

## **But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids**

Why Are Some Animals Pets And Some Are Lunch?

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[Jane] This is *But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids* from Vermont Public Radio.

I'm Jane Lindholm. On this show, we take your questions and find interesting people to answer them. This episode though is a little bit different. We are tackling some questions without answers.

This episode is a follow up to our cats and dogs episodes. So if you haven't listened to those yet you might want to go back and listen to them before you listen to this one.

In those two episodes we answered all kinds of questions about our feline and canine companions. But that got us thinking: why do we have pets in the first place? Why are some animals farm animals and some are pets while others are wild? And why do we eat animals?

We're going to be spending some time thinking about those hard questions including the ones about which animals are ok to eat. So adults you may want to think about whether or not this is an episode that's right for your kids, or listen to it on your own first before you share it with them.

OK. Let's get started. A few years ago I read a book for adults called *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals*. And it kind of blew my mind because it talked about all of these interesting ways we think about animals. The same kind of animal, a bunny for example, can be a wild animal, a pet animal, an animal that's used for medical testing, or an animal we eat for dinner. And how we feel about that bunny affects how we treat it.

In American culture, we would never eat a dog. Dogs are pets, but we eat a lot of hamburgers. However if you live in India it's illegal in most parts of the country to kill a cow or to eat any kind of meat that comes from a cow like hamburger or steak. So our ideas about animals have a lot to do with our religion, our culture, our beliefs and where we live. We're going to explore some of those ideas today. And our guest is the author of that book I mentioned, Hal Herzog is a professor of psychology at Western Carolina University. Psychology is the study of behavior and the brain, so why we do the things we do and how our behavior, our actions are connected to our minds. Hal studies the relationships between humans and animals. Since we talked about cats and dogs in our previous two episodes I wanted Hal to explain a little bit about our relationship to our pets.

Now people often say they are a dog person or I'm a cat person. Hal says he's a dog person but right now he just has a cat.

[Hal] People say that they keep pets because they get unconditional love from their pet. Well, my cat does not give me unconditional love. I give her unconditional love but she treats me like the guy that like opens the door and lets her outside and does what she wants to do.

[Jane] So what do you think it means then if somebody says they're a dog person like you did or a cat person given that you have a cat but you don't feel like your cat gives you that much love. But you know do you have a sense of what it means for somebody to wear that badge of cat person or dog person?

[Hal] Well there's been a ton of research on that and basically it's been fairly consistent. There is sort of consistent but fairly small differences in dog people and cat people. And so for example dog people tend to be a little more extroverted, cat people tend to be a little more introverted. Some studies have shown that cat people tend to be a little more open to new experience and new ideas. On the other hand cat people tend to be a little more anxious but I'm not sure. I think sometimes you just fall in love with an animal and sometimes it's a cat and sometimes it's a dog and I think people can switch back and forth.

[Jane] And for those of you listening, if those were new words for you 'extroverted' and 'introverted,' extroverted kind of mean somebody who's really bubbly and likes to talk to other people and really likes interacting with people and introverted people tend to be quieter or maybe you just don't like the excitement of a really loud room, you don't want to be the center of attention then you might be a more introverted person.

[Hal] Yeah, interestingly enough I think that also to some extent applies to cats and dogs. Cats tend to be more introverted, they tend to be shyer. Dogs tend to be more extroverted. They tend to give you more, in some cases you know sort of psychologically and are more eager for social interactions at least my dogs have always been.

[Jane] Not my dog. My dog is very introverted and he's not a people pleaser. He's more of a cat in dog form.

[Hal] Yeah. That's interesting because you know it's very interesting because you do have cat-like dogs and you do have a dog-like cats. I met a cat recently that was very dog-like. She fell in love with me instantly and wouldn't get out of my lap and let me eat dinner with friends.

[Jane] Yeah that's sounds very doglike.

[Hal] Yeah.

[Jane] So Hal when we think about dogs in American culture at least, most of us think about pets. They're dogs that live in our house, sometimes they're dogs that live outside in a barn, or live outside for part of the day but come in at night. But at least for me my dog sleeps in our bed and is very, very much a part of our family. But that's not how dogs are treated in all parts of the world. How do different people think about the boundary between what is a pet and what is an animal that is used for some other purpose like farming or security?

[Hal] Well, I think that's a very good question. Let's deal with that in two ways. First of all we can take a look at how that plays out in our own country. So for example I lived for a lot of years out in the country, in the Smoky Mountains and my neighbors had dogs and a lot of them had hunting dogs. And I used to go raccoon hunting actually with this neighbor of mine who was a farmer, and man did he love his coon hounds and he had great respect for them and he really took care of them well. On the other hand they were never allowed in the house. They were rarely petted. They weren't really considered pets. They had names but they always lived outside. And if a coonhound didn't hunt well he would get rid of it. He would sell it or he would give it away to somebody. On the other hand my friend, his name was Sammy, he always had a pet dog, usually a small dog, that he did let in the house, and he fed at the table and he did let sleep in his bed. So here we have in the same person, we had two categories of dogs both of whom he respected a lot. One set of dogs was a working animal that had a job to do. And the other one that was there because of affection, and we see that so that we see that even in our own, in our own country.

