

O P I N I O N



Jonah Goldberg

One of my favorite kinds of news stories is the report of a new scientific study that verifies the obvious. New research finds that heterosexual men are attracted to very attractive women. But some research that corroborates the obvious is exciting because some people refuse to accept the obvious.

Which brings me to the work of Dr. Gregory Berns, a neuroscientist at Emory University and the author of "What It's Like to Be a Dog." Berns has, from what I can tell, the best gig in neuroscience. He spends all day taking pictures of dog brains. He uses magnetic resonance imaging to study what's going on in Fido's head.

And what did Berns discover? Something that almost every dog owner in the world could have told you: Dogs aren't faking it when they act like they love you.

Berns and his team confirmed this through a host of tests that looked at different centers of the doggie brain and how they responded to different stimuli. In one test they alternated between giving the pooches hot dogs and offering them praise. Looking at the pleasure centers of the dogs' brains, the researchers found that nearly all the dogs responded to "Who's a good boy?! You are!" with at least as much pleasure as when they got a Hebrew National. A fifth of the dogs actually preferred praise to food.

Berns concluded that dogs derive as much pleasure from love as from food.

As almost anyone who has come home to their dog after an extended absence will tell you, dogs don't go bonkers for missing loved ones solely because they think there's a meal in it for them.

And yet, there are people who argue almost precisely that. There's what I would call the dumb version and the smart version of that particular school of thought. The dumb version, as the label suggests, is dumb.

It can be found in people who say things like, "Dogs

just lick you for the salt," or, "It's just an animal; you shouldn't care about its feelings."

The smart version has more merit. Evolutionary psychologists and other scientists label dogs "social parasites" or, in the words of some, "con artists." They claim that dogs evolved from wolves to exploit our weakness for cuteness. They also note that dogs evolved an ability found almost nowhere else in the animal world: to read human body language and expressions. Indeed, Berns found evidence of this in his MRI studies.

Some, rightly, reject the term "parasitism" in favor of "mutualism," because while dogs certainly benefited from the warmth of cavemen's campfires and the tossed scraps from their mastodon kills, they also made important contributions as guard dogs and hunters. Pat Shipman even speculates in "The Invaders: How Humans and Their Dogs Drove Neanderthals to Extinction" that dogs gave us a competitive advantage against our (presumably) hated rivals, the Neanderthals. Dogs — or proto-wolf/dogs — weren't so much pets as allies in hunting big game, helping us evolve as a cooperative species.

I think that's all true, or at least quite plausible. But what it leaves out is the ingredient missing in almost all discussions of evolved behavior and genetic programming — not just for dogs but for people, too. Dogs obviously evolved to depend on humans, but humans also evolved to depend on dogs. From our genes' perspective, we love our children to ensure that our DNA lives to see another day. But that's not how we consciously think about it, nor does that explanation diminish the experience of love or make it any less real.

Dog genes may be designed to con us, but the dogs themselves aren't in on the caper. They just love us, because that's what dogs do.

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Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

Thank you to all the wonderful people who joined us for the two "Journey's Flight" book publishing parties we had at the middle school and at the chamber building.

It was such a wonderful time that some of us would like to try to make this an annual event. After all, the monarchs begin their southern migration in mid-September of each year. Why not hold a celebration for them which would offer us a wonderful opportunity to educate students and the public about the need to help these vital pollinators survive, which is critical to our food chain?

If you would like to help with next year's event, please contact me at harryandlolabooks@gmail.com.

Jean Nave

Contributing author and publisher of "Journey's Flight"



To the Editor:

One of the first things Oregon's Republican Secretary of State Dennis Richardson did

after being elected in November was to form the "Fair Redistricting Task Force." In April, he announced a complex plan that would give more power to his own office in redistricting decisions.

With Oregon due for a sixth congressional district after the 2020 census, Richardson may get a chance to put his new plan into action.

Indivisible: Sisters, Oregon, is worried about this new, untested redistricting process. If this also scares you, please join us on Saturday, October 7 in watching the one-hour film "Democracy for Sale" and discussing the possible fallout. There will be two showings, at 3:30 and 6 p.m. at the Sisters Library meeting room, followed by a 30-minute discussion.

Will the Supreme Court make new rules to prevent gerrymandering, or will the conservative justices avoid this issue? Make your reservation at EventBrite now! Seating is limited.

Paula Surmann

Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Sunny 74/38	Sunny 78/44	Chance Rain 69/41	Chance Rain 56/37	Mostly Sunny 57/39	Chance Showers 59/38

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