

Kitty See, Kitty Do

Do your cats copy each other?

FELINES, IRRESPECTIVE OF AGE, are famous for copying one another's antics. I've always assumed this is because they must have a copycat gene in their inherent makeup.

In our household, 16-year-old Fudge copies all of 4-year-old Ziggy's bad habits, like climbing on the bar counter and sitting there as if waiting to be served. So I have further deduced that the copycat gene is intrinsically linked to the naughty gene. It has to be, because my cats never copy one another's good habits — only the naughty stuff.

I wonder if feline geneticists like Leslie Lyons and Carlos Driscoll have ever seriously thought to research what it is that prompts cats to carbon copy each other's actions.

The first written evidence of the term copycat is said to be found in American author Constance Cary Harrison's 1887 quasi-memoir *Bar Harbor Days*: "Our boys say you are a copy cat, if you write in anything that's been already printed."

Interestingly, during medieval times, to call someone a "cat" was an insult because cats were associated with all sorts of evil and mischief. In the 1960s, the word started to get attached to criminal activity, copycat crime spree, copycat murders and so on. This brings me back to the question of a naughty copycat gene. I recently witnessed what I can only call extreme copycatting. Fudge and Ziggy obviously have aspirations for their own reality show.

Fudge has always been a very enthusiastic and energetic digger in the litterbox. I'm sure she is convinced that somewhere down there is a shortcut to a different dimension, and she is determined to find it before some scientist does.

The moment Fudge is in the litterbox, Ziggy suddenly gets the urge to go, too. Suddenly, there is a line forming outside the litterbox like at an airport restroom. As Ziggy stands and waits (he won't go to another

box), he watches Fudge's litterbox tactics. When it's his turn in the box, he's flinging sand everywhere, too.

After turning the kitchen area into a beach, Fudge will stand there with an expression on her face that says: "I can't walk here! Can you clean up, please?" And soon Ziggy is ganging up on me, too, with the same dirty look on his naughty face.

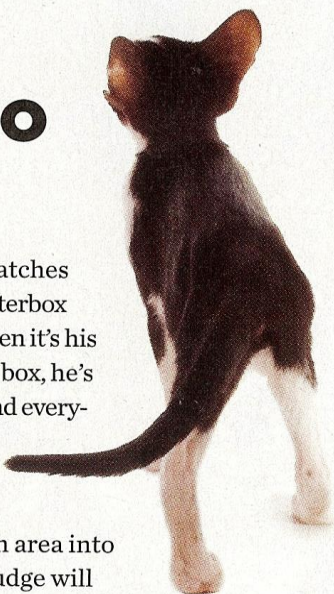
But the crunch came when the cats got a new bed to test. The Plush is in fact a dog bed different from any other bed because it's got a wonderfully soft blanket sewn into the design. It's a unique bed, and I waited to see if they would make this discovery, too.

I put the bed down, and Fudge arrived for the first inspection. It passed the test, and she climbed in. It didn't take long for Ziggy to get curious and nudge her out of the way so he could get in, too.

They fought over the bed for weeks, nudging each other out and often sharing. (We have four other beds in the house, I hasten to add.) Then Fudge did the unthinkable: She vomited in the bed and instantly left. I arrived with the cleaning fluid to remove the mess. But after a serious olfactory inspection, Fudge "red tagged" it. It obviously still smelled of vomit and cleaning fluid, and thus wasn't safe. Ziggy, standing and watching the inspection, went over and nosed Fudge and it was as if they were having a private conversation after which Ziggy got the message and avoided it, too.

The bed just sat there for a week, vacant. Determined to outsmart them, I took the bed apart and threw the upholstery sections into the washing machine, then spent several hours drying it flat

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before "rebuilding" it and presenting it as "new."

I put it down and waited. It didn't take long before the first feline inspector arrived. Fudge gave it a serious once-over, sniffing, and climbed inside. Ziggy, witnessing all this, then rushed over and was soon nudging Fudge to the side to get in, too.

I have to admit I think copycatting is a wonderful trait. It's what makes cats so funny and almost addictive to watch when they get going. All those funny cat videos on YouTube are a wonderful testament. 🐾

Sandy Robins is an award-winning multimedia writer, author, blogger, pet lifestyle TV spokeswoman and host of the nationally syndicated radio show House Pets. Best of all, she's a besotted pet parent to Fudge and Ziggy. Like her on www.facebook.com/sandyrobinspetlifestyleexpert.

