Companion Animal Attitude and its Family Pattern in Kuwait

ABSTRACT

The Pet Attitude Scale (PAS) score of Kuwaiti adolescents correlated more highly with that of their fathers than with the score of their mothers. This contrasts with a similar American study in which the PAS score of adolescents correlated more highly with the score of their mothers. The different pattern seemed to be congruent with the father’s more dominant role in Arab families. This study found that Kuwaiti family members had scores on the PAS about a standard deviation lower than that of American family members, a finding viewed as consistent with the less positive attitude toward companion animals in Muslim countries.

The purposes of the present study were (a) to determine the mean Pet Attitude Scale (PAS) (Templer, Salter, Dickey, Baldwin, & Veleber, 1981) scores of Kuwaiti family members; (b) to compare these scores to those of American family members in a previous study; (c) to determine the pattern of adolescent-parent PAS score correlations, and (d) to compare this pattern of correlations with the pattern found in the previous study with American family members.
The present study was conceptualized in the context of companion animals’ being less common in Muslim countries than in the United States and other “Western” countries. Although dogs are very much a part of family life in the United States, the dog is a nonhuman animal who generally is regarded as “dirty” in the Islamic religion. The Islamic religion, however, does permit dog ownership for hunting and for the guarding of fields and herds. In the Muslim world, nonhuman animals generally are thought of as having more economic than emotional value. Companion animals are not forbidden in Islam. The guardianship (ownership) of cats and birds and fish is common in Kuwait. In the Muslim religion, as in virtually all religions, there are differences of opinion about what is proper and what is improper. A communication of the Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt (2002) maintained,

Of interest to all followers of the Islamic Faith, is that there is not a single Sura in the Holy Koran that mentions that Allah disfavors dogs as being unclean. Such ideas in the Middle East are totally erroneous and are based on misinformation and DO NOT conform with the Divine Word of the Holy Koran or with the spirit of Islam.

The present study also was conceptualized in the context of research on animals in family systems and the importance of companion animals in the psychosocial development of children.

Cain (1985) employed the conceptualization of family therapist Bowen (1978) who contended that the family comprises a system that can include pets. Cain surveyed 896 military families with pets throughout the United States. Sixty-eight % of the families viewed their pets as full family members. Sixty-two % reported that their pets usually-to-always had “people status.” Obtaining a pet was said to increase family happiness in 70% of families, to increase expression of affection in 60% of families, and to increase family time together in 52% of families. That pets understood what family members said was reported by 77% of the families; that the pet communicated back to them, by 73% of the families; and that the pet stayed close when family members were upset, by 50% of families. The majority of families believed that pets are important when families are sad or lonely or depressed, or when there is illness or death of a family member. When asked if a pet entered the situation ("triangled" to use the terminology of Bowen) when there was
tension between two family members, 44% of the families said sometimes-to-always. An example is that of a dog’s trying to get a couple’s attention away from their fighting.

In research of Schenk, Templer, Peters, and Schmidt (1994) the PAS score of adolescents was positively correlated with the Experiences and Independence scales and negatively correlated with the Control and Achievement Orientation scales of the Family Environment Scale.

Triebenbacher (1998) conceptualized her study with reference to both the theory and research on human-to-human attachment (Ainsworth, 1969; Bowlby, 1969) and that on animal-to-animal attachment (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959). Triebenbacher reasoned that the unconditional love and acceptance and sense of security in human-animal attachment should increase a child’s positive attitude toward the self. She did report a positive relationship between the Companion Animal Bonding Scale of Poresky, Hendrix, Mosier and Samuelson (1987) and a measure of self-esteem. She also found that children with a dog or cat had greater attachment to their companion animals than children with other types of companion animals such as a bird, reptile, rodent or horse. This was explained in terms of the greater interaction with dogs and with cats. The research of Vidovic, Stetic, and Bratko (1999) with Croatian children appears to have implications regarding family interrelationships and interpersonal relationships more generally. They found that children who had dog companions had more empathy and pro-social behavior than children who did not own dogs. Children with greater pet attachment perceived their family climate as more favorable than did children with lower pet attachment. Poresky (1990) found that children with a greater empathy toward pets also had greater empathy for other children. Poresky and Hendrix (1990) found that children with higher scores on the Companion Animal Bonding Scale had greater social competence and greater empathy for other children. Poresky, Hendrix, Mosier and Samuelson (1998) reported that retrospectively determined childhood bonding was positively correlated with the score of adults on the Companion Animal Bonding Scale.

