

PARENTS TALK BACK

Prom or anti-prom: where would you party?

There used to be two options for the high school prom: Get a date or stay home.

There’s long been some kind of official or unofficial after-prom party. It could be a school-sanctioned overnight event in a community center, a group sleepover at a beach house or a private sleepover in a hotel room.

The anti-prom is different. It’s a rejection of prom culture — of excess, consumer values, conformity, social hierarchies, authority and its rules and expectations.

Prom has become a rite of passage, a culmination of four years of high school work and play, friendships and feuds. And prom spending has gone through the roof. The national average topped \$1,100 in 2013, according to the annual Visa report. It dipped to \$978 in 2014, but both the West and East coasts exceed \$1,000 per teen attending the big night. The idea of spending that much on a single night to fulfill a teenager’s fantasy of starring in a glam fairy tale seems warped.

A student-led backlash was inevitable. “We were baffled at how emotionally attached everyone got about prom. It became such a big deal for everyone at school,” said Katie Miller, a senior in Bloomfield, Nebraska. “If you’re not the popular kid, if you don’t have a date, it can be a really difficult situation for some teens.”

She and her friends felt the school’s official prom catered to a very specific group of people. Plus, the music is often pop and hip-hop, and little attention is paid to those outside those conventional margins. They decided to throw their own party.

“There would be no dates, no dresses you had to spend \$500 on,” she said. It’s a free overnight event at a community center, open to students around the area, with snacks made by Miller and her friends.

“It’s very much focused on geek and nerd culture,” she said. This month marked their third year throwing the party. There’s a Quidditch match and Nerf war, along with games like a Lego challenge in which students have to build concepts such as “the emotion of anger” or “language of Portuguese” out of Legos in a limited amount of time. Miller and her friends even wore cardboard cutouts of the doctors from “Dr. Who” the day of the official prom to advertise their anti-prom.

In a high school of about a hundred students, it feels like a success when more than 20 people attend their anti-prom, Miller said. She collects a few donations and saves her own money to throw the party.

“We just think prom should be (welcoming) to all types of students, and we decided to make another one,” she said.

It’s not just the proud geeks and nerds who have turned tradition on its head.

Myra Ekram, a senior at St. Louis’ Parkway North High School, was one of the main planners of the Spring Fling for the area’s observant Muslim teenage girls. Some of the other organizers wanted to call it a morp (prom spelled backwards, as some anti-proms are called), but she resisted.

Ekram plans on attending her school’s prom, albeit single, while most her friends will have dates.

“I’m the only one in my school who wears a scarf,” she said. “I want to be involved with everything to show that we do all that stuff that everyone else does.” Her prom involvement, however, will be dateless, covered, avoiding the dance floor and any alcohol.

Meanwhile, she and the other organizers rented and decorated a hotel ballroom for their own Spring Fling, kept it strictly female-only, and were able to shed their scarves, showing off their updos and fancy dresses.

Other anti-proms veer in the complete opposite direction, with free-flowing alcohol and drugs banned from the school-sponsored dance. Or there are anti-proms held in protest of discrimination against gay or lesbian couples at their schools.

For those quick to dismiss today’s teen culture as more heavily narcissistic, consumerist and vapid than we remember our own, it’s only fair to credit them as also being more inventive, creative and resourceful in expressing their individuality.

The anti-prom is what it means to own difference. It’s this generation’s celebration of diverse countercultures.

Whether you go prom or morp, a party is a party.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Those puppy eyes can help a dog bond with owner

By MALCOLM RITTER
AP Science Writer

NEW YORK — Oh, those puppy eyes.

Just by gazing at their owners, dogs can trigger a response in their masters’ brains that helps them bond, a study says.

And owners can do a similar trick in return, researchers found.

This two-way street evidently began when dogs were domesticated long ago, because it helped the two species connect, the Japanese researchers say.

As canine psychology experts Evan MacLean and Brian Hare of Duke University wrote in a commentary on the work, “When your dog is staring at you, she may not just be after your sandwich.”

The new work is the first to present a biological mechanism for bonding across species, said researcher Larry Young of Emory University.

Neither he nor the Duke scientists were involved in the study, which is reported in a paper from Japan released Thursday by the journal Science.

The brain response is an increase in levels of a hormone called oxytocin (ahk-see-TOH'-sin). Studies in people and animals indicate this substance promotes social bonding, such as between parent and infant or between two lovers.

One experiment in the new research involved 30 owners and their dogs. Oxytocin levels in the urine of both species were sampled before and after the owners and their dogs spent a half-hour together.

Analysis showed that owners whose dogs looked at them longer in the first five minutes had bigger boosts in oxytocin levels. Similarly, dogs that gazed longer got a hormone boost, too. That’s evidently in response to being touched by



AP Photo/Rui Vieira

In this March 6 file photo, a Welsh corgi competes in the ring with its owner on the second day of Crufts dog show at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, England. In a study released on Thursday, scientists found that just by gazing at their owners, dogs can trigger a response in their masters’ brains that helps them bond. And owners can do a similar trick in return. This two-way street may have begun during dog domestication because it helped the two species connect, the Japanese researchers suggest.

their owners during the session, one of the study authors, Takefumi Kikusui of Azabu University near Tokyo, said in an email.

No such result appeared when researchers tried the experiment with wolves. The animals were paired with people who had raised them, although not as pets. The difference suggests dogs started gazing at owners as a social strategy when they became domesticated, rather than inheriting it from their wolf ancestors, researchers said.

Another experiment with dogs found they looked at their owners longer if they were given doses of oxytocin, and that the hormone’s

levels then went up in their owners. But these results appeared only in female dogs; the reason isn’t clear.

