

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiere

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiere, where I ask her: How can my dogs live their best lives? Welcome to Getting Curious, this is Jonathan Van Ness, I'm so excited I cannot handle my excitement for today, this is, like, a really relevant topic in my life. I'm burgeoning with curiosity. We have a literal doctor. And if you've been listening to Getting Curious for some time, you know that I freak out for, like, a doctor. I mean, I freak out for everybody, but really a doctor just takes me there. So welcome to the show. Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiere, who is the director of the Thinking Dog Center at Hunter College, where she focuses on studying the behavior and cognition of domestic dogs and other, I'm-, canids? Canids?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:00:56] Yeah, you got it! Canids!

JVN [00:00:57] How come we don't say canines?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:01:00] Well, we have different classifications and so we can say canids. We're talking about things that go beyond just domestic dogs.

JVN [00:01:07] So is, like, is a canid, like, what are those other little things in Lion King? Like, there's the three of them. And they think they're, they're kind of best friends, and they're kind of dog-ish.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:01:17] They're hyenas, aren't they?

JVN [00:01:19] Hyenas! So are those cats?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:01:21] I actually don't know. I'd have to go look it up. But really fun fact about hyenas. Females have a pseudo penis, so that's kind of random. But that's literally the only thing that I know about hyenas. I do not study them, but you should get a hyena expert on this show.

JVN [00:01:33] I didn't mean to go take such a hard left. I just-. So is a candid, like, like, a wolf.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:01:38] Yeah. So we have different types of classification systems. So when we think about canids you can think about things like wolves, you can

think about things like dogs, you can think about things that are, are essentially sort of canine-like.

JVN [00:01:52] I've literally never heard that word until I read your bio. Like, I'm obsessed with learning new words. I can't even stand it. But, OK. So and then, Doctor Byosiere, is that OK if I call you Sarah?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:02:04] Yeah, I go by Sarah. No. One uses the doctor title.

JVN [00:02:07] OK, but it's so fierce, I love it. Like, you know, I just freak out for a doctor. So here's the question for today. No one totes knows this yet. You're hearing it here first. But I impulse adopted another puppy. So now I have two dogs. My husband made the same face that you're making now. What happened was, is I met this rescue puppy whose mom was literally killed by a fucking coyote. And so all the puppies were orphaned when they were, like, three days old. They all, like, got bottle fed till they were, like, ten weeks old. But that's how I met this puppy. And then the lady who had rescued them was, like, you know, told me the story I just told you. And that I was like, "Ahhh! I need this puppy. I was born to raise this puppy! Like, Pablo will be normal. Like my ovaries are exploding, like, I have to have this puppy!"

So, so then we said that we'd foster because we do have, like, one kind of angry, one-eyed rescue dog named Pablo, who he loves so much. And we've had him for just about a year. So, you know, our hands have been full. Now we have two dogs, five cats, four chickens. That totals eleven animals. We have a lot. Our hands are full. But basically, I just, really, when I learned about you, I was, like, "We have got to have Sarah on and learn more about dog behavior." And I've got so many questions. This could be, like, a ten part series. I am kind of a nightmare and, so can, so basically, will you just tell everyone so that I don't talk for the first twenty five minutes of this podcast before I let you get a word in edgewise about who you are and what you do.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:03:39] Yeah. So I'm the director of the Thinking Dog Center, which when you're wondering, like, "What is the Thinking Dog Center and what do we do?" I kind of have in many ways what I think is the best job in the world. I get to play with dogs all day. New Yorkers generally bring in their pups. We play problem-solving games with them, always to find fun toys, snacks, treats, everything that's super enjoyable for these guys to do. And basically, these problem-solving tasks are designed in a way to tell us a little bit something about dog cognition or dog behavior. So they get to engage in these really fun games. And I get to learn a little bit about the science behind dogs. So essentially that's what my research really focuses on. But we study a whole bunch of

different, sort of, disciplines within dogs. We study shelter dogs, we study dog training, we study are dogs susceptible to illusions? So, the whole gambit.

JVN [00:04:28] OK, I'm so glad that I asked you that question because it actually inspired me to, like, not talk about myself and my dogs for, like, at least another twenty minutes because I have so many questions about this. So let me get this straight. You study, like, what dogs can see.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:04:42] Yes.

JVN [00:04:44] So, like, what can they see? We just, and just sidebar, we had this genius, like, doctor slash philosopher come on to teach us about, like, what are animals thinking? Because my step dad always told me that since animals don't speak, they don't think. But then this lady was like, "Oh woah, woah, woah, woah, no. Because, like, what is language? It's communication. It's more than just words. It can be body language. It can be this. It can be that, like, so they totally think." There's-, because I always just thought it was, like, a white noise machine going on in there. If they didn't have language, like, between their ears, it was just, like, "Whhooooooo." But it's not like that. Right. That's what we learned from this podcast with our fierce philosopher. So they, all animals are really up and they're thinking,

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:05:17] Yeah, yeah. So what do we know about dogs and how they see the world? So they see the world a little bit differently than we do, which is kind of cool. Right? The first thing that I think people don't really think about is where are they in terms of height? So, like, even just as something as simple as, like, where are they located in the world? They're kind of at your knee-length or below, and so when you think about "What do they see?" they're seeing everything that's around your knees. So things on counters, they don't see things on the car seat when they're trying to jump in, they have no clue. And so I always say, you know, when you're asking your dog to jump up in the car and it's the first time, be a little patient, you know, you could be asking them to just jump into a black hole and they're trusting you, and they know that you've got their best interests at heart. But even just from the physical perspective of where they are in space, their world looks so different from the world that we see.

JVN [00:06:15] I am so selfish, I never realized, so, yes! But I never, oh my God, my dogs, they see. So they must think that my head is, like, some crazy hairy skin hair dog that, like, pops down from my knees sometimes, like, how do they see me?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:06:35] Yeah. So the fun, the fun thing is, is that we actually do know a little bit about how dogs see faces of humans as well and, and, and sort

of gauge human emotion. And so we have these studies that tell us that, that dogs can understand sort of our emotional valence and the context from the facial expressions that we're giving. So this is kind of cool. So maybe when you do pop down, they learn over time that this is not, you know, something that's super terrifying. But actually this is someone who's going to give them a cuddle or someone who's going to give them a snack. And this is actually a really good thing. But like, yeah, your head is way larger than the head of, you know, the average Chihuahua. So perspective is very different. The world is a very big place for very small dogs.

