

Boys VS. Girls

By RITA REIMERS



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Over the many years I've spent working at various adoption events, I occasionally heard people voice preferences for adopting one sex over another. I never thought too deeply about gender-specific behavior differences among cats until a recent experience with a client.

Since she knows I am connected with many local rescues, one of our clients at Just For Cats told me she was looking for a new kitty to adopt. One of her boy cats had passed away, and she wanted to adopt a new pal for her remaining orange boy. I knew of a young orange female who was available for adoption, but my client said she really wanted another boy. After thinking about my own cat household, her reasoning became clear, as you'll see.

For me, I always took in the kitties who needed a home fast because they were in dire straits or the ones who chose me at an adoption event and wouldn't let go of me (I have been chosen plenty of times, lucky for

me!). But undeniably, there are some behavior differences between male and female cats in general. Living in my private 20-cat rescue, coupled with over 15 years' worth of both rescue experience and working with thousands of kitties in other people's homes, I have been given some pretty clear insight into the behaviors of many cats, male and female alike.

Boys will be boys

There are some basic differences in the way male and female cats behave that are largely centered around their hormones. For example, an intact male

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cat has a very strong urge to reproduce. Male cats have been known to literally break screens to get out (or in!) in order to accomplish their mission when there is a female around who is in heat. They are basically slaves to the mating drive.

Some behavior tendencies for unneutered males include:

- ❖ Roaming
- ❖ Not wanting to stay indoors
- ❖ Marking (spraying)
- ❖ Fighting with rival males

After a male cat is neutered, his tendency to roam and wander will greatly diminish, as will his need to fight and mark territory. Neutered males may still engage one another in territory matches, but these will usually be disagreements, not actual fights.

Neutered male cats tend to:

- ❖ Be more loving and accepting of other cats of both sexes
- ❖ Engage in horseplay with their male cat friends and with their people
- ❖ Cuddle with both male and female cats
- ❖ Mark less, although some will spray when feeling threatened or insecure
- ❖ Become deeply bonded to a special cat friend who is usually, but not always, another male. My Boo-Boo and Dash boys are so bonded, they cuddle and “nurse” one another quite often even though they are both fully grown.

Sugar and spice

Intact females, on the other hand, express their hormones a little differently. They tend to become very affectionate, purr and roll around, exposing their tummies, wanting to be petted and loved. She may even “present” herself to you, as she would to a male suitor. Females in heat also vocalize more, in order to attract a mate. They generally tolerate more handling when they are in heat, but can also become sexually frustrated and somewhat aggressive. I once had a cat who could not be spayed due to a severe heart murmur. Sometimes she would become so agitated when she

was in heat that she would attack my head in the middle of the night, one time narrowly missing my eye!

Some behavior tendencies for unneutered females include:

- ❖ Loud vocalization
- ❖ The desire to be handled and petted more
- ❖ Marking their territory with face marking and sometimes spraying
- ❖ Running off rival females from their territory

Once the female is spayed, she will no longer go into heat, so the loud



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caterwauling and hormonal presentations will cease. She may not want to be handled quite as much but will still be affectionate toward other male cats and her chosen people. She may even be somewhat maternal to young kittens, regardless of whether she’s had her own litter or not. That maternal drive seems to stay in place for most females.

Spayed female cats tend to:

- ❖ Be a little wary of strange people and animals, which makes sense when you think of her role in the cat family as

mom, protector of the young

- ❖ Not enjoy rough play, like their male counterparts do; but they do like to play
- ❖ Cuddle with a male cat, especially if related, but it is rare to see two female cats cuddling
- ❖ Remain very territorial and not likely to share certain spots with others, especially with other females
- ❖ Be more self-reliant than male cats, and they don’t always have a special cat buddy; they are more solitary. If they do have a cat friend, it will usually be a male cat and not a female (although my Smoochy and Picasso are proving me wrong right this moment, as they are bathing each other — which is a very rare occurrence!)

Vive la difference!

As far as bonding well with people, both male and female cats will bond with their humans equally well. I can tell you that firsthand; my girl kitties love me and snuggle with me just as much as my boy cats. My boys will share me and jump on my lap together or play a game with me at the same time.

The girls, however, are not into sharing and will get upset if another cat tries to horn in when we’re cuddling or playing.

My tiny cat, Smoochy, has my big male cat, Oliver, scared of her because she would loudly scold him whenever he tried join us on the sofa. So now he won’t come near me if she is on my lap or sitting next to me. She’s never hurt him, but she’s made it quite clear that she is in charge and he is unwelcome. Yes, the female cats most definitely rule the roost.

Did I make your decision harder or easier? Only you can decide if gender should be a deciding factor when you are adopting a cat or kitten. I guarantee you will fall in love with the right cat, no matter the gender. Either way you choose, you’ll have a wonderful feline friend for life when you add a cat to your family. 🐾