

You are receiving this email from Animal Behavior Associates because you subscribed on our website or asked us to add you to our list. To ensure that you continue to receive emails from us, add [info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com](mailto:info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com) to your address book today. If you haven't done so already, click to [confirm](#) your interest in receiving email campaigns from us.

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

June 11, 2008, Volume VI Issue 6

### In This Issue

**Dog Piece:**  
**Is Behavior "Contagious"?**

**Cat Piece:**  
**Cats and Personal Space**

**Our Piece:**  
**Hard-wired Behavior?**

**What's New:**  
**Survey Results**

### Dog Piece: Is Behavior "Contagious"?



Anyone who has been around dogs has encountered the following: The dog down the street begins to bark at who knows what, and within seconds, every other dog

within hearing is barking his head off as well; two dogs begin to play chase at the local dog park and soon half a dozen dogs are drawn into the game; one of your dogs

Dear Suzanne,

Thanks again to all of you who responded to our survey. You will see the direct result of your input in our new telecourse schedule. Hope to hear many of you in class soon! Happy Summer!

Suzanne and Dan

### • Cat Piece: Cats and Personal Space

Our good friend Mel sent us a sequence of photos of her four cats that was both interesting and enlightening. Some of you



may have seen us show these during our lectures, and a small version of one is included in the html version of this ezine. The first slide shows Mel's four cats spread out on her bed enjoying the sunshine pouring through the windows. They're all quietly co-existing, each in a different part of the bed. The next photo shows two of the cats in a cat fight. What happened? One of the cats, - Flame - who had been lying on his left side facing away from the others, rolled over to lie on his right side. This put him closer to Hazel and this

**turns his nose up at the food dish and walks away, but comes back and eats like he is starving when your other dog starts to eat.**

**This phenomenon of one animal doing something that draws others into doing the same behavior is called social facilitation and is seen mainly in highly social animals. Some behaviorists have referred to it as social contagion in animals. It's been seen in the feeding behavior of chickens, grooming behavior of rhesus monkeys and athletic performances in people, to give just a few examples.**

**Social facilitation probably has several functions. It may allow animals to take advantages of resources that are scattered in patches, such as seeds on the ground. One chicken discovers them and starts to feed, and it draws the flock to feed as well. It probably also leads to coordination of cooperative activities such as hunting or protecting the group against intruders. The "bark fests" that dogs get into could have evolved in this way to intimidate and chase off intruders. The social howling of wolf packs may alert other packs to their presence in the area and advertize their possession of a territory.**

**A particularly dangerous situation where social facilitation can occur is in aggressive or predatory attacks on people or other animals. Some of the most savage attacks by dogs have involved groups of dogs. In a few cases it has been shown that the dogs involved in the attacks were not particularly aggressive until aroused by the presence of other dogs. The aggression seems to be contagious - such as the hysteria experienced by groups of fearful people. The dogs do things in groups that they wouldn't do by themselves. The possibility of such socially facilitated aggression**

**led to the fight. Why should such an innocent movement cause a fight?**

Cats, like most animals and people, are surrounded by an invisible envelope we call personal space. Most animals don't like that space invaded by others, except under certain circumstances. When an individual doesn't want its personal space invaded, it either moves away from the social partner or threatens or attacks the other. This is what happened to Mel's cats. When Flame rolled over, it put him Hazel's personal space, who took exception to this breach of her personal space by hissing and swatting.

The size of the personal space as well as how the individual responds to the invasion depends on many factors, including the species of animal. In general, cats, a more solitary species, have a bigger personal space than dogs, a more social species.

The response also depends on the situation and the relationship between the individuals. Our cat, Buffett, has a much smaller personal space with us than he does with our two dogs. He doesn't usually let them get so close. Also, Buffett's personal space with us is much larger when we have the nail clippers than when we have a bit of chicken.

Some of the fighting that occurs between cats living together seems to be caused by invasions of personal space rather than dominance issues, possessiveness or even territoriality. Many cats are tolerant of other cats if the others don't come too close. But some home environments, shelters and research facilities don't give cats enough room to spread out and this can lead to distress, threats and fighting. One way to do this in limited indoor environments is to provide additional vertical space and plenty of hiding space. Adding perches, kitty climbers, and even cat walks along the walls can help cats maintain their personal space and help prevent conflicts. And putting simple items like paper grocery bags or boxes in various locations give cats more opportunities to hide from others if they want to.

provides a good reason not to let dogs roam freely in groups.

Not all dog behavior is socially facilitated. Fears of thunderstorms and other loud noises and separation anxiety do not seem to be spread from one dog to another. Furthermore, not all dogs engage in socially facilitated barking, feeding, play or aggression. We don't know what factors predispose dogs to engage in socially facilitated behavior.

Keep in mind that social facilitation is different from imitation learning. With the latter a completely new and novel behavior is being learned; not so with the former.

The next time you hear a group of dogs begin to bark or howl in response to one another, keep in mind that it isn't much different than groups of fans screaming for their favorite teams at a sporting event.

### ***Summer School***

\*\*\*\*\*

***Using the feedback from our recent survey, we have developed three new courses for our summer session. Register early for these courses, as based on their popularity in our survey we expect them to fill rapidly. Survey responders - be sure to use your coupon code, good for 10% off registration for one telecourse.***

***For our ambitious learners, sign up for all three new telecourses, and receive a 10% DISCOUNT on registration. Just enter the***

***"Feline Aggression to Other Cats"*** is one of our new telecourses. See the "Summer School" section of the newsletter for all course titles.