But if you look at the way dogs are treated in different cultures you find, vast, vast differences. So for example in some countries dogs are considered to be unclean and they're considered to be vermin. So in other words they are seen to be pests and people would hardly ever keep them as pets. On the other hand there are some countries where dogs are considered lunch. So for example there's roughly 25 million dogs a year eaten, usually in parts of Southeast Asia they are items on the menu. There's big differences in how people relate to dogs.

[Jane] That might surprise some kids, some of you listening to think that in some places dogs are food when we usually think of dogs as pets. And in fact we would sometimes think that somebody is a terrible person for eating a dog, but for example in some other countries you don't eat cows, you don't eat beef because that would be considered a terrible thing to be doing, and yet in America people who aren't vegetarians eat a lot of hamburgers.

[Hal] That's exactly right. There are some cultures that don't have pets at all. In fact there are some cultures where their language doesn't even have a word for 'pet' really no concept of having a pet. Yeah.

[Jane] Like where?

[Hal] I've got a friend who's an anthropologist who was from Kenya and he was raised in a village in Kenya, a small village and they had dogs around, this is one of those cases where they had dogs around to scare away strangers and to keep animals, wild animals out of their gardens but they did not consider the dogs pets. They would never consider them members of the family. They like mean dogs. But I said you know what's the word for pet in your language and he thought he thought you said you know we don't have we don't have a word for pet. People don't keep pets. We don't we don't bring animals into our lives and treat them like our friends.

[Jane] How do you think that happened, that we started to think of animals as something that was not exactly human but more than just a work animal and more than a wild animal? I mean people keep fish and crabs and mice and guinea pigs and cats and dogs and pot-bellied pigs and all kinds of pets.

[Hal] Yeah. I think to me that's, that's one of the great questions and if you look at the diversity of pets in the world, they are amazing and for example in Japan one of the most popular forms of pets are rhinoceros beetles. Actually amongst young boys, what they use is they have little rhinoceros beetle fights and they carry crickets and their beetles around and little you know. And with my part of the country people used to have rooster fights and chicken fights they have you know beetle fights. What impresses me most about the human-animal relationship now, after studying this stuff for many, many years is just how cultures differ in that and how even preferences within a culture can change.

So for example 100 years ago in the United States one of the most popular types of pets was what are called pocket pets. These are were things like mice that you'd carry around in your pocket, in your shirt pocket. When the pioneers were taking pets across the country in their covered wagons, dogs were not the most popular animal they took, it was songbirds. So we see these enormous changes in pets and cultures and they can happen fairly rapidly. One of the things that I study is why dog breeds get popular quickly. Sometimes a dog breed that's completely unpopular will suddenly just take off and everybody will want one. And usually oftentimes it's because for example a movie star, a pop singer or something like that, will get a kind of dog and then it just spreads just like sneaker styles.

[Jane] What's popular right now?

[Hal] Well, that's very interesting. What's popular right now are dogs that are fundamentally unhealthy and these are dogs, they're called, if you want to learn some big words to impress your friends, this is a good one: Brachycephalic. It's a scientific word. It means short-nosed

These are animals that have been bred for short noses and these are things like boxers and Bulldogs. And the one that's really hot right now is a smaller version of a bulldog called the French bulldog. They've become extremely popular in part because Lady Gaga got one.

[Jane] And these are dogs you know if you try to take them for a walk up the hill in the heat, they really struggle a lot of them because they can't breathe very well.

[Hal] Man, I heard, my wife and I were going for a walk the other day in a town that I live in and there was a bulldog, English Bulldog, which is really very short nosed, real stubby nose. You could hear you hear that thing breathing from a hundred yards away trying, to just trying to get up the small hill.

We have bred these animals to be like that's one of the more interesting ethical things in our love for animals and our love for pets and our love for dogs, we've actually created animals that have some pretty serious genetic disorders.

[Jane] If we are creating and we have the ability to breed these animals and we've created them in a way that is unhealthy for them what do you think, is that ethical is that morally OK?

[Hal] No, that's the answer. It's not morally OK. And to me this is why the study of human animal interactions is, I find, so fascinating, is that it shows the good in the bad in human nature. On the one hand we love these animals so deeply. Now on the other hand we wind up doing bad things to them. And so we live in a very, very ethically and psychologically complex space when it comes to our relationships with animals. So we think oftentimes we think we're trying to do the right thing but it might not be the right thing.

