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For Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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Dog Piece:
Uncovering the "Whys" of Dog Behavior

Imagine you are the new pet parent of an 11 week old puppy. You give your puppy a



Dear Suzanne,

This is National Animal Shelter Appreciation Week. Read about [10 things](#) you can do to support your local shelter. We'd also like to wish each of you a Happy Thanksgiving. For a different take on the holiday, pop on over to this [holiday greeting](#).

Best,
Suzanne and Dan

- Cat Piece:**
Electronic Containment for Cats?

Most of us are familiar with the controversial outside electronic containment systems for dogs. They generally consist of a receiver collar the dog wears and a transmitter attached to a wire that is buried or strung along the boundary that the dog is not to cross. When the dog crosses the boundary, she receives a shock or spray of citronella oil to punish the transgression. The dog quickly learns not to cross the boundary and can successfully avoid all future punishment by avoiding the boundary. Indoors, a similar system



"Greenie"

for the first time. It's obvious your puppy loves the Greenie. To practice making sure you can take things away from your puppy, you reach to take away the Greenie. Your puppy growls and snaps (doesn't touch) at you.

Is this normal puppy behavior?

Defining "normal" is typically based on whether the majority of the population or species displays the behavior. There may be differences in frequencies among breeds, or even between sexes. So while we may not be able to accurately label this behavior as "normal" or "abnormal", we can certainly say it is unacceptable. Why did this puppy react in such a way? Should we label this puppy as "dominant"?

Let's take another example. Suppose you are caring for dogs that have been rescued from Hurricane Katrina. One of the dogs, an intact male, bites a person who is reaching to pet him. Is this due to "post-traumatic stress syndrome" as some of his care-takers think?

Sometimes arriving at the "why" of a dog's behavior is not easy. Animal behaviorists actually consider four levels of "why" questions. We consider the evolutionary "why" – how did this behavior come to exist? Second, is the immediate "why" – what event(s) in the dog's immediate environment triggered the behavior? Third is the developmental "why" – how did this behavior develop over time. Last is the functional "why" – what purpose does this behavior serve for the dog?

Not all of these "why" questions are always answerable. Labeling a behavior does not necessarily help us understand it. We can sometimes create problems for ourselves, or arrive at the wrong conclusions by doing so. For example, it doesn't help us to understand why the puppy growled over the Greenie by labeling the puppy as "dominant". It also

can be arranged to keep dogs out of specific areas or away from doors and windows. These can work well for dogs and thousands (if not millions) of these systems are used daily.

Have you ever thought of using such systems with cats? Recently Dan had the opportunity to observe several cats being trained on both indoor and outdoor containment systems. The training was carried out by professional installers, was fast and didn't seem to cause the cats pain or fear. They seem to be just as effective for the cats as for dogs.

There are several advantages to having such systems for cats. They can prevent indoor cats from door-dashing and escaping. Containment systems can also keep cats out of certain areas of the house where they may become destructive or create problems for allergic people. Separate areas can be created to keep cats who don't get along apart from one another. They can also be used to enrich the lives of cats by giving them limited, safe access to the out-of-doors. Many times it is hard to find ways to enrich the lives of indoor cats or to keep indoor/outdoor cats from straying. This can be accomplished with a containment system used in conjunction with conventional fencing. The regular fencing is needed to keep people, dogs and other predators from coming onto the property and harassing or harming the cat.

Use of electronic containment systems is controversial. Some people do not like them because they use punishment and negative reinforcement to keep the animals contained. Conventional fencing that is modified to keep cats in a yard doesn't rely on such punishment. Indoors, cats can be restricted by closing doors and using double gates rather than using containment systems. Our view is that electronic containment systems are not for every cat or dog nor for every situation. However, they can be effective and humane when they are installed and used correctly and when the animals are carefully trained to the systems.

- **Our Piece:**
Choosing the "Right" Pet

doesn't help us understand why the hurricane survivor dog bit by calling the behavior the result of PTSD.

In psychology and medicine one of the reasons for labeling diseases and disorders is to help us identify the symptoms and discriminate between disorders. But the label itself (or the "diagnosis") isn't the explanation for the problem. We need answers to the "why" questions to know that.

Descriptions of behavior, labels for behaviors or their causes, and the "whys" of behaviors are three separate entities. In most cases, the sciences of applied animal or veterinary behavior aren't yet sufficiently sophisticated to have agreed upon criteria to accurately and consistently attach diagnostic labels to behavioral manifestations.

For example, post-traumatic stress syndrome in people has behavioral, physiological, as well as cognitive components. It would be difficult if not impossible to evaluate cognitive manifestations (how do we tell if a dog is having flash-backs?), and no research has been done to evaluate the physiological manifestations such as changes in heart rate. So labeling a behavior as being due to PTSD isn't very helpful.

