

Canis familiaris

Companion and Captive

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The domestic dog, *Canis familiaris*, a species designed for tens of thousands of years by humans, is fundamentally held in captivity by humans. Through countless iterations of selective breeding, dogs have been shaped, essentially, to be dependent on their designers. One in three US households contains a dog, some 75 million dogs in all—largely, in this culture, kept for most of their days in a house or in an enclosed yard with or often without any persons or other dogs in the near vicinity. Their movement is restricted; their diet is regimented; their sexual impulses thwarted.

Yet to call dogs, subjects of gloriously overwrought sentimentalization by these self-same humans, “captive” seems at first pass ridiculous. For their free movement is restricted only for their safety, limited to the domicile and environs, as a child is reined by a parent; their diet may be regimented, but nourishment is provided to them daily; their sex hampered, but only so as to not overrun the neighborhood with more resultant puppies than there are persons to keep and feed them.

Dogs, thus, exemplify a characteristic tension when discussing the captivity of (typically wild) animals: between the limitations of captivity on the animals’ lives and the freedoms that, paradoxically, captivity might make available. In addition, dogs, as domesticated animals, add another facet to this discussion. The dog is *constitutionally* captive. For domestication has changed the species sufficiently that there is no longer any true “wild” dog. The resultant *species*—not just individuals of the species—is held captive by its designers.

In this chapter these issues are explored, first through discussion of what it might mean to talk about “captivity” with dogs. The concept extends from the



Figure 1.1 Courtesy of Jo-Anne McArthur, *We Animals*.

very concrete—particular confinement measures imposed by pet-keeping—to the more abstract—the restrictions obliged by domestication. The effects of these captivities are then reviewed, by highlighting modes of interspecies interaction peculiar to the human-dog dyad. Finally, captivity's obverse, *freedom*, is considered with dogs.

STATES OF CAPTIVITY

When considering the “captivity of animals,” most writers (e.g., Hediger 1964) are referring to *wild* animals—that is, species who predominantly live elsewhere and otherwise than with humans, and members of that species who are now confined. Indeed, though the nature of the captivity varies, some kind of *confinement* is a necessary element of a captive life. The confinement may be literal—as in a cage or pen—or more figurative—as with an uncaged animal who is nonetheless kept by humans.

By contrast, domestic dogs live *within* human society. There are no “wild” members of the species. There are “feral” dogs—recent descendants of domestic dogs who live around human society but are not kept by any individual or individuals; there are “free-ranging” dogs—those provisioned with food by, but living apart from humans; and there are “stray” dogs—those who lived with humans but have wandered away or been abandoned.¹ All are the same species, and humans are implicated, directly or historically, in their existence. Contrast this situation with that of dogs' closest genetic relation, *Canis lupus*, the gray wolf. While the wolf can be “tamed” or socialized, made manageable and able to live in provisional (if not guaranteed to be permanent) harmony with humans through long-term training and handling (Kubinyi, Virányi, and Miklósi 2007), no wolf voluntarily lives among humans. Some individual or small groups of wolves are, of course, held in captivity, in the traditional sense: in zoos and in preserves intent on supporting the perpetuation of the species (e.g., Wolf Park, in Indiana, and the Wolf Conservation Center, in New York). The only extant wild wolf packs in North America survive through the packs' maintenance of *distance* from human society, rather than living within it.

This difference between *Canis lupus* and *Canis familiaris* means that, in some sense, the subject of the discussion at hand is also changed: a discussion of “captivity” of wolves (as with most animals) typically refers to the state or condition of *individuals*; but with dogs an additional, and most prevalent, sense is of the *species*.

Thus, in considering the captivity of dogs, a two-pronged approach is due: discussing the nature of the species' situation (through domestication) and the nature of individual dogs' situations (through the confinement resulting

from pet-keeping). With these explications in hand, we can ask what captivity entails for dogs. Is captivity possibly desirable? Is there even any other option for the dog?

DOMESTICATION

It is not too much of a stretch to say that dogs have been *designed* by humans. Changed in temperament, anatomy, and behavior, domestic dogs are inextricably intertwined with humans—at least, it is inextricable *for the dog*.

