

Fur Kids? Paw Parents?

Does language modify behavior or does behavior modify language? Are laws arising as a result of changes in our language, expressions and words, which have, in turn, altered our attitudes toward animals?

Words have crept into our vocabulary that is increasingly being reflected in the dog/owner relationship. Transformed words and expressions are placing different emphases on animal shelters, rehoming organizations and the rehomed dogs, often to the detriment of that relationship.

Are we, who daily fight to maintain the right to own animals, too harsh on those who are anthropomorphizing their dogs by how they use language??

Recently, I posed those questions to a group of thoughtful animal anti-animal rightist activists, and it was a match that ignited a bonfire. There was frustration --such as how the word "breeder" is now used to debase decent people. "Profit" has developed such a negative connotation that breeders defensively insist that they lose money on each pup. While talking in social media, breeders can no longer discuss their dogs living in 'kennels,' but the dogs must now live in 'dog rooms.' The 'compassionate' reader wonders about expressions like "pet quality," and questions why all dogs aren't the same, and about why one dog is favored over the other.

The group members expressed concern about animal rights groups using words to harm us, yet, well-meaning breeders use the very same words until they become familiar and are constantly used in everyday conversations. One person related how she heard a breeder call another person a 'greeder,' because of the number of litters she had that year. Everybody has heard another breeder called by the infamous "mill" word.

The group was frustrated by the increasing anthropomorphizing language used by dog owners, not only for "pocket dogs" and "stroller dogs," but also by those in the breeding community. It has become a vocabulary that is increasingly, deliberately blurring the lines between animal and human. We questioned when this phenomenon began, as even the younger people in the group couldn't remember their mothers referring to themselves 'pawparents,' 'pet parents,' or calling their dogs 'furkids.' The trend seems to have appeared in the early '90's at about the same time that Animal Rights groups were gaining ground in the media and impacting our lives.

The group discussed words that increasingly anthropomorphize dogs, which should be anathema to a breeder, as it reduces the worthy and historic interest in producing quality animals to cartoon characters such as Pongo, Augie and Snoopy. Some of the words mentioned, not in any special order of distaste: Pet Parent, Furkid, (Fur anything), Paw Parents, Furever Home, Foster Mom, Best Friend, Family Member, and my Baby. There are now even dictionary definitions for most of those words;

they have become so ingrained in dog owner culture. Furkid, for example is often defined as, "A pet (normally a cat or dog) that the owner treats as if it were a child." Modern Dog Magazine wrote that "These words blur the divide between humans and other animals in our society, muddying the comfortably clear-cut distinction we've set between the roles and rights of each"

<http://moderndogmagazine.com/articles/furkids/12550#sthash.dQXnEDYW.dpuf>

The recent dictionary definitions of some words are changing to reflect these damaging alterations. When looking up a simple word such as *companion*, the older dictionary versions define the word as "one that accompanies another: comrade, associate; also: one that keeps company with another" (Merriam Webster). A more recent Google Web definition becomes, "a person or animal with whom one spends a lot of time or with whom one travels." An even stronger change is in the word zoophile. "*Zoophile* — n. a person who is devoted to animals and their protection from practices such as vivisection" Collins English Dictionary. More recent definitions assign some form of sexual attraction to animals to the word. There are many other examples of how actual formal definitions are being altered to reflect a growing change in how animals are perceived.

These are the terms used by those well-intentioned, admirable folks who rehome dogs and who want to invoke sympathy for the animals that are found homeless or in a situation that requires removal. However, words like "rescue" ("Rescue: when someone or something is rescued from danger: a daring rescue at sea") becomes a term for any dog or animal that is in a shelter for any reason at all. It has become that now, when a person buys a dog from a perfectly safe rehoming organization or shelter, they add "rescue" to the name as if "rescue dog" was an actual breed. If asked by a stranger what their dog is, the first response is often, "Oh, he's a rescue dog," or "I rescued him from the shelter." There are certainly cases where dogs are rescued -- the dogs pulled from the Katrina floodwaters, from absolutely abusive environments, etc. -- however, most dogs in shelters or rehoming organizations are no longer in danger; they are safe, no longer needing to be "rescued."

While 'adopt' can be applied many ways, the first definition will always be some version of: "To take into one's family through legal means and raise as one's own child." 'Adopt,' instead of purchase; 'Donation' instead of purchase fee; has become the new language for those who rehome dogs. There have, indeed, become an increasing number of breeders who now 'place' their dogs through 'adoption,' with a hefty 'adoption fee.'

Why is all of this so important? It makes it easier for those Animal Rightists to convince the public that animals should have the same *rights* as humans, and therefore should not be owned by a human. Such as: Breeders shouldn't breed (words like *force them to breed* comes to mind); Breeders shouldn't *force* them to be performance dogs, or show dogs, or therapy dogs. By humanizing dogs (pawparents, furbabies, my kids) in the media and everyday usage, it increases that blurring tenfold. It gives the Extremists that much more ammunition to use against

the owning of animals. We need to be cognizant that by buying into and using the blurred language promoted by the Animal Rights groups and the media, we are legitimizing that language. ARs use the transformed expressions in order to justify legislation – such as the Guardian ordinance in Boulder and other cities and states. That ordinance takes away the *ownership* and creates a completely different legal definition for the dog in your house. Beware, or be aware of the language that you use, because it may and will have unanticipated and unintended consequences.