An oxytocin researcher not connected to the study said previous work had provided bits of evidence that the hormone plays a role in bonding between species, but that the new work is more comprehensive.

“It makes very good sense,” said C. Sue Carter, who directs the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University.

But Clive Wynne of Arizona State University, a psychologist who studies interaction between

dogs and people, said he thinks the link to domestication is “barking up the wrong tree.” The study doesn’t provide convincing evidence for that, he said.

Emory’s Young, who studies bonding behavior, said the relationship between people and dogs is special. Human love can lose its initial exhilaration over time, he said, but he hasn’t seen that with the dogs he has owned for 10 years.

“When I come home from work every day, they are just as excited to see me now as they were when I got them,” Young said.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Escaped monkeys foiled by housewife and banana bait

Three escaped Rhesus monkeys who wreaked havoc in Pendleton in June 1951 were finally captured by a crafty housewife and a handful of bananas. The monkeys were part of a carload of animals from a disbanded circus in the Midwest that were en route to a zoo in Everett, Wash., and were involved in an accident on Emigrant Hill that also briefly set an elephant loose on Umatilla Indian Reservation land.

The monkeys escaped from a cage at the Round-Up caretaker’s house June 10, 1951, when he opened the cage to feed them. Two of the monkeys took up residence in the trees near the E.O. Stratton and Forrest Zirkle homes on Northwest Eighth Street. A third monkey



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

was discovered at the Dean Oliver home on Southwest 18th Street on June 13. Mrs. Oliver saw the monkey in her yard and, after a little thought, lured the monkey into the garage with a trail of breakfast cereal. Police caged the relatively tame animal and took the “two-apartment” cage to Northwest Eighth in an attempt to round up the other two, who were eventually lured into the cage with bits of broken banana. All three monkeys were put on display in their cage on the lawn of the police station.

One of the monkeys, which

had been given to the police by the driver of the truck as repayment for taking care of the animals after the crash, escaped again June 26 after a grass fire near the Vern Hollinsworth home on Southwest Seventh Street endangered him. Mrs. Hollinsworth opened the cage door and he followed her to the porch, where she chained him.

The monkey broke loose from the chain on the arrival of Officer Clifford Murray and escaped into the trees, and for several hours policemen tried everything they could think of to lure him back to the cage. Tear gas backfired, as the monkey avoided it and it blew back onto the officers, driving them away. Oranges doped with knockout drops only gave the monkey “a cheap drunk.” Finally, officers

Bryan Branstetter and Orville Simmons gave up when their shift ended at 8 a.m., leaving youngsters Jerry Lane and Diana Johnson to man the trap.

Jerry attached a cord to the door of a cage baited with cookies. The monkey entered once and, when the door stayed open, returned again for more food. Jerry slammed the door shut on the second foray and the monkey was back in custody. The monkey was moved to a bigger, permanent cage and Jerry and Diane each earned a dollar for their help.

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Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Chimp Tushi turns drone-buster in Dutch Burgers’ Zoo

ARNHEM, Netherlands (AP) — Beware! Chimp Tushi at the Dutch Burgers’ Zoo is a real drone-buster.

When the zoo sent a drone over the chimpanzee enclosure for a better look at how their 14 apes live, the response was swift.

With the unfamiliar intruder coming close to them, 23-year-old female Tushi waited in a tree, gritted her teeth and with two whacks from a long branch, downed the drone. A long sweat.

Zoo spokesman Bas Lukkenaar said on Tuesday that “we can write the drone off. It cost about 2,000 euros (\$2,100). Then again, it doesn’t surprise that Tushi did this. She is very handy with sticks.”

With the camera still rolling on the ground Friday after Tushi’s strike, the zoo got some close-up footage anyway — of chimps coming to inspect their kill.

‘Tree Ninja’ caught chopping down tree with a hammer

BOSTON (AP) — Boston police say they have arrested a 65-year-old man they believe is the infamous “Brighton Tree Ninja.”

For several years a vandal has been damaging newly planted trees and shrubbery in the



Royal Burgers’ Zoo via AP

In this image taken from video on April 10, Tushi the chimpanzee, foreground, hits a drone with a stick.

Man kills armadillo, but ricochet gunshot hits mother-in-law

LEESBURG, Ga. (AP) — Authorities say a south Georgia man shot an armadillo, but ended up accidentally wounding his mother-in-law when the bullet ricocheted off the mammal known for its hard shell.

Lee County Sheriff’s deputies tell WALB-TV that 54-year-old Larry McElroy fired his 9 mm pistol at the armadillo Sunday night.

Deputies say the bullet killed the armadillo, but bounced off the animal, hit a fence, traveled through the back door of the mother-in-law’s mobile home and the recliner in which she was

sitting, striking her in the back.

McElroy’s 74-year-old mother-in-law, Carol Johnson, suffered injuries described as non-life-threatening. Lee County sheriff’s investigator Bill Smith said she was walking around and talking afterward.

Lee County Sheriff’s deputies say McElroy was about 100 yards away from the home when he shot the armadillo.

Woman blames coffee-drinking parrot for car crash

UNIONTOWN, Pa. (AP) — State police say a woman blames her coffee-drinking pet parrot for distracting her moments before she crashed her car into a guardrail in Pennsylvania.

Troopers from Uniontown say the 35-year-old woman was driving on a South Union Township road just before 5 p.m. Tuesday when she noticed the bird pecking at the lid of her coffee cup. The woman says she struck the guardrail when she glanced down to see what the bird was doing.

The woman told police that the bird likes to drink coffee — and they also found bird seed in a cup holder next to the coffee and a few feathers nearby.

Police say the woman broke her arm and had facial cuts because her air bag deployed.

The bird was safely removed from the vehicle.