What does it mean to be domesticated? Etymology provides a hint: Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary defines the related *domestical* and *domestick* as, in part, "belonging to the house" (Johnson 1755). Domestic animals are those connected to, even a part of, a person's domicile—as opposed to those whose habitats are fundamentally not residential. Biologically, domestication is a variation on the evolutionary process of natural selection. The selective-breeding process that Darwin originally called "methodical" selection is now referred to as "artificial" selection (Darwin 1859).

Domestic dogs, and all domestic animals, are those whose breeding is controlled by human communities; these communities also provide nutrition and demarcate the territories—living spaces—of their charges (Clutton-Brock 1999). Under this "new regime" of human beings (Clutton-Brock 1999, 32), a population genetically isolated from their wild relatives is developed over many generations.

The dog family, *Canidae*, includes dozens of species, all terrestrial, social, and largely crepuscular and nocturnal in habit (Serpell 1996). The first two of these attributes appear to be contributory to being domesticatable, as they align with the attributes of the domesticator. Dogs, via a common ancestor they share with the wolf, were the first domesticated animals by thousands of years (Clutton-Brock 1999). Archaeological evidence dates dog domestication to approximately 14,000 years before the present. Found remains range from a tomb at Ein Mallaha, Israel, containing an adult human skeleton with a hand on the thorax of a puppy (Davis et al. 1978), to dog skeletons in trash heaps, implying their use as a food source. Canid mitochondrial DNA suggests a more distant split between ancestral wolves and dogs, pointing to a divergence between the majority wolf population and those who were to become dogs as long as 145,000 years ago (Vilá et al. 1997). We could call the latter wolves *proto-domesticators*, since they had themselves changed behaviorally in ways that would later encourage humans' interest (or merely tolerance) of them.

Theories of how early domestication happened abound, but most converge on a few salient points about the behavior of the early proto-domesticates: in

particular, they must have had a changed fear threshold, enabling them to approach and interact with human communities. One prominent theory, consistent with the evidence to date, suggests that when humans became less nomadic and began to create fixed settlements, they also created piled food waste. These scraps-piles were, essentially, a new niche, full of usable food for opportunistic scavengers (Coppinger and Coppinger 2001). Wolves will scavenge as well as hunt (Mech and Boitani 2003), so those wolves who could overcome their fear of this potential predator, humans, would be able to exploit that niche. In this way, these ancestral wolves may have self-selected, with tamer wolves able to acquire the most food. Concurrently, humans may have tolerated, even taken in, some of the pups, allowing them to survive long enough to reproduce. Over many generations, a new species—dogs—began to emerge from those self-selected wolves (Coppinger and Coppinger 2001).

In the thousands of years hence, this new species, while still terrestrial and social, was further shaped by generations of artificial selection. Most recently, selection has taken the form of diversification of dogs into *breeds*—usually related dogs who have similar physical features and behavioral tendencies. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, breed “standards” arose, according to which dogs with traits conforming to a newly stated ideal were interbred and those who did not conform were not bred (Garber 1996). This phenomenon served to exaggerate the diversity of dogs’ appearance, especially in size, head morphology, and communicative anatomy (such as tails and ears).

The resultant changes in today’s dog are *physical*—of anatomy and especially superficial anatomy—and *behavioral*. Physically, the dog’s brain volume is smaller, relative to head and skull size, than that of the wolf; indeed, a smaller brain is typical of domestic animals (Clutton-Brock 1999). Dog teeth are smaller and more compressed than their ancestors’, a result of the foreshortening of the jawbone. Their skull shape changed to include a “stop,” a more distinct forehead between the front of the face and the top of the skull. Dogs’ eyes are more rounded and forward-facing (Clutton-Brock 1999), and their ears are often floppy rather than erect. The consequent appearance of the face, with some facial features reminiscent of the human face,² is a prototypic instance of the neotenuous appearance of many domestic dogs (Hecht and Horowitz 2013). Dogs’ coats show an unprecedented degree of variation for a single species, from brindle coloration, to single-color coats of silver, red, and black, as well as the piebald coloration. Similarly, dog tails are highly variable in shape and length, but notably less rigid than the ancestral wolves’ tails. Hearing and vision are less acute than in wolves (Serpell 1996), and olfaction may be diminished as well (Horowitz, Hecht, and Dedrick 2013). Indeed, it has been proposed that domestication chiefly consists of suppressing the pre-domesticated’s *Merkelt*,

or “perceptual world.” Sensory sensitivity, adaptive in a wild setting, is not favored—and selected against—in domestication (Hemmer 1990).