Gender repeatedly emerges as a significant variable in companion attitude research. Triebenbacher (2000) found that girls scored higher than did boys on the Companion Animal Bonding Scale. Vidovic et al. (1999) found that girls scored higher than did boys on the Child Pet Attachment Scale. Planchon,
Templer, Stokes, & Keller (2002) found that female college students scored higher than did male college students on the PAS. Poresky (1997) reported that college men who had dogs as boys and college women who had cats as girls had a higher self-concept than did college men who had cats and college women who had dogs as children.

The family resemblance aspect of the present study is patterned after the research of Schenk, Templer, Peters and Schmidt (1994) who reported positive correlations between parent and adolescent scores and between the scores of the parents on the PAS. Schenk et al inferred that attitude toward pets is influenced by family relationships.

**Method**

The participants were 157 Kuwaiti high school students, 26 boys and 131 girls, and their 268 parents. The students were requested to complete the PAS and have their parents, 124 fathers and 144 mothers, complete such. The fathers’ ages ranged from 33 to 63 with a mean of 45.21 and a standard deviation of 5.81. The mothers’ ages ranged from 23 to 54 with a mean of 40.00 and a standard deviation of 4.53. The boys’ ages ranged from 13 to 24 with a mean of 17.73 and a standard deviation of 2.04. The daughters’ ages ranged from 13 to 20 with a mean of 16.18 and a standard deviation of 1.37.

The PAS of Templer, Salter, Dickey, Baldwin, and Veleber (1981) is an 18-item Likert format paper and pencil instrument. It was found to have a Chronbach’s alpha of .91 and test-retest reliability of .92. It was found to have three factors labeled love and interaction, pets in home, and joy of pet ownership. Kennel workers had significantly higher scores than did social work students. The PAS was correlated with four different personality instruments in the construction and validation study.

**Results**

Table 1 provides the PAS score means and standard deviations for the fathers, the mothers, the sons, the daughters, and all adolescents (sons and daughters combined). Table 1 also contains the means and standard deviations for the Schenk et al. (1994) study with American adolescents and their parents.
Schenk et al. did not provide separate means and standard deviations for the sons and daughters. Kuwaiti means were significantly lower than the American means for the fathers, mothers, and adolescents.

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<th>Table 1. Pet Attitude Scale Means and Standard Deviations</th>
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*** p < .001

Table 2 contains the product-moment correlation coefficients between Kuwaiti family members. In addition to the father-adolescent and mother-adolescent correlations contained in Table 2, these correlations were computed using only those 111 adolescents with PAS scores for both parents. The father-adolescent correlation was .34 (p < .001) and the mother-adolescent correlation was a non-significant .12. It is apparent from these two correlations and from the correlations in the table that the pet attitude of the adolescents resembled that of their fathers more than that of their mothers. The highest correlation is between PAS scores of the two parents.

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<th>Table 2. Correlation Coefficients between family members</th>
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* p < .05
** p < .001
Age was not related to pet attitude. The correlation coefficients between PAS score and age were -.06 for the fathers, .01 for the mothers, -.05 for sons, -.07 for the daughters, and -.07 for the sons and daughters combined.

**Discussion**

The PAS means are roughly a standard deviation lower in the Kuwaiti family members than in the American family members. The significantly lower Kuwaiti means were expected and probably can be attributed to cultural and religious differences.

One might infer that Kuwaitis have a negative attitude toward companion animals. However, if one takes an international perspective, one might instead infer that Americans have a positive attitude toward companion animals. A high rate of companion animal ownership and the regarding of pets as family members may be primarily a phenomenon in Europeans and persons in countries in which the majority of citizens are of European descent.

It is difficult to make statements about absolute Kuwaiti companion animal attitude just as it is difficult to make precise and comprehensive statements about comparative Kuwaiti companion animal attitude. An attempt at assessment of the former can be made if one examines the Likert format of the PAS, which ranges from 1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree with a 4 for unsure, which presumably represents a very neutral or mixed attitude. If a participant circles all 4s or a mean of 4 for the 18 items, that person would score 72, which is very close to the Kuwaiti means obtained in the present study. It certainly cannot be said that most Kuwaitis view companion animal ownership as always a highly taboo, sacrilegious, or outrageous behavior. And, about a fifth of Kuwaiti family members have PAS scores as high or higher than the average American family members. The overlap is as deserving of attention as are the differences.