JVN [00:07:16] OK, so are, like, are some breeds of dogs, like, colorblind and other ones aren't? Or do they all see color?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:07:23] Oh, this is such a good question. So when it comes to color perception, this is actually something that's something that I focus on and it's so hard to to figure out even within humans. OK, so just, like, let's think about this theoretically, like, if you and I are both looking at a strawberry, we agree that that strawberry is the color red. Right?

JVN [00:07:45] Yes.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:07:46] We're, like, "Yes. That strawberry is red. It's super delicious. I want to eat it. It's super yum." But how do I know that the color red that I'm seeing is the exact same color red you're seeing.

JVN [00:07:56] As a hair colorist, I-, no, as a hair-, I have run into this a lot, you know, I've read into this a lot because it's like when someone says, like, "I want a beige blond," it's, like, and then they pull out this blond. It's, like, an ash paper white. And so, like, everyone has, like, a different perception of like, what color is that? So I'm totally tracking, like, yes, it's, like, some, like, the blue might look a little bit different to everyone, like, the red might look a little different to everyone. OK, so I'm tracking on that. So, but, what about the animals? Do they have blue, the black and white color? Do we literally not know? What does your research say?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:08:25] Yeah, so we do know that they are what we call dichromate, which means that they have two cone photoreceptor cells in their eyes. And that's different from humans. Humans are trichromats. So we have three, which means that I know that means that maybe they don't see colors the way that we do.

JVN [00:08:44] So how do they see that?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:08:47] That's a great question and one that I really wish we had the answer to. We kind of think that because they, they, they sort of align with what a red-green colorblind human would see, we think that's probably how the world looks to them. But that's not to say that red and green things totally disappear. Like, I always get this question of "Should I get rid of all my red toys because my dog is red-green colorblind. It's a dichromate. What happens when I throw my red ball on the green grass? Does it just, like, disappear?" And the answer is try it and see what happens. There's other things beyond color that dogs actually use to figure out that there's an object there. Right. So just because the ball is red and the grass is green, the red ball might reflect light differently. So it might actually look brighter than the grass behind it or the way that the surface of the ball looks. It could be textured. And so maybe that provides an additional cue. And so probably that ball doesn't just magically disappear. What probably ends up happening is that they're seeing, like, two shades of brown that are a little bit varied and so they can pick it up and, and evaluate. "Yes. OK, awesome. This is my ball."

JVN [00:09:55] But what's red-green color blind again, in humans?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:09:58] It's called deuteranopia. So it's when humans can't really make a distinction between red and green. So we have these amazing tests that we do in humans where you look at these, like, all these little spots in a circle and you have to identify a number. They're called Ishihara Plates. And so you can take these tests online to see if you're actually colorblind. And there's multiple different types of colorblindness out there. You can be blue-orange color blind. But the most common one we see is in men, and it's red-green colorblindness.

JVN [00:10:27] And so for them, red and green just looks brown?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:10:32] It's a good question. I actually don't know off the top of my head what they see, but the colors blend together. And so you can't make a distinction between the two. So if you were red-green colorblind and you were looking at one of these Ishihara Plates and I asked you, "Hey, can you see a number in there?" You would tell me "No. All those little dots in there look identical. And I cannot see a number in this, in this visual stimulus."

JVN [00:10:56] Oh, because it really would be, like, there would be, like, a green four in the circle. But if it all blends together, you can't see it.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:11:04] Exactly!

JVN [00:11:50] Oh, my God. OK, ok, moving on. OK, ok. So that's how dogs. So it's-, ok. OK. What about dog dreams, when they're, like, running. Do you think that they, like, see in little dog dreams? Obviously!

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:11:21] My non-researcher hat says yes. One hundred percent for sure. They are definitely chasing squirrels and they are definitely running after little rabbits and having a great time. The cool thing is, is that we've actually just started studying this in dogs. There's some really great research coming out of a laboratory in Hungary where they're doing fMRI research on dogs who are sleeping and they're learning things, really cool things that I can't even explain but about, like, sleep spindles and how that aligns to human sleep cycles and all these really amazing, phenomenal things.

JVN [00:11:55] OK, I'm obsessed with that! OK, so OK, so what about memory? So, like, if you, like, yeah, so if you, like, have to take your pupper somewhere for, like, three months for, like, summer dog camp or something or whatever, like, how long do they remember stuff? Or is all dogs different because like all people remember things for different amounts of time?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:12:18] Yeah. So the cool thing is, is that most of the memory stuff that we do in dogs actually is about working memory. So you know how if I ask you to, like, remember a phone number or something and you sit there and you're, like, recalling those numbers over and over and over again, and if I disrupt you and, like, start randomly shouting numbers, it becomes harder to remember the original phone number? So that's, that's an example of working memory. And so most of the tests we do in dogs are kind of like this. We're asking them to recall different things that are in their working memory. But do they remember you when you come back?

That's a different type of memory called episodic memory. So these are kinds of things like the what, the where, the who of one's kind of past experience. And so this is something that we haven't really investigated super well in dogs. There's a couple of cool studies that have looked at, like, single subjects to kind of see, "Hey, can you recall what happened at this point in time?" And they ask them a specific sort of question that's been trained and then they see, can they generalize this to a novel context? And it's not super convincing? I'm hoping we'll get some more research in that realm soon.

JVN [00:13:32] Can you explain what you just said? Like, to-, what? So, like, how do you ask a dog if it remembers something from an episode? Like, is that like teaching them to sit, like, on a raft and then taking them somewhere else or something, like, what is it? Like, how would you do that with a dog.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:13:47] Yeah. So these are usually really well trained dogs. So there's a couple of super cool dogs that were named Betsy and Rico. These are, if you've ever heard of, like, Chaser the Border Collie, who could remember thousands and thousands of names for toys. And she could, you could tell her, like, "Go get Darwin!" and she'd, like, go through a pile of, like, a hundred toys and go pick out Darwin. But basically, some researchers gave two dogs, these two dogs Betsy and Rico, a chance to kind of view two separate rooms with various objects within them. And so then the dogs were asked to go get one of the objects in that room. So these dogs are already super well trained. They know the words for these objects, like, this is beyond what my pet dog can do, like, this is really exceptional. And so then what they looked at was trying to see how those dogs would vary their search patterns based off of their previous experience within the room. So the idea was, "Oh, if you can recall information about what you previously did in the room and how you searched for certain toys when you found new toys, can that then tell us something about your episodic memory?" So, like, super intense, right?

JVN [00:14:55] So did they? Did they remember? Did they use any of their old skills? Nooo!

