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Animal Behavior

In this article, I am discussing behaviors, not breeds. Breeds don't define the behavioral terms. They display the behaviors. We have to take what we see the animals display, and then we define these things in words in accordance to how they are displayed. Experience provides the "display" component. Education provides the "definitions" component. By doing this, we are able to build upon the knowledge acquired by those that came before us. By combining both education and experience, one begins obtaining a true understanding...and only after this true understanding begins to occur is the proper application of true knowledge possible.

The degree to which a dog displays a behavior may be influenced by the breed and dog...but never the less...the terms themselves are unified for all breeds...as they don't define breeds, but behaviors.

First, let's define drive. A drive is a behavior that is motivated or displayed in order to preserve a species. Sex drive for example is the desire to engage in intercourse..., which is obviously necessary to preserve a sexually reproducing species.

Behaviors include...

1. Prey drive - The desire to chase, hunt, catch, or kill...for food. This drive can be harnessed and cross over to "non-food" items. What some people call "play drive" when a dog chases a ball is actually prey drive even though the ball is not food. It is the instinctive response to catch (and typically bite) the object. This drive supplies food, which is obviously a necessary component of life and therefore prey drive, as do all drives...preserves the species. The perfect example is the cat and mouse...or dog and rabbit.

2. Defense drive - The natural reaction to defend against a threat, perceived threat, or challenge...to protect themselves, others, or what they possess. Defense has many degrees. There are courageous defenders that are forward. There are fear biters that would opt for flight if given the chance...leading to the phrase "fight or flight" that often pops up when discussing defense drives. The perfect example of defense is a coyote or wolf protecting its den from a bear. If the coyote is courageous (perhaps motivated in this example by protecting its den with young pups in it...so it views the need to protect as worth the risk of courage in this case)...the coyote or wolf may actually pursue the bear until the bear is a safe distance from the den. If the wolf is not courageous (or feels the den isn't important...no pups), the wolf may leave...or "cur" to choose flight...realizing that success may come at too big a cost for little gain. This behavior is species preserving and is therefore defined as a drive.

3. "Fight drive" - I put "fight drive" in quotes because true fight drive doesn't exist at any significant frequency in the natural world. Let me explain. Very few people truly understand what real "fight drive" is. Fight drive is only found among a few domesticated animals that have

been selected to fight. In the natural world, fighting an unnecessary battle causes injury, infection, death, and eventually extinction. Let's remember, the definition of the word "drive" is a behavior that is motivated to preserve the species. Therefore, by definition of the term drive, "fight drive" can't be labeled in the natural world as a "drive" in the sense that fighting behavior (fighting simply for the sake of fighting) would go against preservation and species. One may fight for prey, defense, rank, food, sex, territory, etc. but to fight simply for the sake of fighting simply would cause injury and extinction in a natural world. HOWEVER, in an artificial world...a domesticated world...in certain populations (such as game fighting dogs), if a dog quits then was not permitted to breed. Only the ones that would win were allowed to breed...and over time (with the help of using medicine to preserve winning dogs that would have otherwise died)...the dogs got "gamer" and "gamer" until "game dogs" began displaying a behavior that would cause their own extinction if it wasn't for the aid of man and medicine. These dogs we saved and admired...and bred. So, what was unnatural developed into a "species preserving behavior in an UNNATURAL and DOMESTICATED WORLD...hence "artificial selection" creating "an artificial drive" known as "fight drive."

4. Rank drive - is simply trying to obtain dominance. Although rank drive has some roots to defense, as it is motivated to "protect" one's position within a pack and the benefits of status that come along with this status, rank drive is also different than pure defense drive in that rank drive also tries to establish higher positions within a pack in order to improve the benefits of status. This difference may seem slight, but it is vital. So, although rank drive is similar to defense drive in some ways, I believe rank drive should be defined totally separately from defense drive as this is a significant difference that is clearly visible in real life. Unlike rank drive, pure defense does not "establish" new domain or dominion. Do not underestimate this slight difference, as it is an important note when selecting a family guardian. I have studied and observed two forms of Rank drive. Intraspecies rank and interspecies rank.

