Differences between videos
 - Video versus true interaction
 - Videos were brief
- Future research:
 - Ensure equivalency across videos (e.g. film on green screen)
 - True interaction versus video

References: Hills, 1995; Jerolmack, 2003; Koger & Winter, 2010; Kruse, 1993; Myers & Saunders, 2002; Myers, Saunders, & Garrett, 2004; Paul & Serpell, 1993; Vining, 2003