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:15:00] So one of the dogs did seem to, yeah. One of the dogs seemed to kind of demonstrate that he had this capacity to remember what he did and the other dog, not so strong. So it's kind of up in the air.

JVN [00:15:14] Interesting. OK, well, that makes sense because, like, everyone's so unique, so I'm sure, like dogs all have different levels of, like, of, of being able to do this or that. OK, so now I have a million questions about myself and my own family.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:15:31] I love it.

JVN [00:15:32] OK, ok, so from the very beginning also. OK, so here's where it all started. We adopted Pablo, and he was, like, so sweet, like, the best dog of all time, and he still is the best dog all time. But there was very much, like, a pink cloud of, like, three weeks where, like, because this was, like, last summer, my aunt had come into town, like, she had quarantined for a few weeks. We quarantined for a few weeks. So she came into Austin for, like, five whole weeks. And it was in that time that we adopted Pablo. And she has a dog. So her, her little dog, Harper and Pablo were besties. Pablo was, like, with these other two old sisters who are so cute and, like, 13 and just the cutest old sisters. And he seemed to be down with them.

And then after about three weeks, it's, like, Mark bent down to, like, take this, like, you know, Kong thing away that had, like, you know, the peanut butter treat in it. Pablo bit the shit out of his hand. Now, I should mention, we had gone from our lake house in Texas to

New York, and we did it on, like, a road trip. And so we did have Pablo in the car for, like, you know, two-and-a-half days, like, of a hardcore road trip after having him for about six weeks. So there was, like, in our first few months, like, I think, two three-day road trips within like six weeks is a lot for a dog, like in retrospect.

So I've often wondered, like, "Oh my God, did we put this, like, traumatized dog through, like, too much shit at the beginning?" But anyway, that was the first nip. So then so then we got this dog trainer, we really, like, stuck in for the long haul. I realized by that point that he fucking hated New York compared to Texas. Like, his anxiety was just, like, a different level, like, with the banging and the construction and the stuff and then going outside to walk and seeing all these dogs, like, it just went from, like, zero to seven hundred, like, way too quick. So I was like, "OK, when we go to New York, you'll stay in Texas."

And Pablo's come such a long way, he had so much leash reactivity, like, just extreme. Now he takes really, really good walks. But I will say, I'm so sorry I'm talking so much. I'm a nightmare. I'm sorry, but I've got to tell you everything I know. You tell me what you think I should do. So is everyone like this with their dogs when they talk to you about, like, dog behavior and stuff?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:17:42] Yes. And I'm also like this.

JVN [00:17:44] OK, so basically, so whenever, if I have anyone come in town now, if it's more than one person, Pablo has to go to, like, the dog place because it's just, I don't want to set him up to fail. And it just, it's historically felt like too much. And also it really stresses my husband out, which I'm pretty sure Pablo can feel that, like, you know, his other dad is, like, stressed out, you know, and just on edge. So I just, I feel like it makes his alpha come out and I feel like it just makes him be on edge. So, but, when there's one person that comes in town, we just say, "Don't touch him, don't look at him, ignore him. Like, just don't pay him any attention. He's air. If you think that you can touch him, don't fucking bite you. Like, just don't fucking-, he's air, OK."

So then we have my mom in town. She was really good at that, she really respected that. And after five days, my mom and I were sitting alone on the kitchen table. Pablo walks over to her, jumps up on her leg, and he's, like, tail wagging, ears up, seems really happy. And my mom's, like, "I think he, like, loves me and, like, is, like, into me now." And I was like, "Honestly, I kind of think so, too. Like, I think this is his way of being like, 'I'm down with you, bitch.'" And so my mom was, like, "Should I try petting him?" And I was like, "Yes." So when I'm really trying to do this story hilarious, I do this thing where my mom goes [GESTURE] at him, but it really wasn't that dramatic.



It was a, it was, like, a slight, it was a slightly fearful pet, but not, like, a massively timid one. It just was, you know, it went to-, she went in with a soft hand. I told her to come and, you know, like, come in on his good side, not the, like, not the no eye side. And the second that her hand got within, like, 18 inches of his head. I saw the ears pinned back. I saw one paw come off of her leg and I was, like, "Mom, come out, come out." And she started to withdraw, and the second she started to withdraw, he was already, like, lunging. And he didn't bite her, but came really close. So here's the thing. He doesn't bite legs. He doesn't bite, like, things. It's only hands, you know, and it's, like, only if he doesn't know you. So the fuck is that about?

And then I meet the puppy and then I was like, well, fuck. What do I do with Pablo? Am I going to be OK? Is Pablo going to murder the other fucking puppy? Because he's not-, but he's growing so fast. I just, you know, so they both are kennel trained for sleeping. We do at least walks together twice a day to integrate. And, you know, we do leashes. But now we've been doing supervised playtime in the backyard without leashes. But I'm in the back with both of them. And I haven't had any biting. There is some lunging sometimes, there's a little bit of lunging, but Pablo seems chill.

But because he's had this whole Jekyll and Hyde thing where he seems chill and then-, okay, the other time his really angry side came out as we tried to put a winter jacket on him in New York. Not a good idea. We actually had to take him to the vet to get it removed because he was, like, it really brought out his, like, sustained naughty side, I was like, "We're never doing this again. Oh my God." So, are we bad people? Is Pablo healable? Are we going to be OK? And will the dogs like each other? It seems like they're kind of down with each other so far. OK, I'm ready, go ahead!

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:20:27] OK, so are you, are you bad people? No, absolutely not. I mean, the fact that you are thinking about all these things that you're going through, all these motions, this is a lot of effort, right? We always talk about the good side of pet ownership and the good side of having a dog and what that means: stress reduction, more physical activity, because you go on walks. The fact that your, your love hormones increase because you're petting your dog. But sometimes it's, it's not all sunshine and rainbows. Right. So this is a, this is a great example of all the stuff that dog owners, cat owners, pet owners in general go through.

And so the fact that you are, you haven't given up and that you're still looking for resources, and you're learning and applying new tips, feedback, suggestions to all these different contexts, in my mind, that just demonstrates that you're a fantastic pet owner that cares about the well-being and your relationships with your pets, but also with the other

people in your life in relation to those pets. So you're doing awesome. This is hard, right? This is not easy. So I apologize that it's not all sunshine and rainbows always. But I think that's something that we don't talk about enough when it comes to pet ownership. And so it can feel really isolating as an owner when you feel like your pets aren't behaving the way that they should.

