

Human-Pet Dynamics in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract:

Pets increasingly serve the function as emotional surrogates of children, with tremendous resources poured into their care. However, this function of pets may be quite different from the typical human-pet dynamics characterizing a wider array of societies. To help fill a gap in the cross-cultural understanding of pets, we employed the probability sample of the electronic Human Relations Area Files (eHRAF), covering 60 societies, to code for various features of human-pet dynamics. The findings revealed that dogs are the most commonly kept pets, followed by birds, cats, and other animals including horses, rodents, and reptiles. Dogs, cats, and other pets frequently served valuable functions such as aiding in hunting and pest removal. Birds, dogs, and some other pets also served as playthings, particularly the young of these animals and for the enjoyment of human children. Feeding, sleeping, and positive and negative interactions varied across societies and pets. Dogs, cats, birds, and other pets were frequently killed—and sometimes eaten—and dogs frequently subject to physical abuse. These data illustrate both similarities and differences cross-culturally in human-pet dynamics as well as many stark contrasts with how pets such as dogs in the US are treated today.

Keywords: [BIOCULTURAL](#); [BIRDS](#); [CATS](#); [DOGS](#); [DOMESTICATION](#)

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