[Jane] How we think about animals goes beyond how we treat them as pets. Animals are used for all kinds of things. We do have them as pets. We also use them as working animals like draft horses and oxen or seeing eye dogs. We eat animals and we use them for scientific research. And in many cases one kind of animal can have a lot of different places in our lives. But depending on our point of view we feel very differently about that animal. For example Hal brought up this story, when his twin daughters were kids, Hal went into their classroom to talk about animals and ethics. Ethics are the rules that we've created about deciding what's wrong and what's right. And he asked the class this question. Let's say there's a kid who has a problem with his heart and he

needs a transplant. Should we take the valve of a pig heart and transplant it into that kid, so the kid can be healthy even though that would kill the pig. Basically you'd have to sacrifice the pig in order to save the kid. And Hal asked the class if they thought that was OK.

[Hal] And I said, 'all right. How many of you think we should kill the pig and take his heart and give his heart valve to save the kid?' And nobody in the class and almost nobody in the class agreed with that. They thought we should not do that. I said 'All right. How many of you ate a hotdog this week or had a ham sandwich or anything like that?'

And there was this just stunned silence in the class.

[Jane] And so you might not feel very good about a pig being sacrificed for medicine, but if you eat pork chops or bacon you're eating pig. Or let's have another example a rabbit, last night I was sitting on my porch watching wild rabbits run around in my yard. So obviously some rabbits are wild. Now, I have friends who keep rabbits as pets. And in many places rabbits are eaten for food. And yet in still other situations rabbits are used for scientific research.

[Hal] One thing that enables us to negotiate these sort of difficult questions is that we have category systems in our head so we can put a rabbit in the pet category. We can put it in the meat category. We can put it in the pest category and then we treat them completely, completely differently.

[Jane] Even if it's the same animal something like a rabbit or a mouse?

[Hal] Even if it's the same animal.

One of the first studies, investigations, that I did on this had to do with what I called the moral status of mice. And I was working in a laboratory at the time and in that laboratory there were three different types of mice. Well, not just in the laboratory. First of all I had kidnapped one of the mice. I rescued and I took it home, I gave it to my kids for a pet. We named it Willy. And so we had a pet mouse living in our house, on the other hand the laboratory was snake research lab. So most of the mice in that lab were snake food. They were designed to go down the gullet of a boa constrictor and then in the same lab, not in my lab but right down the hall, there were mice that were being used in research and these were what I called the 'good' mice. But the interesting thing is there are also mice running around loose in this lab and you can't have that in a biological laboratory. So these were the pest mice and these were the ones that were trapped in sort of a brutal way. And the thing that got me interested is that I one time ask one of the lab techs. I said well why are these mice running around loose? And she said well what they are is they were the good mice that had escaped and so we have one set of mice

that if you want to use that in research you have to go through all kinds of rigamarole and regulations and have a committee approve it. But once that mouse hits the floor it becomes an escapee, its fate is sealed.

[Jane] So a mouse that is being used to test medicine has all kinds of rules about how it gets treated by humans. But if that very same mouse gets loose it's considered a pest and it can be killed and thrown into the trash. Same mouse but treated very differently depending on what category it's in. What do you think about that?

It's a tricky thing to figure out. And it's ok to find these ideas and questions confusing or troubling. It's good to wrestle with big ideas and beliefs and it's a really good idea to talk to an adult you trust when something has you feeling a little bit weird or unsettled. I do hope though that this episode got you thinking about what you believe and how it can vary depending on how you have been raised and what your family thinks.

We actually have another ethical question that we'd really like you to offer some thoughts on now ethics and morals are the rules that govern our behavior. They're basically the rules we've created for ourselves about what is right and what is wrong. So here's a question we got from Finn in Seattle, Washington.

[Finn] Is it OK to do something you're told not to do and then never tell anybody?

[Jane] Is it OK to do something you were told not to do and then never tell anybody. That's a really interesting question, Finn. OK, you guys what do you think? Is it ever OK to do something you were told you shouldn't do, and then to keep it a secret? Have you ever done that yourself? Did anyone find out? And did you get in trouble or maybe no one found out but you felt really bad about it for a long time. We'd really like to know if you have a story about this that you want to tell us that you think, maybe Finn or other kids might benefit from hearing. We're going to talk about it in an episode coming up soon, so think for a few days and then have an adult record you. You can tell us your story or you can just answer what you think of Finn's question. Is it OK to do something you're not supposed to do and then keep it a secret? Be sure when you answer to tell us your first name where you live and how old you are and then have your adult send your answer to [questions@butwhykids.org](mailto:questions@butwhykids.org).

*But Why* is produced by Melody Bodette, and me, Jane Lindholm, at Vermont Public Radio. Our theme music is by Luke Reynolds. We'll be back in two weeks with an all new episode about honeybees.

Until then. Stay Curious!