

Norwich Terriers, 5-23

Title: Conformation dog shows, sportsmanship, and social media

Why show dogs? The motivations are likely to be different for different exhibitors. Some may want to put titles on their dogs to prove they've developed a successful breeding program, others to showcase their ability as a handler or groomer, others to own a dog that is a top winner. Exhibitors spend a lot of time and money for a few minutes in the conformation ring, often with little gained other than the satisfaction of winning a ribbon. In the "good ole days" — before the Internet and social media — win or lose, tomorrow was another day, another show, another judge. We enjoyed our wins, treasured special memories, and looked forward to the next show.

Social media has no doubt affected dog shows, and sportsmanship. Nowadays, you can show off your win with immediate ringside selfies, then again by posting the official show photo. If you've hired a professional handler, you don't even need to show up at the show to show off your win and experience the gratification that brings. And, if no win, no problem. Recycle a Facebook memory!

Why all the dog show bragging? On its face, bragging may seem like a way to make a favorable impression. People who brag may think it makes them look good, but it often backfires. In fact, research suggests that self-promoters fundamentally misjudge how other people perceive them. "When we ourselves engage in self-promotion — either on social media or in person — we tend to overestimate people's positive reactions, and we underestimate their negative reactions." (APS, 2015) As a consequence, when seeking a favorable opinion, people may engage in excessive self-promotion that has the opposite of its intended effects. Scopelliti (2015), a behavioral scientist, discovered that self-promoters often thought people would be more jealous than they actually were. Self-promoters were liked less and were not perceived as being more competent.

Perhaps there is something about our competitive nature that keeps us engaged in dog shows. Citing Spence and Helmreich (1983), Nelinson notes that from a psychological perspective the more competitive you are, the less likely you are to be a cooperator. A "cooperator" gains pleasure from helping others, whereas

a competitive personality desires to be better than others. An exhibitor's competitive nature may be tied to how the person handles losses and feels about other competitors.

What about sportsmanship?

If you've spent time at dog shows, you've likely seen examples of bad sportsmanship ... scowling faces, bad-mouthing the competition and the judge etc., etc. The AKC Code of Sportsmanship endorses vigorous competition and (in the same sentence) mentions winning and losing with grace. So, what does good sportsmanship look like? In the sport of tennis, it's been described as when the competitor walks off the court and you can't tell whether he/she won or lost. Hallmarks include being able to win or lose gracefully and respecting one's competition. Humility was once a virtue. Today, the "humble-brag" has replaced humility, as in, "Gosh, I'm surprised I won the Breed today ... forgot to set my alarm, didn't have time to even groom my dog" ... Or the "humble" thanking the prestigious judge and awesome handler team for one's own boastful win, always in a competitive entry. Bragging is bragging, and bragging is poor sportsmanship.

Remember when our parents reprimanded us, "Don't be a showoff," An article titled, "Teaching Children Good Sportsmanship" (Stanford Medicine), lists some principles to instill in children, including: "If you lose, don't make up excuses. If you win, don't rub it in." Your competitors know when you win. Has winning become so important that we've lost sight of why we are at the dog show in the first place?

Good sportsmanship extends to how dog owners interact online. "Selfies" exploded on social media with the invention of the reverse lens on smartphones. For some professionals, the selfie has its place — it's akin to advertising. But what are the rest of us selling? A demonstration of how happy we are? Sociologist Sherry Turkle suggests that the selfie is a symptom of a world obsessed with conveying an image of ourselves to the outside world. Social media allows us to control. Bad stuff is filtered out, good stuff is left in. No wonder the selfie is so popular. (Butler 2014)

Social media can be a slippery slope. Another study, sadly applicable to the dog show scene, used social media (an inexhaustible mine of data) to obtain information to study the emotion of *Schadenfreude*. This is a German term composed of *Schaden* ("harm") and *Freude*

("joy"), so the word *Schadenfreude* means finding pleasure in another's misfortune. A close phrasing in English can be "malicious joy." The researchers found that Schadenfreude is a frequent emotion these days, being linked to social image. (Cecconi 2020)

Bragging has become a part of daily life – people brag about the food they eat in restaurants, their children's accomplishments, vacations ... To the list of things people brag about (but no one is impressed by), let's add: the ribbon won at the dog show.

Jane R. Schubart, AKC Gazette Breed Columnist, The Norwich Terrier Club of America

REFERENCES

Association for Psychological Science (APS). Self-promoters tend to misjudge how annoying they are to others. May 12, 2015. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/releases/self-promoters-tend-to-misjudge-how-annoying-they-are-to-others.html>

Butler JD. Selfies: narcissistic self-indulgence or harmless fun? Irish Examiner, May 20 2014. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-20269169.html>

Cecconi C, Poggi I, D'Errico F. Schadenfreude: malicious joy in social media interactions. *Front Psychol.* 2020 Nov 12;11:558282. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.558282. PMID: 33281661.

Nelinson M. (2022) Psychology of competition. <https://showsightmagazine.com/psychology-of-competition-in-dog-shows/>

Scopelliti I, Loewenstein G, Vosgerau J. You call it "self-exuberance"; I call it "bragging": Miscalibrated predictions of emotional responses to self-promotion. *Psychol Sci.* 2015 Jun;26(6):903-14. doi: 10.1177/0956797615573516. Epub 2015 May 7. PMID: 25953948..

Spence, J. T., & Helmreich, R. L. Achievement-related motives and behaviors. In J. T. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives*. San Francisco, Calif.: W. H. Freeman, 1983.