JVN [00:21:43] Especially when people are, like, so judgmental!

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:21:46] No, you're right. People are exceptionally judgmental. And we put a lot of stock into thinking that the way that our pets behave are at the fault of the person who's caring for them. And that's not true. You know, your pets have their own personalities. They have their own quirks, they have their own qualms. Sometimes you got them as, you get them as a puppy, sometimes you get them as a 10-year-old. And so that means that you don't always necessarily know the entire history. And so judging somebody for the way that their pet behaves, not a great thing to do. There's no value that comes from that. I mean, I think we can do a lot more by being supportive and encouraging owners and guardians to find resources so that they don't shut down when these things happen, so that the education component here is really to seek out more information than shy away because you feel like you're being burdensome or somebody is judging you. It's just not fair. So the second question is, what was that, is, is Pablo screwed over for life?

JVN [00:22:47] Yeah, because, like, Pablo, we got him when he, we think he was about to he was, you know, he does have one eye. I've always, like we were told when we adopted him by both the people that, from the shelter and from the trainers that we worked with, they were like, "You know, it's really important that you don't spend too much time thinking about what the trauma was or trying to surmise, like, maybe what happened because a bajillion things could have happened. So, like, you know, don't." But so, you know, he has one eye, he, he was running around South Texas for about two years, they say when they found him, like, he didn't really come from a yard, it was more of just he was, like, out on the streets. And I want to set him up for success. But it's, like, I guess, you know, with this new puppy, it's like, did I-, I kind of thought maybe having him have another friend would be good for him?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:23:28] So I love that you use that term setting your dog up for success, because it's what I do. It's, like, every time I think about, "Should I take my dog to this place?" or "Should I do this with my dog?" or "Should I interact with my dog in this way?" I think using that sort of as a prompt to think, "OK, should I go to New York this weekend and should I take Pablo? Am I going to set myself up for success? Am I going to set Pablo up for success?" Probably not. "Am I going to set him up for success by taking

him to this fantastic trainer who loves him and who he loves? And he's going to have a great time?" Yes, that's probably the best way to go.

So I love that you use that term because this is such an important thing to think about, because you can think about, "OK, it would be great to take Pablo because I would have fun, like, it would be great for me. I could take him for three months and we would get to cuddle together." Which he doesn't like, but, you know, we'll pretend for, you know, the story's sake that he would love to cuddle, you know, in the perfect world. But that's not who he is. So setting him up for success kind of just depends on what his success is. And so that depends on the dog you have.

And so maybe Pablo is not the cuddler, but maybe Elton will be. And who knows? It sounds, right, like right now, the way that you're introducing the two of them, the way that you're doing these fantastic walks that are these co-walking walks where they get to see each other, they get to explore the world together, they're not too long. This is fantastic. The supervised, off-leash visits in the backyard. Great. They can play together. You can recall one of them or both of them back every five minutes or so to kind of interrupt it, give them fun snacks. This is a playful environment. We love this. These are all really good things that will set them up for having a fantastic relationship. And that's not to say that their relationship needs to be that they're spooning and cuddling on the couch together, but they may be really good friends. And Pablo may have the play partner you've always wanted.

JVN [00:25:23] OK, I have a few more, I have a lot more questions. OK. So we don't let Pablo on couches or beds because we noticed it, like, weirdly, like, couch, bed, or, like, sitting. If we take him "bye-bye," as we call it, in the car, if you like, take him to, like, you know, to go walk on the river, like, if we take him to this coffee place that's, like, pro-dogs where we live. And you only do it in the morning when we know there's no one else there. Like, we don't do it. Like, it's only at seven in the morning for him.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:25:47] I love it! You're doing great things!

JVN [00:25:48] But we just noticed that, like, food aggression related things started to happen? We thought at first, that it was just, like, a, you know, resource guarding, which can you tell the listeners like what resource guarding is?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:25:59] So, so resource guarding, it can vary. It's kind of a spectrum. So any attempt to kind of grab an item or keep an item and sort of be a little bit protective or in a sense not want to give that item up, that can be an example of resource. So it can be something that's in a sense not super harmful. Like, "I steal this sock and I just

run away from you because I don't want to give it up." But it can be something as extreme. And those are the cases where you see owners who want to reach out to qualified trainers and vet behaviorists, all of these types of specialists where the dog has a bone or food or a toy and will actually react negatively or in a sense harshly towards the owner. So maybe biting, nipping, when you try to get the object back.

JVN [00:26:44] It's happened to us with toys. It's happened, then he turned to his kennel, like, he started to resource guard the kennel. Then he also, like, we, we taught him place. So, like, "Place!" where you go to, like, the, little, like, elevated platform area or, like, his own bed. We have like three different places for him. There was a day, like, just three weeks ago, pre-Elton. But he I said place and then he went to place and then I went and walked by and he just went fucking berserk. Like, I didn't even reach for him. Nothing. He just tried to, like, "grrr." And I was like, "What the fuck?" And then I started to walk towards him and, like, his, he bore his teeth like he was about to, like, attack. And I was like, "Oh, hell no." I was like, "Come, come." And then I, like, made him go to this other place. And then I realized that the cat had taken this vat of baked beans. And thank God the lid didn't come off, and Pablo had taken it to place and Pablo was guarding these beans. I just didn't even know that there was beans there.

Which is part of why we don't do treats or bones, no treats, like, no treats, no bones, because he often will take one, hide it. And then if you don't realize it's there, you're toast. So it's another, like, setting them up for success thing, but we don't even do treats. I'm scared to give him a treat around the puppy because I don't want that to bring that out around that. So, like, we don't even fucking do treats because he's so touchy around that. So first we thought, "OK, it's just resource guarding." Then we, the trainer was like, "Look, girl, here's the thing." I'm paraphrasing here. He didn't say "girl," but whatev-? So he was like, "Look, there is a small percentage of dogs that it's like the step above resource guarding where, like, they're just, like, alpha dogs. Like, they just they're just kind of alpha and they don't really fucking like you telling them what to do because they are just in their little hierarchy like they are, they are the one." As a doctor, like, does that sound like something that maybe could be true?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:28:22] So it's, it's super hard without knowing Pablo, without seeing the behaviors. That being said, my first suggestion always to anyone who is dealing with this type of a problem is to go talk to the vet. The reason why is that there could be something healthwise going on that would be a cause for concern. So, for example, you're-, everything that you're saying makes it sound like these are things on his body, hands close to his body, close to his face, all of these things. And so maybe there's, maybe he's in pain in some way, shape, or form. So maybe there's a pinched nerve or a muscle or something that's causing, you know, him to lash out, because when the hand

comes close, usually it touches him. It causes him pain. So his response is, "I lash out so that people don't touch me." Right. And so that would be my first step, before saying, "OK, let's just double check," rule out that there's no health issues.