Behaviorally, as a result of the presumed founding trait of a raised fear threshold, dogs are more calm and less reactive than their wild forebears. The corresponding changes of the species’ social and cognitive behaviors, begun in this slight way, are quite profound. Socially, while wolves live in family packs, domestic dogs do not pack. Neither stray dogs nor free-ranging or feral dogs form traditional social packs with a single breeding pair, although individual dogs may travel “together,” in parallel. These dogs do not hunt cooperatively, as wolves do. (Beck 2002). Instead, the dog is verily a member of a human social group: the natural environment for dogs is around other dogs *and people* (Horowitz 2009a; Miklósi 2007).³

Dogs are changed cognitively: for instance, dogs perform less well than wolves on physical problem-solving tasks, such as retrieving hidden food (Miklósi 2007). On the other hand, dogs excel at *social* cognitive tasks—that is, in understanding how to glean information from others (people or dogs). Their performance is not only higher than wolves’ in this regard, it is higher than nonhuman primates’—especially in following human gaze (Agnetta, Hare, and Tomasello 2000) or pointing (Pettersson et al. 2011; Soproni et al. 2002), and in distinguishing levels of others’ attention (Call et al. 2003 Horowitz 2009a; Schwab and Huber 2006). In fact, this social problem-solving skill may have displaced any physical problem-solving skill: just those abilities—attention, persistence, astuteness—that serve a wild animal well might have been replaced by a new skill: manipulating the environment by using humans as tools. Humans solve dogs’ problems: opening closed refrigerators, cans of food, and locked doors.

This social-cognitive skill was enabled by a changed use of eye contact. For wolves, and most other social animals, eye contact is wielded as a threat: to stare is to assert dominance (Fox 1971). While useful, this prevents these animals from looking at each other for cues as to where their attention is and what they see and know. Dogs, however, do not shy from eye contact—and as people use eye contact to convey information, dogs have learned to glean that information as well. Just as a developing child learns to follow another person’s gaze and use gaze-alternations to share and request, so does the dog (Horowitz 2009b).

Dogs mirror human infants in other ways: they show attachment behavior comparable to infants, responding differentially to their caregiver at reunion (Kubinyi, Virányi, and Miklósi 2007). Their behavioral flexibility in considering humans “conspecifics” may be due to a change in their social critical period: while wolf pups open their eyes at ten days old, and thus must be exposed to any nonconspecifics who are to be in their social world before that time, dogs’ socialization window is approximately three months (Freedman,

King, and Elliot 1961; Kubinyi, Virányi, and Miklósi 2007). The result is dogs' ease at bonding to noncanid species introduced in that critical period.

Delineation of the far-reaching changes wrought by domestication of dogs indicates how inextricably bound they are to their domesticators. Their social group includes human beings, not just conspecifics. They are dependent on humans for food, territory, and protection. Their brain structure, and, as a correlate, cognition, has been altered. They no longer have the perceptual acuity to survive outside of human civilization. The very process of artificial selection holds dogs captive, tethered to persons in body and mind. As a species, consideration of the morality of keeping dogs captive is no longer relevant: without this captivity, domestic dogs would not exist.

While holding dogs captive—qua domesticates—has in some sense enabled their existence, it should be noted that recent artificial selection has also had grievous effects for many breeds. Standards of conformation themselves predispose members of dozens of breeds to inherit and pass down physical disorders (Asher et al. 2009). These disorders range from skeletal dysplasias in large breeds—bred to be large for large's sake, and too large to support their own weight—to spina bifida in the pug, a side effect of the gene for a tightly curled tail, required by the breed standard. Shar-Peis are prone to eye ulcerations as a result of human preference for protruding eyes, and the Cavalier King Charles spaniel may suffer the dramatic and grotesque disorder called sryngeomyelia, in which, because of human preference for a dog with a small head, the animals' brain grows too large for its skull. The result is brain swelling, neurological damage, and severe pain. Those breed members unlucky enough to be the genetic inheritors of these conditions are held captive by their own bodies. Humans have enabled this unfortunate circumstance.

