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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

September 14th, 2005, Volume III Issue 9

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Dear Suzanne,

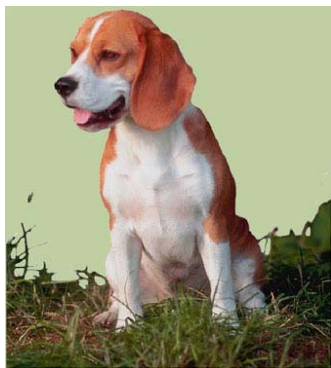
Welcome to fall! Our thoughts and best wishes are with the people and pets in Louisiana and Mississippi. There are many ways you can help - see our link to the ASPCA's donation site as one option. Close to home, we are thankful that Rita Kieffer, Barb's Airedale puppy, is recovering after a serious illness. Life can change so quickly - we should all appreciate every day we have with our loved ones.

Best,
Suzanne and Dan

- Cat Piece:**
Why Does My Cat Do That?

Dog Piece: Drive Theory Outdated

If you've read many books about dog training, you've probably encountered the idea of "drives" that supposedly motivate various behaviors. We hear of "prey drive" motivating dogs to chase objects and



Cats have a reputation for being mysterious and difficult to understand. Why do they just sit and seem to stare off into space? Why do they bite us when we merely pet them as they sit in our laps? Why do they "mark" our stuff? We don't have simple answers for these questions. Animal behaviorists are still working to try to understand the different communication signals of cats. Our knowledge of cats still lags way behind our



people, and "pack drive" being the reason dogs want to be with others, or become distressed when left alone.

While working on the second edition of my Pet Behavior Protocols book (due out late in 2006), I've been reviewing the early ethological literature critiquing "drive theory", dating from the 1960's. The concept was actually first proposed back around the turn of the century. In the 1950's, Konrad Lorenz and others proposed a "drive specific energy" that built up internally. When the right stimulus appeared, the energy would be released to power or "drive" the specific behavioral response. We now know there is no such thing as "drive specific energy", and in fact the entire notion of "drives" as motivating forces was pretty much abandoned in the scientific literature around 30 years ago.

Why the idea still persists in the dog training literature isn't clear. We certainly don't read much about cats or dolphins or pet iguanas and their "drives". "Drive theory" really is not a helpful concept and does nothing to further our understanding of why dogs engage in certain behaviors or how we can best encourage them to do what we want.

Further, linking behaviors that in actuality may have little relation to one another may in fact be a source of confusion and misinterpretation rather than adding to our understanding of canine behavior. Many dogs will chase balls and not chase people, yet both these behaviors have been said to be motivated by "prey drive", despite no objective research linking the two.

Another significant misunderstanding of the "drive" idea is that the term is used to refer both to motivation for specific behaviors, as well as to refer to inherent personality traits. Dogs are said to have high or low "defensive drive" for example, as though this is something inherent in the dog. The original "drive theory" idea was never

knowledge of dog behavior but recent studies have shed light on some of their mysterious ways.

One interesting study looked at the tail-up posture of cats and what it means. When cats approach people or other cats in a non-aggressive way, their tails are usually straight up in the air, with the tip moving slowly or curled slightly. It has been assumed that this is a friendly signal to other cats or people, but to prove it, Dr. Charlotte Cameron-Beaumont of the University of Southampton presented cats with cardboard silhouettes of cats with the tails either up or down and then looked at their reactions. Cats were more likely to approach the tail-up silhouettes quickly, in a friendly manner and with their own tails up. Cats did not approach the tail down silhouettes as rapidly or in as friendly a manner.

Other research has shown that cats approaching a person or other cat (or being approached by a person or cat) will often flop down in front of them and roll on their backs or sides. This seems to be a friendly behavior that signals "I am no threat to you" and usually allows the cats to stay near the other individual.

Meowing by cats has also recently received attention from researchers. As most cat owners know, how a cat's meow sounds can be quite variable. Different cats may give very different sounding meows and even the same cat may give different meows at different times. Interestingly, meowing is rarely used in communication between cats. Mothers and kittens frequently meow at each other but adult cats don't do it very often. Adult cats mostly direct their meows to people and it seems to act to get our attention. Cats seem to learn to do this because the behavior often "works", and for the same reason cats can learn different sounding meows for different contexts.

Our cat Buffett communicates with us in all these ways. He frequently greets us by approaching us with his tail up, meowing and then flopping down and rolling in our path. It's a very effective way to get us to stop and pay attention to him. In his own kitty way, he is showing his friendliness and affection.

applied to personality traits, but instead was an attempt to explain why animals engaged in specific behaviors at a moment in time.