JVN [00:29:14] We have taken him to the vet, like, twenty-seven billion, million, million times, like, he's been tested for, like, everything under the sun. He does have, like, an ear infection that comes sometimes because he has allergies. So he is, like, on an allergy pill. And I can tell when he's, like, shaking his little head, like, that, like, you know, the ear is bothering him. So we have had to get, like, that allergy stuff or the, you know, the ear infection stuff like, you know, where they plug the little ear hole. And I think he might, you know, have some ear, nose, throat stuff because he's missing an eye.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:29:39] Yeah, so he might have some sensitive ears.

JVN [00:29:42] Yeah, he definitely has sensitive ears. I definitely know that. But do you think that he's an alpha? Is that a thing?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:29:48] So it's, it's, it's not. I hate to be the bearer of bad news in the sense that the idea of dominance theory is what we call it in, in the dog world. This idea that you have an alpha in the pack. It's actually been debunked. So it was originally something that was observed in wolf packs where you would have this alpha-like figure. It's where we get some of these strategies which we shouldn't be doing, like, "alpha rolling" your dog, because you need to create a-, the, the sense that you are the dominant individual in the household. So you, like, thrash your dog over in a sense to create this dominance-like structure. This is not something you should ever do with your dog.

This is, this is bad for your relationship with your dog. Your dog is not going to like this, and you're not going to have a good time. And so the original research that was done in wolves. Yes, we discovered that we had alphas, betas, all these cool things. And the dog world kind of took it by storm. And then the researcher who actually did this original research came back with newer publications and said, "No, OK, we've made a mistake." We, the evidence suggests, yes, alpha-like structures. But in follow-up studies, he actually found that this was not the case. This was not the structure. And so even though it's been debunked scientifically, it's something that the dog world has kind of held onto for a very, very long time. And so, no, this is, is not something that you need to practice with your dog. And this idea of having an alpha-like persona, it's not valid.

JVN [00:31:18] So Pablo just has, like, he just has trauma, like, obviously from, like, he just has, like, his little version of dog trauma. But resource gardening, we do feel, like, it's, like, so he just has, like, an extreme maybe a little resource guarding thing, like, every once in a

while, just, like, "Don't fucking put a goddamn muzzle on me," you know? What's your thought on muzzles?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:31:41] My thought on muzzles is that they can be very, very good in certain situations and that there is no reason to judge an owner for a dog that has a muzzle on that is actually an owner who is taking care of their dog. And in our words that we're using today is setting their dog up for success. Right. Because that's an owner that knows what their dog's threshold is. They're making it so that they cannot put their dog in an uncomfortable situation, and they're doing a fantastic job. That's not to say that muzzles can be used incorrectly. So, you know, if the muzzle is too small so that the dog actually can't breathe, so they can't open their mouth, then that's problematic. But the judgment that dog owners get for having to muzzle their dog I think is totally unwarranted.

JVN [00:32:25] That's part of why we only take Pablo, you know, anywhere if it's like 7:00 in the morning, where we could absolutely ensure that there will be no one that we can, like, control. And another thing that made it really hard with New York is people just, like, you know, they see me. They want a selfie. They want to pet the dog. And it's, like, I just-, and we actually, physically, like, when he sees the muzzle, he's not living his best life. He's not loving it.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:32:47] Well, so a lot of the time, it's that the muzzle may not be the most fun thing to put on, right? Every, like, the things that we want our dogs to do so that they fit into our lifestyle, so that we can do things with them. They're not usually the most fun, right? Like, walking on a leash nicely next to you and not, like, going out and exploring all the scents, that's, that's a lot of restraint, but also not really what your dog wants to do. Right. Your dog wants to go explore, wants to go sniff things. And you're just, like, "Let's walk nicely next to me so that I can walk you."

And so having some sort of compromise can sometimes be good, but also setting your dog up for success in the sense of, "OK, let's make this the most fun thing ever," so that the muzzle is not, like, "Ugh, it's the muzzle," but "Oh, my gosh, the muzzle is the best thing in the world because I get X or I get treats, food, snacks. I get to walk," something that is super high quality, super amazing and fun can sometimes change their perspective. It's the same thing for us, right? Like I hate cleaning, I hate cooking, I don't like doing domestic things. But, like, if I tell myself that I'm going to go shopping afterwards, like, I'll happily do the dishes. It's fantastic. Best dishes I've ever done.

JVN [00:33:59] So OK, maybe it's, like, if we go on a car ride or something, I don't know, I just have, like, PTSD trying to get a muzzle on him. And I also just think, like, "Why try!" It's

like, that-, it's, like, he's not going to New York anymore. Like, we're not in situations where he would need one.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:34:13] Exactly. And don't force him to, to do those things. That's, that's why we want our dog's consent in some ways for, like, getting the muzzle on. We want these to be-, there's some great practices right now in the dog world in terms of like certifications that you can actually look for in, actually, in trainers as well, but also in other animal professionals, things like LIMA, which means "leash intrusive, minimally averse," or fear-free. These are all kinds of strategies, practices, ways of, kind of, doing what you might call cooperative care. So even things like nail trims or brushing teeth, it's much easier to nail trim a dog who puts his paw in your hand and doesn't constantly pull it away. Right. So that takes effort. And it's a lot harder than holding the paw still and grabbing it and clipping the nails because you have to work your way up to this. But giving them snacks, making this a really fun experience can actually mean that nail-trimming day is spa pedicure day. And it's a really good bonding time for you and your dog.

JVN [00:35:19] It's not our truth. The treats do kind of bring out not his strongest side. What about, like, cats and dogs getting along, like, or tips for people that are, if you're in a situation where you have, like, one dog, if you're like me and you got another puppy, what are some of the things that people can do to, like, better include or better introduce their dogs?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:35:46] If you have an answer for that, let me know, because I'm currently dealing with the exact same thing, and I feel like I have tried everything under the sun, so we can talk about all of my failures and all of the things that have not worked. But that's just to say that they're not working for this particular set of animals. It's not to say that it doesn't work for anyone else. You can always start by introducing them from afar and, and giving your cat space, especially if the cat was kind of the first animal in the household. That's, that's kind of what we did. It's much easier sometimes when the cat sets up boundaries. So if your cat will kind of smack your puppy, in a sense, as sad as that is, it kind of sets up the, the roles that everybody will play in the house. I'm stuck in the current situation where my cat has, let's just say he has a-, he gets a lot of joy out of taunting the dog. And so, like, he's just like, "smack, smack, smack." "This is great!" And coming back for more.

