

AN EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND PET
BONDING IN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Obesity has been linked to many physical as well as psychological problems. Many children who are obese suffer from low self-esteem. No studies have been published documenting the effect of owning a dog on the self-esteem of children who are obese. This study used a non-experimental, descriptive, four-group comparison design. One-hundred-twenty participants comprised the four groups: obese children with a dog, obese children without a dog, children of a healthy weight with a dog, and children of a healthy weight without a dog. Participants who were in the 85th percentile or higher for their height and weight were placed in the obese group. All participants completed the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) and participants who owned a dog that lived in the house at least 50% of the time also completed the Pet Bonding Scale (PBS). The four groups were similar on most demographic characteristics. Obese children had lower scores in the domains of Physical Appearance, Social Competence, and Self-Worth. Participants in the study who owned a dog, both obese and of a healthy weight, were more likely to have lower Physical Appearance and Behavioral Conduct scores. All 60 participants in this study who owned a dog considered the dog to be a member of their family. The findings of this study can be used as the basis for future studies evaluating the relationships between dog ownership of obese children and effects on self-esteem.