

# **Don't Know or Don't Care?**

## **How Beliefs and Attitudes about Dog Health and Welfare Limit Behaviour Change**

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# Objectives

- Using health and welfare issues in Brachycephalic dogs as an example:
  - Highlight the complexity of human-dog relationships and
  - Demonstrate a need to access resources available in other domains who study and apply Theories of Behaviour Change and Complex Systems
- In order to promote positive change

# “Honest advice about dogs”

<http://www.yourpurebredpuppy.com/reviews/bulldogs.html>

*If you want a dog who...*

- Is moderately-sized
- Has an easy-care coat ...
- Is easygoing and dependable ...
- Doesn't need much exercise
- Spends much of the day snoring on the sofa
- Seldom barks

*... An English Bulldog may be right for you*



# “Honest advice about dogs”

<http://www.yourpurebredpuppy.com/reviews/bulldogs.html>



## ***If you don't want to deal with...***

- Tenacious stubbornness
- Serious food possessiveness
- Shedding
- **Snorting, snuffling, wheezing, grunting, loud snoring**
- **Slobbering and drooling**
- **Gassiness (flatulence)**
- **A multitude of health problems, a short lifespan, and sky-high vet bills**
- **High cost (\$1000 and up)**

***... An English Bulldog may not be right for you.***



# “Honest advice about dogs”

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**The past 10 years has seen a doubling in the number of Bulldogs (up from 3,000 to 7,000 KC registrations in 2015)**

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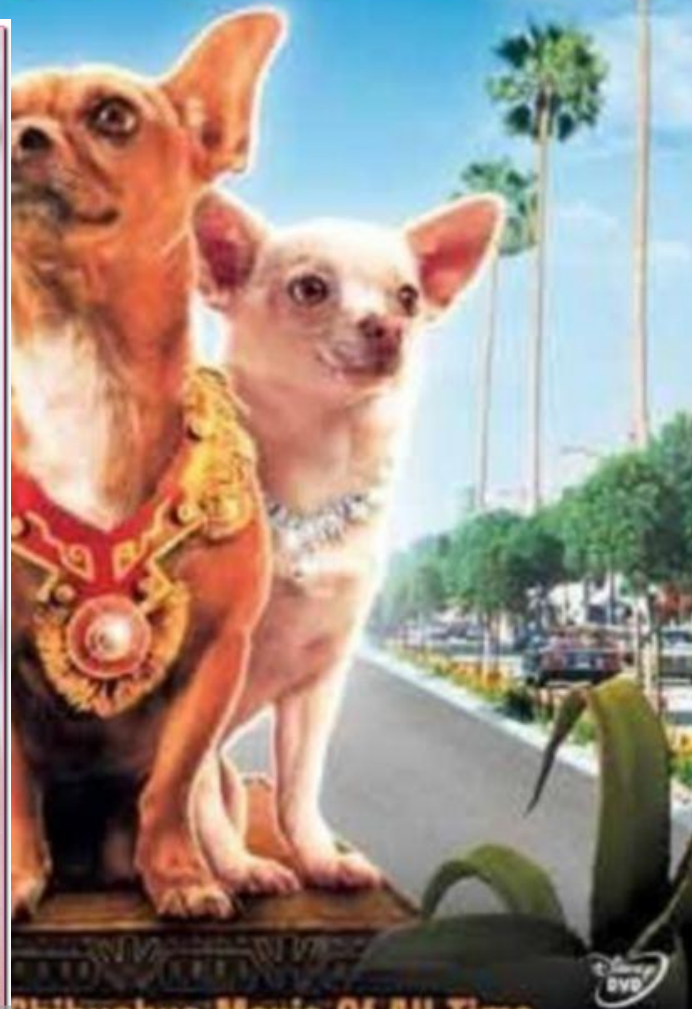
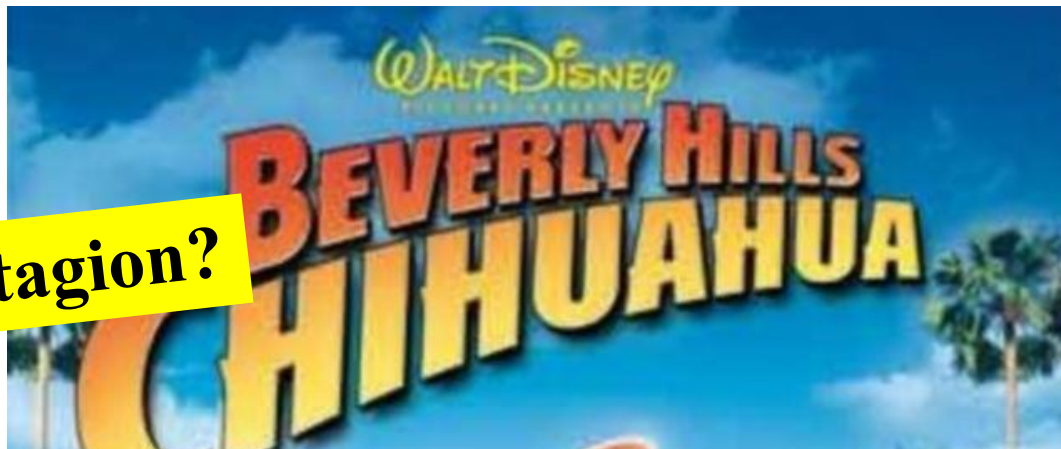
***... An English Bulldog may not be right for you.***