JVN [00:36:49] And your dog's like, "Let me live!"

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:36:52] Yeah, the dog, the dog is like, "Oh, my gosh, this is so exciting." And I'm like, "Oh, dear." Like, we're never going to get over this. You're

supposed to be a guide dog. Like, this is never going to happen. You're going to chase small animals for the rest of your life.

JVN [00:37:03] Oh nooo!

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:37:04] I've heard good things about training your dog to go say hello. So once they're a little bit older and they have a little bit more impulse control, if this is something that's still a problem that you can kind of teach a "go check out the cat and come back" so that you then get over this intense focus on the animal. Some dogs actually just have a really high prey drive. You can think, like, Greyhounds, things like that. They're actually bred to chase small rabbits and animals. And so there are some dogs that maybe just don't do as well with small household animals. So sometimes it can not be the best situation.

JVN [00:37:48] I have one more question, then I want to get into a little fun, gorgeous crash course on the Thinking Dog Center and ask you more about what you do now that I've completely monopolized a lot of the time about myself, because I'm a nightmare. Shock collars, the collar-training things that a lot of dog trainers use. What do you think about those?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:38:07] So, they could cause a lot of damage. And that's the scary thing about them, is that they're they can they can really ruin your relationship when they're not used correctly. And that tends to be the majority of time for pet owners in general. And so I think it's, it's great that we're moving sort of away from relying on these types of tools because, yes, some people may argue that they could serve as a quick fix or as a, sort of a one-shot way to get your dog to do something. But it's not doing you really any favors in terms of your relationship with your dog. Same thing like I was mentioning earlier with the nail trims. Right. It's, it's, it's easy to hold your dog's paw and to clip their nails while they kind of, like, futz around and move and wiggle. They're not enjoying it, but you'll get it done and you'll move on, and it will be five minutes, and it's fine.

But if you can make that a really good time where it's not just a training exercise, but it's a bonding activity, it's cooperative care, these types of things are really nice for your relationship. They can improve the relationship that you have. You as a person might actually see nail trim day as a fun time and your dog might also see it as a fun time. And so with shock collars, they're sort of extremely accessible. You can just go on any website and purchase one. And humans are kind of bad actually learning about dog behavior. And you have to be very, very quick when it comes to either identifying what you want your dog to



do or what you want your dog not to do. And so just making it available for anyone to use can be extremely problematic.

And so that's why in many countries, in the UK and in Australia, shock collars are banned there. You cannot use them. They're not available for purchase. And so we've seen recently, I think one of the large pet store chains has stopped selling them as well. And so I think we're heading in the right direction there. What does that mean then, in the sense for, for pet owners? First of all, if you've used one, it's, it's, it's OK. You know, you've probably discovered that maybe it didn't work super well or maybe on the off chance you had a great trainer who was able to use it successfully and maybe that was the one case where it actually worked out.

So, who knows? You can still recover your relationship. It's not going to be the end of the world. So don't feel like you're the worst pet parent just hearing that, you know, this is not maybe the best tool to use, but there are other tools out there. And so finding a really good trainer that takes a lot of effort. And it's hard to figure out what their credentials mean and where they went to school. And did they even go to school? And are they a positive reinforcement-based trainer, which is kind of what owners should look for, or are they something that they call a balanced trainer. And so these are things that owners have to learn about in and way. And it's, actually, it's a lot of effort.

JVN [00:41:02] I do think we got lucky with someone who seems, I feel like they know what they're doing. And, like, we-, I don't know, I mean, he just was like he went from being like, "I'll fucking bite you if you put a leash on me," to, like, "Oh, I'll walk next to you and be cool. And like, I'll go on place, and I'll sit, and I won't, like, attack people." So I guess I hear what you're saying is, like, sometimes if your trainer is, like, really good, it can work. But, like, on the whole, if you just do it, like by yourself, it's, like, probably not good.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:41:28] Yeah. And even with a qualified trainer, you can sometimes just get into issues. And so the thing is, is that people see the one instance or the two instances where it's successful and they don't see all of the instances where it really caused significant damage in terms of the dog's confidence or in terms of their relationship or something like that. And so they, you kind of see it as, as this fix and you want to try everything, because as an owner, if you're already at your wits end and you're, you're debating, "What do I do? How do I manage this?" This kind of seems like a last resort. And you can go that route. But there are some really fantastic, amazing trainers out there who can actually do this without the use of these tools.

And that's not to say that you can't, for example, use the word "no" or teach, you know, a "no" reward marker, something like that, to indicate, "OK, that's what you shouldn't be

doing," and then reward what they should be doing. So you can use words or sounds or anything to communicate "Eh, try again" or "Yay, keep going." And all of these things can be really helpful. And those will generalize to every context in which you train your dog to do one thing or another thing or another thing. And so it takes a lot of time. Yes. Well, your dog be happier, most likely because a lot of the time the dangers with these, with these collars is that you get a dog that shuts down and a shut-down dog has very unpredictable behavior. And that's where you get into a lot of problems.

JVN [00:42:57] Is it normal just to tell people, like, is it, have you seen other people have dogs or like the rule is just, like, if more than one new person comes over, the dog has to leave the house. And if there is one new person, like, they just cannot touch the dog because it's just too risky. And that's just OK, because that's what Pablo's story is?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:43:11] Yeah. I mean, I have, we have a family dog who we picked up from a shelter who's a fantastic dog. We love him. He's super good with all of us at home. But he will bark at strangers for, like, the first 10, 15 minutes that you come into the house. And it's gotten a little bit worse now because he's so old and he, he's kind of deaf and so he can't hear himself. And so I swear, he barks louder. And so the rest of us are like, "Sam, please stop barking. You're so loud." And so we always warn people that, like, he's a twenty-five pound Schnoodle, you know, super cute. Just give him ten minutes to bark it out and he will be fine. But ignore him. Don't pay attention to him. We have fewer people that usually join us because if we have 12 new guests, he's probably going to bark for an hour instead of, you know, five minutes. So I think this is totally fine. It's your house. You, you can tell your guests how you want them to interact with your dog and setting, setting rules and guidelines so that it's a good set-up for not only your guests, but for your dog and also for yourself. Right. Because this is stressful for the owners. This only helps kind of set everyone on the right track for having a really positive interaction.