In order to obtain a comprehensive perspective of animal attitudes in Muslim countries, one should bear in mind that Islamic teaching regarding the rights of animals is both elaborate and specific. Masri’s book (1989) covers this matter very well. In regard to the slaughter of animals for food, Masri said:

> While Islam permits eating meat, it gives instructions to ensure humane slaughter, with as little pain to the victim as possible: God’s Messenger(s)
was reported as saying: “Allah Who is Blessed and Exalted”, has prescribed benevolence toward everything [and has ordained that everything be done in a good way]; so, when you must kill a living being, do it in the best manner and, when you slaughter an animal, you should [use the best method and] sharpen your knife so as to cause the animal as little pain as possible. (Narratated by Shaddad bin Aus. Muslim; Vol. 2, Chapter 11; Section on “Slaying”; 10: 739, verse 151. Also “Robson” (Ref. No. 15); p. 872. Also recorded in Riyad. (Ref. No. 28); Hadith No. 643; p. 131).

The Messenger of Allah was heard forbidding to keep waiting a quadruped or any other animal for slaughter. (Bukhari. Also Muslim; Vol. 2, Chapter 11; Section on “Slaying,” 10, p. 739; verse 152. Also ‘Robson’ (Ref. No. 15), p. 872).

The prophet(s) said to a man who was sharpening his knife in the presence of the animal: ‘Do you intend inflicting death on the animal twice—one by sharpening the knife within its sight, and once by cutting its throat? (Al-Furu Min-al-Kafi Lil-Dulini; 6:230).

Masri (1989) went on to say: There are many Ahadith forbidding blood sports and the use of animals as targets, some of which are as follows:

- The Prophet condemned those people who take up anything alive as a mere sports. (narrated by Abdullah bin ‘Omar. Muslim’, Vol. 3, Hadith No. 1958)

- The prophet forbade blood sports. (Narratated by Abdullah Ibn Abbas. Awn, [ref. No. 32]; 8:15, Hadith No. 2603. Also “Robson” P. 876 (Ref. No. 15))

- The prophet said: “Do not set up living creatures as a target.” (Narratated by Abdullah bin Abbas. Muslim Vol. 3, Hadith No. 1957. Also “Robson” p. 872 {Ref. No. 15})

- The Prophet condemned those who use a living creatures as a target. (Narratated by Abdullah bin Omar. Bukhari and Muslim. Also “Robson” p. 872 [Ref. No. 15])

- The Prophet forbade an animal being made a target. (Narratated by Anas., Recorded by Riyad. [Ref. No. 28]; Hadith No. 1606; p. 272)

- The Prophet was reported as saying: “Do not make anything having life as a target.” (Narratated by Ibn Abbas. Sahih Muslim – Kitab-us-Said Wa’dh-Dhaba’ih, Chapter DCCXXII, Vol. III; Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore,
Pakistan, 1976; Hadith No. 4813, p. 1079; hereafter referred to as Kitab-us-Said)

Ibn ‘Umar happened to pass by a party of men who had tied a hen and were shooting arrows at it. When they saw Ibn “Umar coming, they scampered off. Ibn “Umar angrily remarked: “Who had done this? Verify! Allah’s Messenger has invoked a curse upon one who does this kind of thing.” (id. Narrated by Said bin Jubair)

The Prophet passed by some children who were shooting arrows at a ram. He told them off, saying: “Do not maim the poor beast.” (Narrated by Abadallah bin Ja’far. An-Nassai, 7: 238)

The fact that these Ahadith repeat the same sayings of the Holy Prophet in slightly varying wordings shows that he took the matter very seriously and repeated them again and again on different occasions in the presence of different people. Another significant point to note in this respect is that, to stop the use of animals as targets or in blood sport, the Holy prophet did the same as he did in the case of camel-humps and sheep-tails, quoted above.

Masri (1989) contended that the Muslim religion even provides protection for animals in war: Even in war, animals cannot be killed except if needed for food. Hazrat Abu Bakr, the first Caliph after the death of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (632-634 A.C.), addressed the Muslim army at a place outside Medina, called Jorf, before sending them off for the battle of Muta. Among the instructions he gave to the soldiers was not to slaughter animals except for food (Qu’ran, 22:40: Tabari III p. 123).