PET-KEEPING

Moreover, within a domesticated captivity, there may be levels of confinement and restriction for the *individual* animal as a result of being owned by a person. These captivities may be physical, social, or sexual; the limitations sensory and dietary. To get a sense of these individual situations, we must consider the changing nature of pet-keeping, as far as it has been recorded through the ages. Some confinement methods have been used continuously, and others are specific to culture and time.

Pet-keeping was common in antiquity, although the specifics of the animals' lives with their owners are not known in detail. Some understanding of the reason for keeping pets and the dog-owner relationship is provided through epitaphs at gravesites (Bodson 2000), but this discovery method is quiet on the

nature of the quotidian lives of the mourned pets. What is known of dogs is that they were originally kept to guard, herd, hunt, and as companions (Grier 2006). Upper classes and ruling classes are documented as providing their pets (including but not restricted to dogs) with lavish accommodation and lifestyle: sometimes taking them to bed, to the public baths, building them separate shelters, providing them stipends, and providing them space at the dinner table. Pups have been allowed to suckle at the breasts of humans in both monarchies and in tribal societies (Serpell 1987). To be sure, this treatment should not be taken to represent a wholesale deification of dogs by the ordinary pet-owner. For instance, even as dog-breeding became a popular hobby, litters of unwanted puppies were routinely drowned, with only one puppy preserved for the bitch to suckle (Grier 2006).

To take an instance of the evolution of pet-keeping over a few centuries: American styles of dog-ownership have changed from a kind of benign neglect to a contemporary view of the dog that supports, as of 2013, a \$50 billion dog- and dog-product industry (American Pet Products Association 2013). The original settlers' practices were inherited from Europe, including keeping both companion and working dogs. In the nineteenth century, pet-keeping was a regular part of an American childhood, and with this, perhaps, the attitude toward the animals shifted slightly. Fewer were working dogs and more were kept for their looks or temperament (Grier 2006).

While the sight of dogs wandering along town streets was common, this century also saw the beginning of what was at once a curtailment of dogs' independent perambulations and a permission to share space in the owner's residence. Those animals who were considered "family" dogs were more often allowed *into* the house. Though dogs were usually restricted to a room or area, dog-training literature of the time advises to provide a dog with a "spot all his own" — "a corner or strip of old carpet or blanket" might suffice (Grier 2006, 65). Early twentieth-century advertisements for "dog beds" and even "dog couches," promoted as "beautifully finished in high grade lacquers" (Grier 2006, 309), demonstrate the evolution of this trend. In twenty-first-century America, the business of dog beds is booming, supporting the sale of multi-hundred-dollar beds with fashionable prints (Schaffer 2009). In addition, 50 percent of owners allow their dogs to join them in their beds (Chomel and Sun 2011).

Other quantifiable changes in American dog owners' behavior are visible in attitudes toward dog-walking and dog-feeding. For a country creating suburbs at a high rate, dog-keeping included having a (preferably fenced) yard in which the dog could roam. But as the population moved back city-ward, bringing their dogs with them, "dog walking" (itself a phrase not seen in prose before 1897 [OED 1989]) became a common activity. Subsequently, cities and municipalities began developing dog "parks" or "runs," public areas where dogs could

be brought by owners to interact with their owners and other dogs while off leash. These parks are usually fenced areas of one acre or more, with natural or artificial ground. The first park was opened in Berkeley, California, in 1979; there are now over 500 parks in American cities as well as estimates of a thousand more outside of cities (Trust for Public Land 2011).

Even more spectacularly, dog-keeping has grown a sizable industry committed to producing dog-specific food. While the proto-dog evolved by scavenging, and for most of human history dogs ate (some component of) what was left over after human consumption, “dog food” was invented by a company called “Spratt’s” in 1860 (Grier 2006). While the public needed convincing that dogs needed their own food, they were eventually quite convinced: dog food is now a multi-billion-dollar annual industry (American Pet Products Association 2013).

Thus, the trend of American pet-keeping has been to provide dogs with some of the comforts and freedoms that their owners enjoy—beds, places to roam—as well as a diet worthy of a veritable “member of the family,” as most owners describe them (Chomel and Sun 2011). On the other hand, much of typical contemporary dog-ownership behavior involves circumscription on the animal’s liberties to roam and behave naturally. Dogs are decidedly *not* in a position of total freedom or self-determination.