JVN [00:44:27] I know that we've gone through a lot of our time, but I do want to go into Thinking Dog Center. Can you tell us what the Thinking Dog Center we're going to do this like pseudo rapid fire. But I want to get we got to get the information. So what is the thinking dog center?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:44:39] So the Thinking Dog Center, it's basically a research group that's in, it's in Manhattan. We are a part of the animal behavior and conservation program at Hunter College. And so this is a group that studies animal cognition and animal behavior in general. But we specifically focus on dogs. And so I know we can't actually see this in the podcast, but my virtual background is actually our dog center. So we have all these amazing graffiti dogs. We had an artist come in and tag it with graffiti dogs just, like, hundred plus of them. We have all this fancy artwork from amazing

artists that are local who take crazy photos of dogs with lovely hair and telephones. And so it's really a space that's set up for the dogs so that they can come in, have a good time. And they engage in these problem-solving games that tell us a little bit about dog behavior and dog cognition.

JVN [00:45:31] And so what are your, your group's primary focus of study?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:45:36] Yeah. So at the center space itself, we primarily focus on cognition. So we run these really fun studies. We had one which we called our bologna study, which was basically taking pieces of bologna and asking dogs to make a choice between the two pieces. And these pieces of bologna are embedded sort of on these little boards that have various stimuli around them. And so in humans, we call them illusions. And so one piece of bologna will actually look larger than the other. And so our question was, "Do dogs also see this bologna as being an illusion? And will they demonstrate a preference for going always towards the large piece of bologna because they want the bigger snack?" And so we do things like that. We also do things like looking at how dogs go around barriers. Will they take the long way around? Will they take a short way? Will they just try to paw at a gate to see if they can get the snack because it's, like, visually right in front of them and they can see it, so can they, can they inhibit their sort of emotional response to want that snack immediately and move around it to actually attain it? Or do they just kind of shut down and keep pawing at it and persisting?

JVN [00:46:53] So what do they do?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:46:55] Sometimes they take the longer way, which is kind of funny. And you're like, "Why would you take the longer way? Like, there's a shorter way!" But it's kind of similar to what we call the Marshmallow Test in humans. So this idea that if you put a marshmallow in front of a kid and you say, "Hey, don't eat the marshmallow, you could be if you wait five minutes, you'll get a second one." And so you'll see these kids that are, like, drooling on the table, and they can't wait the five minutes. They just have to eat that marshmallow immediately. And so this is, like, the dog version of it. Can you not try to get the snack and actually move further away from it to go get it and inhibit that response? And so you see some varied responses. We've definitely seen some dogs knock over the fence, just kind of being, like, "Screw your game, just knock down and kill all of your lovely testing equipment and grab the snack."

JVN [00:47:42] Is there any truth to, like, different breeds, being smarter than others? Or, like, did they get the snack easier, or quicker?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:47:50] Yeah, so it kind of depends. So for most of our dog cognition studies, weirdly enough, while dogs are everywhere, they are the most morphologically diverse animal on this planet. They are just-, a Chihuahua looks so different from a Great Dane, right? They're-, not only in size, but in how their face looks and, and their tail, in their body posture and their length. All of these things, so much variation. And so while we have tons and tons of dogs, we often don't really get large enough samples to really specifically look at breed differences because we would need, like, 100 Chihuahuas and 100 Border Collies. And by the time we do this for all 400 plus breeds that exist, not including the mixed breeds, we would have, you know, sample sizes and studies that we could never publish because we'd never get anything. We never actually finished conducting all this science.

And so most of the time we end up lumping dogs all together. But there's been some cool research that has looked at, for example, just Border Collies. And that's because some of these herding breeds that, that do a lot of these working roles where they were sort of originally bred for the purpose of herding sheep, they see that there's certain behavioral traits with persistence that are good for studies where you need them to kind of participate regularly. So always do the same thing kind of over and over and over again. For us, I would say that we haven't necessarily looked closely at the breed differences. I think this is where we're going to go in the future of dog science. But I think beyond breed differences, we see more individual variation, even within a breed. So I think we're going to see more studies that will look at things like personality and individual behavior regardless of breed.

JVN [00:49:38] So if people are listening to this they're, like, "Queen! Sarah, how did you become this expert in, like, a literal doctor in dog behavior?!" How did you develop this, how can other people do it to, like, find their own inner Sarah? Dr. Sarah.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:49:56] Yeah, yeah. So I always say that I kind of fell into it. My, my parents, actually, I think they hated me when I went to college because I applied to the school, I applied to Michigan State University, which was this, like, agriculture school. And they have, like, this fantastic animal behavior program and they do all the school stuff, like I think they even have, like, a dairy program. And in their dairy, it means that they actually have, like, an ice cream shop from their cows, like, something really fascinating that is just super cool. And so I'm from the Ann Arbor area and there's, like, this big rivalry between the University of Michigan and Michigan State.

And so instead of being the smart person that I should have been and going to this lovely agriculture school, I was like, "No, mom, no, dad, I'm going to go to the University of Michigan because that's where you went and that's where I'm from. And it will be great

and dandy." And literally my first semester, I was like, "I've made the biggest mistake ever. I need to transfer to Michigan State. I've, I've made an oops. Let's go back." And so for, for any college kids that are out there thinking that, you know, they're not at the right school, it's OK. I feel like many of us have that feeling. And I took every single animal class at Michigan that I could, and there were not many. And my, my parents were like, "We told you, you should have gone to Michigan State. Why are we paying this money to go to the school they don't even want to go to?"

And I ended up finding out that there was this world of animal behavior. And I thought you could only study animals if you wanted to be a veterinarian. And that's just not true. But they don't tell you that at Career Day when you're in fifth grade, they don't tell you that you can be a dog cognition researcher and that that's a job. And so I found this researcher who was working on dogs and I was like, "Oh, this is cool, like, let's try this out." And she kind of took me under her wing and I learned a lot. And I ended up taking some classes in primates, because a lot of the things that we, we do in dogs actually stem from the primate literature that, that's where we started studying cognition and now it's kind of merged over.

And so that's how I ended up in this. And every dog opportunity just led to another dog opportunity, which was fantastic for me, because while I think primates are fascinating, I am not the type of person that would do well in the middle of nowhere without WiFi and without my hair straightener, like, this would not be a great setup for me. So I decided that maybe dogs would be right up my alley. And that being said, I always joke that I ended up having to move to Australia to study dogs for my PhD because there were no dogs in the US, which, you know, goes to show you that sometimes your opportunities will take you halfway across the world.