The Society for the Protection of Animal Rights in Egypt (2000) pointed out a section of the Hadith that forbids cruelty to animals. The Prophet (pbuh) not only preached to the people to show kindness to one another but also to all living creatures. He forbade the practice of cutting tails and manes of horses, of branding animals at any soft spot, and of keeping horses saddled unnecessarily. (Muslim, Sahih Muslim)

If the Prophet (pbuh) saw any animal over-burdened or ill-fed he would pull up alongside the owner and say, “Fear Allah in your treatment of animals.” (Abu Daous, Kitab Jihad)

A companion to the Prophet (pbuh) came to him carrying baby chicks in his clothing and mentioned that the mother bird had hovered over them all along.
He was directed to return the chicks back to the same bush. (Mishkat, Abu Daoud)

During a journey, someone travelling with the Prophet (pbuh), gathered some birds eggs from a nest. The mother bird’s painful cries and commotion attracted the attention of the prophet (pbuh), who asked the man to return the eggs to the nest. (Bukhari, Sahih Bukhari).

Menache (1997, 1998) described the complex and sometimes apparently conflicting attitudes toward dogs in the monotheistic religions. The early and the medieval authorities in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions generally expressed extremely negative attitudes. The early rabbinical literature regarded dogs as evil, describing them in terminology similar to that accorded to snakes, swine, and the devil. A similar attitude continued in Christianity and was expressed by St. Paul and by the apostles Matthew and Mark. Mohammed initially said that all dogs should be exterminated. He later said that only black dogs, who are diabolical, should be killed. Menache suggested that dogs were regarded as despicable animals not only because of theological and psychological reasons but because in the Mideast there were packs of wild canines who not only were dangerous but who spread diseases, including rabies. Nevertheless, there were leaders in all three religions who acknowledged that some dogs had admirable characteristics. Rabbi Yehudah he Chassid said that the virtuous loyalty of dogs should be emulated by Jewish sons in giving respect and faithfulness to their parents. Ambrose, one of the four Doctors of Christianity, wrote of the protectiveness and loyalty and healing properties of dogs. Mohammed was said to have promised a divine reward to an elderly woman who gave water to a thirsty dog. It is apparent that in all three religions there is a mixture of positive and negative attitudes toward dogs. In general, the attitudes tended to become more positive over the centuries since the founding of these religions.

The present research findings mesh with those of Schenk et al. (1994) in suggesting that attitudes toward pets are developed in a family setting. However, the precise mechanisms of transmission cannot be determined by these studies or by other previous research. The determinants of these mechanisms would appear to be worthy of future research.

The higher father-adolescent than mother-adolescent correlation is the opposite of that found in the Schenk et al (1981) study with American family
members. It is here suggested that this is because the father has a more dominant position in the family in Arab culture than in the United States. In Arab culture, the mother ordinarily has more contact with the children than does the father, but her role includes relating the decisions and attitude of the father to the children (Abudabbeh, 1996). The present study adds to the above-cited research indicating that gender is an important variable in the global understanding of attitudes toward companion animals.

It is recommended that companion animal attitude in the other Arab countries be researched. One certainly cannot infer that the present findings apply to all Arab countries. Arab countries differ greatly in Western influence, the impact of colonists, the percentage of citizens who are Muslims, technological development, per capita income, and the extent to which animals are viewed as beasts of burden. Present or historical per capita income may emerge as an important variable. Japan has a high rate of companion animal ownership. Japan is neither a Christian nor “Western” country, but it is the most prosperous Pacific Rim country. In poor countries, feeding humans is a more important priority than the indulgence of companion animals. It is recommended that future research in Arab and in Muslim countries include not only the Pet Attitude Scale but also the Censhare Pet Attitude Survey (Holcomb, Williams, & Richards, 1985). The former is a generic measure of companion animal attitude and the latter an instrument that taps intense human animal bonding.

A further recommendation is that multivariate cross-cultural research using a number of different countries be carried out. We here propose a frame of reference for both cross-cultural research and research in a single culture, in which it is assumed that companion animal attitude is determined by a multitude of cultural, social, psychological, economic, historical and experience-with-animals variables. Our proposed frame of reference has no absolute criterion of when an animal is a companion animal. A dog who sleeps in one’s bed ordinarily would be considered a companion animal, and a bird who flies over one’s house would ordinarily not be considered a companion animal. We suggest that both of these situations are on the same continuum. If the bird who flies over the house builds a nest in a tree on the property and accepts food from the human residents, there is greater likelihood that this bird would be considered a companion animal. The emotional closeness
to animals probably is multidimensional and differs from person to person and from culture to culture.

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**References**


