

Perceptions of Pet Relinquishment

Each year, millions of dogs are surrendered to shelters in the United States (ASPCA, 2018). Varying factors such as aggression (Salman et al., 2000), lifestyle changes (Haupt, Honig, & Reisner, 1996), and destructive tendencies such as house soiling and chewing (Miller et al., 1996) seem to affect these decisions to relinquish. However, not much research has been conducted to understand how other people perceive relinquishment. In order to understand these perceptions, 443 undergraduate students at Kennesaw State University were surveyed and asked for their opinion on a variety of fictional circumstances which resulted in a dog owner surrendering their pet. Half of the participants were told that the owner had acquired the pet from a shelter; the other half were told that the owner had acquired the pet from a breeder. Within the breeder vs shelter condition each participant was given four reasons for relinquishment (relocation, excessive barking, aggression in the pet, and financial issues). Participants rated whether they felt the situation outcome was acceptable or unacceptable. A mixed analysis of variance showed that whether the dog was acquired from a shelter or a breeder had no effect on participant ratings [Pillai's Trace = 0.013, $F(7, 435) = 0.789$, $p = 0.597$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.013$, power = 0.34]. The type of scenario had an effect on participant ratings [Pillai's Trace = 0.673, $F(21, 421) = 41.195$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.673$, power = 1.00]. There was no significant interaction between the condition (shelter vs. breeder) and the scenario [Pillai's Trace = 0.041, $F(21, 421) = 0.850$, $p = 0.656$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$, power = 0.68]. The results from this survey are an important step in understanding underlying perceptions about dog relinquishment. Understanding these perceptions may help us identify ways to decrease relinquishment.

Keywords: Shelter dogs, pet ownership, pet relinquishment, pet surrender