JVN [00:52:40] That's fun! OK, so then, I have two more questions. So how is the understanding of dog behavior evolved over time? We've talked about that a little bit, but is there any, like, overall, overall arching things that, like, if you haven't checked in with dog behavior, cognition since, like, you know, it's been a minute, what do we know now that maybe we didn't know before?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:52:59] Yeah. So actually this field is super new. So in comparison to a lot of other fields, dog cognition has only really been around for the last 20, 20-ish years. And so it kind of feels like we've done a lot. But at the same point in time, we have so much more to explore. So I would say that if you, you know, you checked it in dog cognition in, like, 2000, 2010, we've we've, like, increased the number of studies by, like, five times. It's crazy. This, this field is just booming. And so now we're doing fantastic

stuff like FMRI research. So training dogs to sit still in FMRI machines to see what areas of their brains light up when we show them certain stimuli.

We're doing really cool touch-screen things where we train dogs to, like I say, boop their snout, just, like, boop their snout on a screen to tell us which one is which thing is bigger than the other thing. So we're doing a lot of stuff that kind of goes beyond what kicked off this field. And what kicked off this field was kind of the idea that dogs are really good at following human-given social cues. So things like pointing. Your dog will follow your point. Which seems really easy and really sort of simple. But it's something that even our closest living primate ancestors don't do. They don't follow human-given pointing.

And so it was really unique that we found this in dogs. And so this kind of started the storm of, of what is now dog cognition and behavior. I think the cool thing moving forward is that we're seeing less lab testing. So, and by lab testing, I don't mean like dogs that are kept in a lab. I mean things like where owners bring in their dogs to places like the Thinking Dog Center. So we're seeing actually less of that or at least a divergence from that to actually study dogs in their own home, which I think is fantastic because now we can reach the dogs that would not be suitable to come here. So, like, maybe Pablo doesn't want to come visit us in New York City.

JVN [00:54:56] No.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:54:56] But would love to play games at home.

JVN [00:54:58] Can you come over? Can you please come over?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:55:01] Can I come help? Where are you? Yeah! I'll come over anytime!

JVN [00:55:03] Yeah, we're in Austin, Texas. We're in Austin, Texas. Because he doesn't do New York anymore.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:55:06] I've never been to Texas!

JVN [00:55:10] Ohmigod, you've gotta come here. I actually do have a few more questions. I'm sorry. So one of our, our trainers said that, like, you know, because we were always, like, my husband and I talk to each other and it's, like, really annoying, like, we're still in love voice. Like, "Babe! Babe!" And so there's a lot of, like, that noise. And she was saying, like, "You know, if you're speaking to Pablo in, like, a high-pitched noise, and a high pitched voice, like, they don't understand English, obviously. So if you're, like, [SOUNDS] "You're a

little baby. I love you so much.' It sounds like you might be a hurt dog." So ends up sounding more like "Wahh! Wahh!" So they're never at ease. So is that true? Like, the whole high pitched voice and, like, no eye contact?

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:55:46] So eye contact in many animals can be seen as a threat display, so, like, with primates and things like that, or with wolves, if you make eye contact, this can be something that's threatening. In dogs, not the case. It's weird because we as humans make eye contact. Right? Like, I look at my screen and I see you and I look at your eyes, like, that's where my attention goes. And it's actually really cool. We think that this has sort of evolved in dogs as well, or at least we as humans selectively bred also for this attention to eyes. And so the eye contact is not necessarily a threat display.

Sometimes it can actually increase oxytocin. So this love hormone in your dog and also in you. So dogs actually use eye contact like we use eye contact. And there was actually some really fascinating research that came out that certain dogs, especially newer breeds, have these amazing eyebrow muscles to, like, move their eyes and to kind of evoke the whole "puppy dog eye" phenomenon. And the idea is that maybe they did this because they would get more snacks from us because we do this.

JVN [00:56:50] They get more treats!

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:56:51] Yeah, puppy dog eyes are super cute, right? So maybe they're actually, like, taking advantage of us with our cute puppy dog eyes. But the speech thing is really interesting because I have not heard that before as, as an explanation. It's certainly true that if you use-, we call this "mother-ese." And so it's that infant-directed speech or dog-directed speech where you're doing baby talk, essentially. If you use that, it can be really over-arousing and stimulating. Right. So, like, use it when you need it. But actually dogs have a preference for that type of speech over any other type of speech. So usually it's a great way to get their attention and it's a great way to talk to them because they pay more attention to it.

JVN [00:57:34] Interest.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:57:34] Yeah!

JVN [00:57:35] And then why does Pablo fucking hate our pool? Like, if I jump into my pool and start, like, swimming? He is mad. He doesn't like the water. He's, like, very, like, nervous about the water. And then I feel like he's, you know, he's, like, running the perimeter. He's doing checks like does he feel like he's the alpha and he has to protect me when I jump in the pool.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:57:52] How big is Pablo?

JVN [00:57:54] He's, like, 20 pounds, he's only, like, knee height.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:57:58] OK, so pools can be kind of scary for a little dog.

JVN [00:58:01] That's true, so maybe it's just, like, a big watery thing, and it's like it seems like the noise is, like, he doesn't understand, like the noises, like, he's like, "What the fuck are these noises?" Like the splashing. He doesn't like the splashing.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:58:11] Yeah, yeah. And it might be just overstimulating. Right. Like, you're probably having a great time in the pool, like, lounging on your floaty, splashing around, laughing, giggling, all this stuff as as someone who also has a dog who does not like new things or who doesn't like, you know, really would love a monotone environment where everything is the same all the time. Yeah. So maybe this can be quite overstimulating and so maybe he's just not comfortable.

JVN [00:58:37] Ah! I mean, I don't know, Dr. Sarah. I don't know if I have any other questions. I feel like you have so thoroughly, like, quenched my, like, curious whistle for dogs. I feel so much smarter. I'm obsessed with you and I feel like, are you our new resident dog cognition behaviorist expert? I think you are.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:59:57] Any time, any time. Sign me up for it. I'd love that.

JVN [00:59:01] Thank you so much for coming on. We really appreciate you. And then we're going to put all of the places where people can follow you, find your work in the episode description. And we're just so grateful for you coming on.

SARAH-ELIZABETH BYOSIERE [00:59:09] Thank you for having me.

JVN [00:59:10] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Byosiere.

You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on.

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