For instance, ancient art and writings indicate that for at least the thousands of years these media portray, dogs were outfitted with collars and controlled with leashes. Wall-relief art from the ancient Near East from the first to second millennia BC show men holding dogs by short leashes attached to distinctive collars—wrapped rope or wound metal—worn on the neck (Johns 2008). *Statue of a dog*, a limestone representation of the same era, represents an alert, erect-eared Mesopotamian dog wearing a collar with a bell or tag on the chest (Pickeral 2008). Ancient Egyptian dogs, large-bodied guarding dogs, are depicted in art wearing spiked or decorated collars—such as one of “white leather decorated with pink and green insets and studs, featur(ing) a frieze of horses running around it” from the Tomb of Miherperi (1570–1320 BC) (Pickeral 2008, 30). The same approach held for ancient Roman and Greek dogs: military dogs were outfitted with spiked leather collars; favored dogs wore ornamented collars.

Presently, all American states mandate that dogs be leashed in public (dog parks excepted), and most owners appear to comply. Collars, or, increasingly, chest or head harnesses, serve to hold identifying tags and form an extension of the leash. In addition, muzzles, not attached to the leash but encaging the snout so as to limit the dog’s ability to open his mouth widely, eat found objects, or bite, are regularly used on a minority of dogs. Indeed, in some municipalities, muzzles are required on dogs deemed “aggressive.”

Leashes and other coupling apparatuses are thus, as ever, ubiquitous accoutrements for dogs in public. The dogs' ability to roam, to run, to investigate odors, and to interact with other dogs or people is controlled by the person at the other end of that leash. The leash and collar themselves serve as that control (or pretense of control) over the animal, but also as marks of ownership of the animal.

Owned dogs are usually kept secured but geographically isolated from their owners and from other social companionship during the day, while owners are at work. This isolation may be inside the home, in a room in the house or apartment, or in a fenced yard or small dog run within a yard. In all events, the dogs' movement is restricted to the domicile. The restriction on movement may be further enforced by the practice, popular in dog-training programs, of keeping domestic dogs in "crates"—cages—when an owner is away from the home and at times also when the owner is at home (McConnell 2007). While dogs are typically walked or let outside to relieve themselves, there has been an increase in the popularity of "pee mats," which allow dogs to urinate inside. Those dogs trained to pee on the mat may not leave the residence with regularity or often.

EFFECTS OF PET-KEEPING

In both the continuities and the discontinuities in dog-keeping practices across eras, specific forms of individual captivities are in evidence. Here "captivity" is used to speak of confinement and restrictive procedures. Clearly, that individual dogs are in many ways tethered to humans is a form of restriction. While a leash may be used for public safety, as a form of control over the dog, or as an assertion of ownership, it also serves to delineate the movement of the dog.

This restriction is more serious than it may first appear. For being attached to humans—while certainly to the dog's advantage *as a species*—may be limiting of the expression of the *Umwelt of the individual*. Subjected to a person's decisions about everything from where to walk (down what routes, and when), whom to approach (which dogs and people), and what to investigate (which odors can be loitered on and which cannot), the dog has little independent choice. These are not *abusive* constraints, to be sure; they are simply reductions of the dog's experience to what the person, and her sensibility, allows. Conversely, while individual dogs have different "personal spaces," the social distance around themselves that they try to maintain, the leash obliges close proximity to a person while walking. This proximity is not always the most comfortable or ideal location for the dog, as the considerable business of trying to get a dog to properly "heel" attests (Horowitz 2009).

Importantly, a restriction on social interaction with other dogs can lead to more difficult social interactions later in life. Furthermore, the typical

contemporary American dog is spayed or neutered,⁴ a fact that reflects not only a national policy to prevent unwanted animal births, but also a national aversion to dog sexual practices. Mating among owned dogs is largely limited to breeders' forced pairings; rarely will "responsible" pet owners allow their dogs to breed. The topic of dog sex has all but disappeared from dog-training and dog-owning manuals: it is assumed that dogs will not be mating. While this is indeed responsible pet-ownership, it is a profound circumscription of what is, for all animals, an ordinary part of life and a significant part of social interaction with conspecifics.