A. Intraspecies rank drive is normal rank drive behavior, which is the desire to move UP WITHIN THE PACK for things like breeding rights, first at food, etc...(Intra-species rank has nothing to do with humans). It is a desire to obtain dominance ONLY within the given species and not directed towards other species. Some degree of intraspecies rank is to be expected among all social animals.

B. Interspecies rank is when rank drive/dominance crosses the species barrier (and is directed towards humans)...and is not normal in most animals and even in many breeds of dogs, but has been selected for in SOME lines of dogs (such as the GSD, Rottweiler, Malinois, Chow Chow, Sharpea, and others). It is BASICALLY defined as dominance towards humans or other non-canine animals...and is often linked to what is known as social aggression. Although many traditionalists desire a degree of interspecies rank or social aggression among police and military types of service dogs, it is my believe that interspecies rank drive is unacceptable for a family companion guardian type of dog, as I find such dogs to be untrustworthy and often times unstable, especially around children.

5. Cur - this is not a drive. This is a descriptive reaction. It describes an animal that quits as a result of realizing success isn't likely. This is both a positive and a negative. In the natural world...in nature it promotes survival...which is good. A natural world a canine shouldn't fight a

losing battle, not if it wants to live and reproduce. For some types of domesticated dogs though this is not desirable. Fighting dogs, protection dogs, and even tracking dogs have been selected to not quit their job...and for these groups a "cur" is not desired. A rank driven dog will often cur when it sees it can't dominate, therefore a term developed known as "rank cur" came about when a dog would bluff or start rough, but would rather decisively quit as soon as it realized it wasn't going to dominate its opponent. This is not the type of dog you want for PP work, and this is another reason why I don't like rank driven dogs.

6. Game - this is not a drive. This is a descriptive term that is often used to refer to a dog that won't quit and that always sees himself as winning or succeeding...no matter how bad they get.

7. Courage - Is not a drive, but is a measure of confidence and in some cases overlaps to stability and nerve.

8. Stability - This is not a drive, but is a measure of "clear headedness." A stable dog does not flip flop or redirect with inappropriate behaviors regardless of stress. Although redirecting behaviors are expressed in response to stress...A stable dog may have strong nerve, but does not require strong nerve. A weak nerved dog could also be stable by simply shutting down. To help clarify this unique behavior, let's refer to many game dogs for examples. It is known many game dogs will not bite a person even in a heated fight even under stress in that "driven" environment. These dogs will often remain focused on their opponent regardless of the stress (not redirecting = stability) yet the same dog may shut down when taken into a noisy busy shopping area or traffic (expressing stress = weak nerve). Although nerve and stability are connected, they are not the same.

9. Nerve - This is not a drive. Nerve relates to a behavioral expression of stress. A strong-nerved dog is a dog that isn't easily stressed. A weak nerved dog is a dog that is easily stressed.

10. Threshold - This is not a drive. If there is any aspect of animal terminology that is often misunderstood...this would be one such term. A threshold refers to the amount of stimuli required to elicit a change in behavior. In other words, a threshold is what is needed to cause a new response by stimulating it. A clear example would be a stimulus strong enough to the illicit the "fight" option of defense drive...but not so strong to cause flight. A threat presents itself and the dog/animal responds by showing a change in behavior (aggression). Then there are ALSO thresholds that cap that behavior by again causing a new response. Take the same example of defense, but now say the heat of the threat gets turned up and causes the dog/animal to change from the fight option to the flight response. By ending the fight option and started a new behavior we capped the fight threshold and just caused the flight response. And now take it further...and say the dog has ran so long that it is exhausted and must lay down...this again is a new stimulus (tired) and therefore caused a new response (laying down/no longer if flight).

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