### • **Our Piece:** **Hard-wired Behavior?**

Recently we had a client tell us that her dog's cat-chasing behavior was "hard-wired" and she didn't think there was any way to change it. What does this mean? The "hard-wired" term is not one used by animal behaviorists and doesn't have any scientific meaning. We think most people use the term very inconsistently and seem to be quite vague about its meaning.



To some, "hard-wired" means a behavior is inborn, instinctive or genetically determined. The behavior is somehow "wired" into the physiology of the animal. Others seem to mean that the behavior is unlearned or not influenced by the environment. Others seem to mean that the behavior is fixed in its form - it occurs the same way every time or in all members of the breed or species. It is reflex-like in its occurrence.

Some people see no difference between these three meanings and to them, "hard-wired" means all of the above. But we know these three aspects of behavior - genetic influences, environmental influences and the rigidity of the behavior in its form - are not the same thing. Saying something about one doesn't imply anything about the others.

For example, cats are predisposed to eliminate in a stereotyped way - sniff, dig a hole, eliminate, cover, walk away - and a predisposition to eliminate in soft sandy material such as kitty litter. They don't have to learn the behavior from other cats. Even kittens raised in the absence of other cats will eliminate in the normal way when given the chance. You could call the behavior "hard-wired" but we know that not all cats eliminate in the usual way - some don't dig or bury for example, and some learn to eliminate in other kinds of materials such as plush carpeting or

*coupon code, Summer School 2008 in the shopping cart at time of purchase. Our survey respondents are welcome to use both coupons for an even greater savings! Use the links below for full descriptions and outlines of all courses. ALL TIMES ARE MOUNTAIN DAYLIGHT.*

***"Helping Fearful Dogs", a two session class offered at noon on Tuesday and Thursday, June 24th and 26th.***

***"Feline Aggression to Other Cats", two session class Tuesday and Thursday July 8th and 10th at 6pm***

***"Canine Aggression to Non-Family Members" two session class at 4 PM on Sundays July 20th and 27th***

***In addition to the new telecourses, we will be offering one of our most popular classes, "Becoming a Great Dog Training Instructor" with instructor Pia Silvani. This 5 week course begins July 16th. This one always fills up fast, so register early!***

***Coming in August - Medical Problems That Masquerade as Behavior Problems. With Dr. Margie Knoll (DVM) and Ms. Nancy Williams (MS, RVT, ACAAB). Dates TBD.***

Want to find out more information? Visit the [Telecourse For Professionals](#) page of our website. There you will find

clothes on the floor.

The term "hard-wired" is just another way that people create a dichotomy between behaviors - the hard-wired and the not hard-wired behaviors. It is no different than saying a behavior is "genetic" or "learned" or pitting nature against nurture.

Of course these are false dichotomies. No behavior is exclusively genetic or exclusively learned or exclusively due to nature or nurture. All behavior is influenced by genetics. All behavior is influenced by the environment, although the relative importance of environmental and genetic influences varies among behaviors. And all behavior, no matter how stereotyped or rigid it appears, has variability. Behavior exists along a continuum with regard to these factors rather than being in one category or another.

Creating these false dichotomies with terms like "hard-wired" doesn't help us understand the causes of behavior or how best to change it. Saying that a cat's elimination behavior is hard-wired doesn't tell me why some cats bury their feces and others don't and it doesn't tell me how to get a cat to use his litter box. These terms don't help us to understand behavior, and they lead us to false dichotomies and confusion. We're better off without them.

### **What's New:** **Survey Results**

We're excited to announce three new telecourses to be offered this summer. The days and times were chosen in response to your feedback about wanting courses other than weekday evenings. The topics we've chosen are the ones that received the highest interest in the survey over 400 of you completed for us a few weeks ago.

You'll find dates and registration information in another section of this newsletter. If you completed the survey, don't forget to use your coupon code (good for 10% off ONE telecourse) you received as our thank you for responding.

We were taken off guard by the great survey response and had to upgrade our survey account to accept all the replies. Thanks to all of you that gave of your time to let us know what you would like to

**complete course listings,  
information about accessing  
telecourse/webcasts, and a NEW  
VIDEO presented by Suzanne  
with lots of great information  
about our classes.**

\*\*\*\*\*

---

## Quick Links...

- [Our Website](#)
- [Products](#)
- [Services](#)
- [More About Us](#)
- [Archives](#)

:: [info@animalbehaviorassociates.com](mailto:info@animalbehaviorassociates.com)

::

<http://www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com>

:: 303-932-9095

see. We plan on doing more of these surveys from time to time to get YOUR input so we hope even more of you will respond next time.

We had hoped to have our two new websites for pet owners, [HelpingFido.com](http://HelpingFido.com) and [HelpingKitty.com](http://HelpingKitty.com) completed by today, but unfortunately Fido won't be up for "real" for a few more days, and Kitty, maybe a week. Look for an email notifying you when these are up and active. These will be the sites that our affiliate program will link to.

Our affiliate program for the products on these new sites will also be done soon. We have three crucial components that need completing before the program is ready to roll. By referring your clients to the products we'll have on these sites, not only can you be sure they are getting good information, but you can make money just as if you were selling the products yourselves but without the costs and trouble of inventory. Again - look for an email message from us in the near future announcing the launch of our affiliate program and how YOU can sign up!

Based on your feedback in our survey and input we've received from other professionals, we are adjusting BEN ([the Behavior Education Network](#)) to better provide the member benefits you are interested in. We have an opportunity to tap into a unique distance learning platform and we are working with the company involved to give access to BEN members. We know you're probably sick of hearing about these delays, but our goal is to create something truly worthwhile for pet professionals who are serious about improving the quality of the behavior care they provide (in whatever form that takes), expanding their knowledge based on science, not on the fad of the month, and leveraging their knowledge into growing their businesses. So patience and trust are the orders of the day!