Most interestingly, the very lifestyle of people who own dogs enforces isolation of the dogs. In writing about the condition of zoo animals, Hediger expresses concern for an animal's "isolation through captivity" (Hediger 1964). In typical contemporary dog-owning practices, owners risk creating "captivity through isolation." Left alone for much of their lives, dogs are socially captive: dependent on their owners, and unable to interact with other beings except in specific settings. Relatedly, "crating" a dog, while done with good intention, is still a confinement that will limit the sensory and social possibilities for that animal.

The United Kingdom's Farm Animal Welfare Council created, in 1965, a listing of the "Five Freedoms" that farm animals are due, with respect to their welfare during their lives. In the United States, the American Veterinary Medical Association has adapted these guidelines for animals kept in humane societies or shelters. They include freedom from hunger and thirst; from discomfort; from pain and disease; from fear and distress; and the freedom to express normal behaviors (Newbury et al. 2010). Certainly, few of these are violated by the average contemporary pet owner. However, the final freedom, expression of "normal behavior," is widely infringed upon by the very nature of typical pet-keeping practices. Leashes, harnessing, isolation, and curbing of social and sexual behavior and sensory exploration all prioritize a secondary motivation for the constraint over the experience of the animal. Leashes are used for their safety—even if they limit who or what the dog can smell. Workday isolation is quite customary—even if it is an extraordinary situation for any social animal to live in. The dog suffers our touching, our proximity, and our leaving him; endures restrictions on his movement, eating, and elimination. The domestic dog, as an individual, is in many ways held captive.

FREEDOM

Imagine the *least captive dog*. What would that dog be like? On the one hand, he would be freed of the confining devices typical of pet-keeping practices—the

leash, the domicile restriction. He would have the liberty to smell what he would like, approach who he would like, and eat what he would like. Importantly, those breeds with severe physical disorders would be freed from their genetic destiny by ending the practices of inbreeding. On the other hand, a dog who is not *species*-captive would not be a dog at all. And, too, to roam free, to live life without the attachment to humans, would be, for a domesticated species, more dangerous than keeping. Indeed, dogs are so sociable that, let free, they will remain with their human “captors” (Serpell 1987). There is no “return to the wild” for this species, for there is no space for, condition of, or future for the wild domestic dog. “Freedom” in *this* sense has no relevance for animals so deeply domesticated.

The condition of being so “kept” is, thus, mitigated by being “a species who was selected to be kept.” To that point, the most freedom for the dog, as the species appears today, would consist of letting the dog behave as he may, within the constraints of his speciesdom. It would be to let dogs do more than simply fulfill our requests for them: to *sit, stay, roll over, come, don’t eat that, “leave it,”* as we bark at our charges. It would be to allow them to express their natural behaviors, even those we find disgusting, embarrassing, or even wrong. It would be to flourish in their relationship with humans, to acknowledge the “social gravity” of the dyadic relationship (Hearne 1999), and express their dogness within this relationship.

Just in the way that the sheep looks sheepish, Thelma Rowell has noted, because that is all we allow the domestic sheep to do—we do not give sheep a chance to do anything else (Despret 2005)—the dog is loyal yet limited because that is what we provide for him. He wags at our return because, with his tail, and his being locked in that room, there is little else to do when you return and unlock it. The dog sleeps all day because we give him nothing to be awake for. The dog’s leash circumscribes who can be at the end of it. At death, the pieces of the dog left behind are the collar and tag: insufficient to represent the nobility of the neck they graced and body they jingled with. In life, we must find more apt ways to know dogs.

NOTES

1. The literature is equivocal on the meaning and application of especially the former two designations, but in all cases, the animal described is still within the bounds of human society, though not the charge of a specific human being (Beck 2002; Cafazzo et al. 2009).
2. The resemblance to a human face is especially profound in some small breeds, such as the brachycephalic (broad- and short-headed) pug—greatly to the breed’s deficit. The pug’s short nose and flat face are linked to severe obstructions in breathing; and their bulbous eyes are prone to ulceration (Asher et al. 2009).

3. Indeed, it is now not a surprising revelation, as it might have been twenty years ago, that most dog owners—or guardians, as some see themselves—consider their animals to be “members of the family”: just as it has been noted that pets began being given human names in the middle of last century (Brandes 2012), so too do many give their charges their surname.
4. Sterilization is widely required by animal shelters before, or as a condition of, adopting a shelter animal (Humane Society of the United States 2010).

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