social contagion?





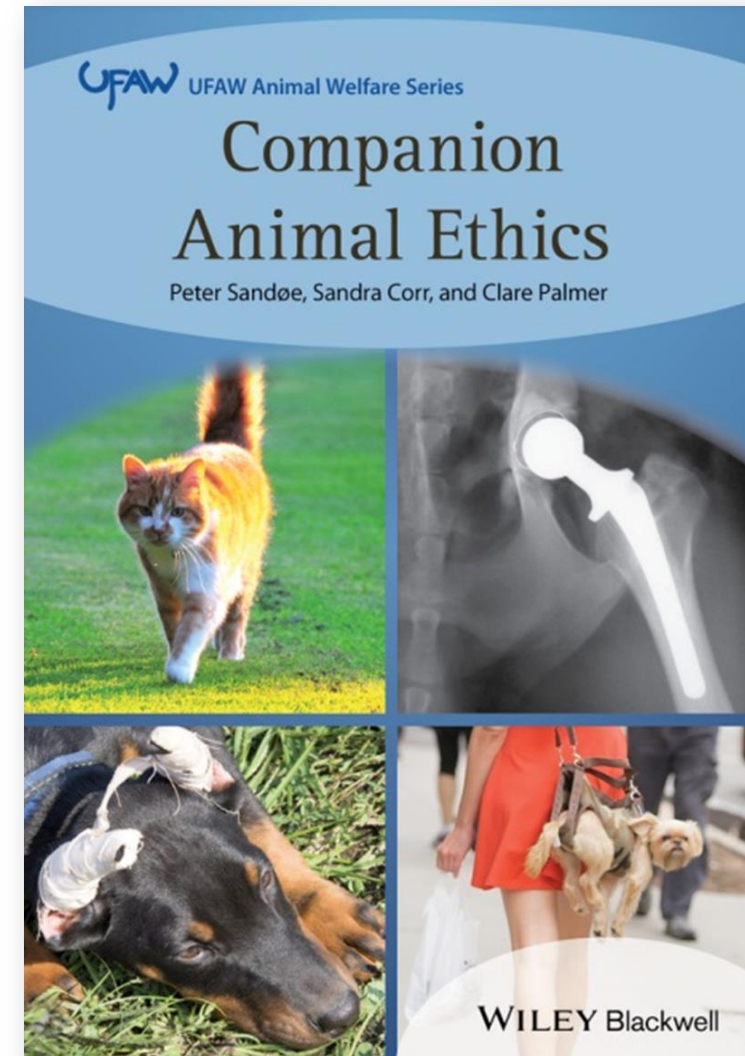
# Messages

Redmalm D. Holy bonsai wolves: Chihuahuas and the **Paris Hilton syndrome**.