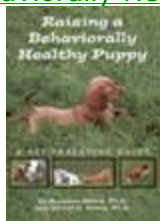
Even more confusing, is that some training books recommend shifting the dog from "prey drive" to "defensive drive", much like one would shift from first to second gear in a car. "Drive theory" had its beginnings as a mechanistic model for behavior, which is one of the reasons it was abandoned early on when we realized that animals were not machines but instead sentient beings. There are many other criticisms of "drive theory", but you'll have to wait until the book comes out to read them! In the meantime, my "Frappachino drive" has kicked in so I need to go satisfy it!



September Special

Free Ground Shipping on Pet Parenting Guides:

[Raising a Behaviorally Healthy Puppy](#)



[Help! I'm Barking and I Can't Be Quiet.](#)



- **Our Piece: Behavior Wellness**

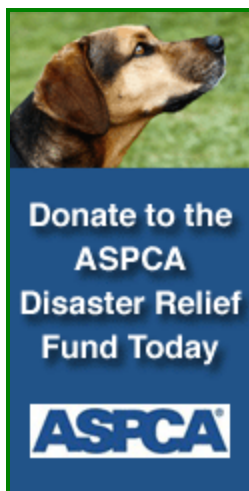
We will soon be in Hershey Pennsylvania speaking at the Animal Behavior Conference, which is part of [Groom Expo](#), sponsored by Barkleigh Productions. One of the topics we'll be speaking on is how pet professionals can help pet parents prevent various behavior problems.



This will be a continuation of our behavior wellness concept, an important idea we've been promoting for several years now. It's really unfortunate that a pet's behavior receives most attention only during puppy or kittenhood, or when the pet's behavior becomes a problem. We encounter so many situations in which an awareness of early warning signs or implementation of techniques to encourage good behavior could have saved the day, and prevented many pets and people from getting into crisis situations.

Behavior wellness is the state of normal and acceptable pet conduct that enhances the human- animal bond and the pet's quality of life, a definition we first introduced last year in our article on the topic in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (August 15, 2004). We are pleased to see that the idea is starting to be picked up by others, as illustrated by a recent article in JAVMA about guidelines for feline behavior.

Last year we lectured at APDT on how implementing behavior wellness programs can be a way for various pet professionals to grow their businesses, and certainly should be a focus for animal shelters. For example, animal shelters should routinely be sending new adopters home with protocols for how to introduce pets to one another, and actively discussing the issue with them as well. When a new pet comes in for its first examination, veterinarians should be following up on this and asking what procedures owners are using and how things are going.



There are many wonderful organizations helping the pets and people of the Katrina disaster. The ASPCA is just one suggestion.

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**Look for our new Grooming and Training Behavior Wellness books coming next month!**  
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If you are a pet owner, take our behaviorally healthy cat and dog quizzes. ([CAT QUIZ](#) - [DOG QUIZ](#))
 See what "issues" your pet may have. Often we encounter people who have tolerated problems for quite some time, either unable to obtain effective help or not actively seeking it. Then something happens to trigger a crisis. Perhaps a move to a new home or a baby beginning to crawl, and the dog or cat's occasional housesoiling can no longer be accommodated and must be changed overnight. This is obviously not realistic. So if you identify early warning signs of "issues", get help sooner, not later.

• **What's New:**
Sheba The Wonder Dog

Suzanne recently appeared on local TV station KUSA 9-NEWS evaluating a dog that was claimed to have exceptional cognitive abilities. The owners claim that Sheba, a mix acquired from a shelter a few years ago, knows basic mathematics, trigonometry, geography, how to count in foreign languages, current events and sports trivia. She watches the news attentively every evening. Sheba could answer all these questions by pawing out the right answer to the question. Suzanne was invited along with the 9- NEWS team to test whether Sheba is as smart as she is claimed to be. When Sheba was asked questions by other people, or when the questioners didn't know the answer to the question, such as what's the square root of 3,845, then Sheba didn't do so well. Suzanne thinks that the owners truly believe their dog can do all these things, but that they may be unintentionally giving Sheba subtle cues as to the right answer. In the early 1900s a similar situation was found with the horse, Clever Hans, who was also claimed to do mathematics. Turns out he couldn't do math, but he was very good at reading human body language that told him when he got to the right answer. To see some of Sheba's abilities and Suzanne's tests, go to the [9-NEWS website](#)

