



A cross-cultural comparison of reports by German Shepherd owners in Hungary and the United States of America

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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural comparisons of dog behavior and dog-keeping practices are limited. The current study compared the questionnaire responses of German Shepherd owners in Hungary and the United States of America (USA). Owners provided information about their dog-keeping practices, as well as reports of their own German Shepherds' behavior and temperament. Cross-cultural differences and similarities were revealed using multivariate regression. Owners from the USA were more likely to keep their dogs indoors during the day ($OR = 29.6, P = 0.006$) and at night ($OR = 772, P = 0.012$), to report that their dogs were kept as pets ($OR = 2648, P = 0.003$), and to engage their dogs in a greater number of training varieties (e.g. conformation training, agility training) ($b = 1.97, P = 0.001$). However, country was not significantly associated with the duration of daily dog-owner interaction, dog's age at acquisition, and the number of previous dogs owned. Owners from the USA rated their dogs more highly than owners from Hungary on the confidence ($b = 0.814, P = 0.006$) and aggressiveness scales ($b = 0.974, P = 0.002$) of the Budapest Canine Personality Survey. In contrast, scores on the liveliness and attachment scales of the Budapest Canine Personality Survey, as well as scores on the Dog-ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) Rating Scale, were not predicted by country. Findings for the emotional predisposition questionnaire were similarly mixed. In order to confirm such findings, future cross-cultural studies on dogs should combine the use of surveys with observational methods. Cross-cultural differences like those observed should be considered when interpreting the results of studies on dog cognition and behavior. Researchers may wish to replicate cognitive and behavioral research with dogs from a range of environments around the world before firmly concluding that the findings apply to all dogs.

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1. Introduction

There appears to be cultural variation in dog-keeping practices around the globe. For example, the percentage of dog-owning households varies from country to country. While approximately 40% of households in the Czech Republic and Australia include a dog (Headey, 2006, cited

in King et al., 2009; Sulc, 2005, cited in Houpt et al., 2007), this figure is reduced to only 14% in Austrian households (Kotrschal et al., 2004). Most studies on dog-keeping practices, including those cited above, focus on a single cultural group or country, while cross-cultural studies of dog-keeping practices are still relatively rare (Miklósi, 2007). In one example of such a study, Miura et al. (2002) found that, compared to Japanese college students, British college students had significantly more childhood experiences with animals and were more likely to have considered a childhood pet to be a friend. In addition,

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the British students had significantly more positive attitudes about pets than the Japanese students. A similar study focusing on dog-specific attitudes found that British college students were also significantly more accepting of the practice of euthanasia than Japanese students (Miura et al., 2000).

In addition to cultural differences in pet-related practices and attitudes, one might also ask whether the behavior of pets themselves differs across cultures. Genetic isolation, as well as environmental variation, could contribute to differences in pet behavior across cultures. Several studies have investigated this question. Bradshaw and Goodwin (1998) administered a breed-ranking questionnaire to dog professionals in the United Kingdom that had previously been administered to dog professionals in the USA (Hart and Hart, 1985). In both studies, respondents ranked breeds on thirteen behaviors, such as playfulness and excitability. Takeuchi and Mori (2006) subsequently administered the same questionnaire to veterinarians in Japan, while Notari and Goodwin (2007) administered the questionnaire to dog professionals in Italy. The studies revealed differences among the countries in the behavioral profiles of certain breeds. For example, the Yorkshire Terrier was ranked high on aggressiveness in Italy, but only received average aggressiveness rankings in the USA and the United Kingdom. However, when breeds were assigned to clusters based on behavioral profiles, there was much overlap across the countries in cluster assignments.

These breed-ranking studies, while important in contributing to the cross-cultural literature on dogs, were not immune from certain limitations, pointed out by Notari and Goodwin (2007). For example, the respondents were not required to have experience with each breed that they were asked to rank. Those lacking experience with a breed may have been more likely to rely on breed stereotypes. Furthermore, there are differences in the distributions of breeds around the world. Dog professionals from one country may have limited experience with a breed due to its low frequency, while in another country, the breed may be commonplace. In addition, the design of the study limited respondents to placing the breeds in a rank order. They could not indicate the subjective distance from one ranking to the next. Lastly, more than 20 years separated the first study in the USA from the last in Italy. Therefore, cross-cultural comparisons were made based on questionnaires that were administered at different times without accounting for changes that may have occurred in the breeding, training, and care of dogs over the years.

Our review of the literature on cross-cultural differences in dog-keeping and dog behavior indicates that the area remains largely unexplored, and additional work is clearly needed. To that effect, we surveyed German Shepherd owners in Hungary and the USA about their dog-keeping practices and the behavior of their dogs. In both countries, the German Shepherd Dog is a popular breed and is often used as a working dog (e.g. police, guide, search and rescue). There were several considerations in the design of the study. First, since there can be great variation in attitudes about and care of different dog breeds, even dogs living within the same household (Fielding and Plumridge, 2005), we directed our inquiries

towards German Shepherd owners only. Second, in addition to collecting demographic information about the German Shepherds and their owners and information about owners' relationships with their dogs, we also collected owner responses on the Dog-ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) Rating Scale (Vas et al., 2007), Budapest Canine Personality Survey (Horváth et al., unpublished results), and emotional predisposition questionnaire (Sheppard and Mills, 2002). Since the owners were asked to rate their own dogs, we minimized the possibility that owners would rely on breed stereotypes. The full set of questionnaires in this study enabled us to make a cross-cultural comparison of owner-reported dog behavior and temperament, as well as of owners' dog-keeping practices.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

In order to test the reliability of the questionnaires across languages, 20 Hungarians bilingual in Hungarian and English completed the measures in both languages. For the main cross-cultural comparison, 51 owners of purebred German Shepherd Dogs from the USA and 185 from Hungary participated. Of the participants from the USA, 17 were from the northeastern section of the country, 27 from the Midwest and South, and seven from the West. Participants were asked to volunteer for a dog temperament study and were recruited through German Shepherd clubs and obedience clubs. Adult members of German-Shepherd-owning households who considered themselves to be owners were eligible to complete the questionnaires. Each participant completed up to three questionnaires, one for each German Shepherd that they presently owned. Participants were informed that the study was about purebred German Shepherds, and the questionnaires asked for each dog's kennel club registration number, as well as the name of the dog's breeder. All of the dogs were at least 1 year of age.

2.2. Procedures

Participants received the questionnaires in person, by postal mail, or by e-mail. They completed the questionnaires either by hand or on their computers and submitted them in person, by postal mail, or by e-mail. The questionnaires asked for demographic information about the owners and their dogs, as well as the number of children, adults, and other dogs in their households. In addition, the questionnaires asked about the amount of time the owners interacted with their dogs, where their dogs were kept during the day and at night, what types of training their dogs received, the age of acquisition, the purpose of having their dogs, and the number of dogs previously owned (Appendix A). 51 owners from the USA and 181 from Hungary also completed the recently validated Dog-ADHD Rating Scale (Appendix B: Vas et al., 2007), a 13-item questionnaire based on a human ADHD questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two subscales used to characterize activity-impulsivity and

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