Wellness Awareness Month

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**To help spread the word about Behavior Wellness we are offering our two new books - Incorporating Behavior Wellness Into Your Training Business, or Incorporating Behavior Wellness Into Your Grooming Business, along with our tips booklets at a special price.**

Training or Grooming Wellness Package includes:



We were recently asked to contribute to a story in a major national newspaper about what the choice of particular pets said about the personality of the celebrities who owned them. We won't tell you who was on the list of 10 (the article may not yet have appeared), but we had fun making things up about what the choice of bulldogs, maltese, terrier mixes and other breeds of dogs (8 of 10 celebrity pets on the list were dogs) might imply about their owners.

It has been said that people choose pets that are reflections of themselves, or how we wish ourselves to be. However, there are no definitive data on this subject, so we can't say that people who choose Irish setters for example, have different personality traits than people who prefer Akitas. Research has found that pet owners in general are more tolerant of chaos and change than are non-pet owners.

Have you ever wondered how people choose their pets? This question might be of particular interest to shelters, breeders and anyone involved in the process of matching people to the "best" pet for them. Why did you choose the pets you have? Suzanne loves Irish setters because of their physical beauty and because they are easy-going clowns who bring a smile or a laugh everyday.

People may choose a pet because it reminds them of a pet that recently died, or perhaps of the pet they had during childhood. Sometimes choices are made because a person feels sorry for the animal. Choices may be made on the spur of the moment or be based on days, weeks or months of research about a species, breed or individual. Interestingly, Dr. Gary Patronek's research from a few years ago found that cat owners were more likely to relinquish their cat to a shelter if the cat's acquisition had been carefully planned. This





- Incorporating Behavioral Wellness Into Your Grooming Business OR Incorporating Behavior Wellness Into Your Training Business - spiral bound book
- 76 Ways To Get Your Dog To Do What You Want - Booklet
- Cats Come Clean -Booklet
- What Dogs Need And How They Think - Booklet

Regular Price \$36.45 Package Price \$29.00 ~ Save over 15%!

**SALE BEGINS FRIDAY,  
NOVEMBER 11**



## Quick Links...

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same correlation did not hold true for dogs. Dr. Patronek speculated that cat owners who did too much research may have developed unrealistic expectations about cats, and were disappointed when their new cat couldn't fulfill them.

The best-selling book, "Blink", by Malcolm Gladwell talks about how people often make correct decisions on very little information. Gladwell calls this "thin- slicing". Sometimes, it appears, too much information can actually hamper good decision making by causing people to ignore important bits of information. People are often not even fully aware of what information they are relying on to arrive at a decision. This accounts for the experience we've all had of taking an instant like or dislike to a person for reasons we can't fully explain. We wonder how this might apply to selecting a pet.

We've all heard people say they didn't choose their pets, but the animal chose them, meaning that something about the pet drew them to the animal. Perhaps we shouldn't discount this immediate attraction. While people may benefit from receiving some amount of objective information about a potential pet, they will also rely on how they feel about the animal. Rather than overwhelming people with too much information that could actually be confusing, people looking for a pet might be better served by receiving targeted tidbits that zero in on a few aspects of the pets' behavior.

Of course this is all speculation, as how best to match people and pets to produce lasting, quality relationships is not known. This, as well as devising predictive evaluations of pet behavior, requires more research.

## • **What's New: Wellness Fair in Denver**

September 29th was the first annual "Wags to Whiskers" pet wellness fair here in Denver. It was a great success. At our Animal Behavior Associates' booth, we



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saw many of our old friends and made some wonderful new ones too. Thanks to the Colorado Humane Society this will be an annual event!

Also this month:

[Senate Asking For 'Puppy Mill' Regulations](#)

Dr. Hetts talks about the problem with Denver's Channel 4 news. [See the video and read the story.](#)

This has been a busy month for us, both personally and professionally. Suzanne's 93 year old father has had acute health problems, requiring a significant amount of our time. Charlie is now settled into a nursing facility, and, while frail, is stable for the time being, but we anticipate a rough time ahead.

In between times, Suzanne has attended workshops on the self-publishing industry, using Google ads, and adding full motion video to websites in her never ending quest to learn more about web-based education and business and self-publishing. She also took a much needed break to meet friends in Las Vegas for a Jimmy Buffett concert.

Dan continues to lecture for the National Animal Control Association Level I Academy, traveling to Sacramento most recently and Nashville next week. Both Dan and Suzanne are working on projects for companies in the pet industry. Suzanne's work on the 2nd edition of her Pet Behavior Protocols book is progressing, although slower than anticipated.

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