Int J Cult Stud. 2013; 17(1): 93-109.

## Humane / welfare groups

- “And the emotional and financial cost of these sick dogs to their owners is enormous.”
- one of the biggest dog-welfare problems in this country



# Messages

## Humane / welfare group

- “And the emotional cost of these sick dogs to owners is enormous”
- one of the biggest dog problems in this country



© Hugh Jackman/Instagram

huahuas





# Possible reasons people choose compromised dogs/breeds?

- Dog owners, prior to acquisition:
  - are **not fully aware** of potential problems
  - do **not perceive the clinical signs** of some inherited disorders as problems, but rather as normal, breed-specific characteristics.
- **other characteristics of the dog may be considered more important than its health and welfare?**

## - O10 - WHY DO PEOPLE LIKE SMALL DOGS WITH EXTREME PHENOTYPES? A REPRESENTATIVE STUDY OF DANISH OWNERS OF FOUR DOG BREEDS

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<sup>2</sup>Department of Large Animal Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; <sup>3</sup>Department of Psychology and Counselling, La Trobe University, Bendigo Australia; <sup>4</sup>Danish Kennel Club, Solrød Strand, Denmark; <sup>5</sup>Department of Clinical Studies, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA.

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### Highlights:

A survey was conducted among owners of four small dog breeds of which three have extreme phenotypes. Motivations for acquiring the dogs, welfare problems and owner-dog relationship were measured. For owners of two of these breeds, health and other breed properties were not important motivators. Owners of breeds with highest levels of welfare problems had closer relationships with their dogs.

**Published Abstract: Canine Science Forum, Padua, 2016.**

**Full Paper in review.**

Also studied whether health and behavior influenced intention to acquire **another dog** of the same breed.



Personality

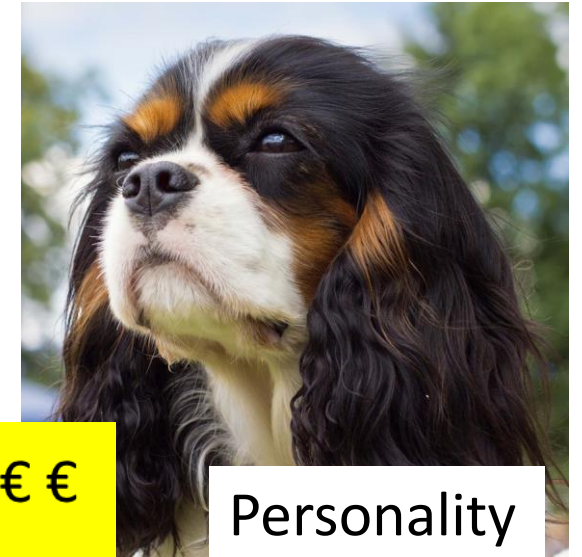
€ €



Impulse

€ €

- A random sample of 750 owners of **each** of the four dog breeds registered with the Danish Dog Registry
- 896 completed the questionnaire
- **response rate of 34%**



Personality



Health



# Study conclusions...

- Motivations for acquiring a dog differ broadly among owners of the four dog breeds included in this study
- **Prospective owners of Chihuahuas and French Bulldogs do not prioritize future health when acquiring a dog**
- **Experiencing health problems will not affect the owners' probability of acquiring a dog of the same breed again, except in the case of French Bulldogs**
- **Emotional responses to phenotypic attributes of extreme breeds make up for breed problems**



**We need to explore ...**

**Complex Systems expertise...**

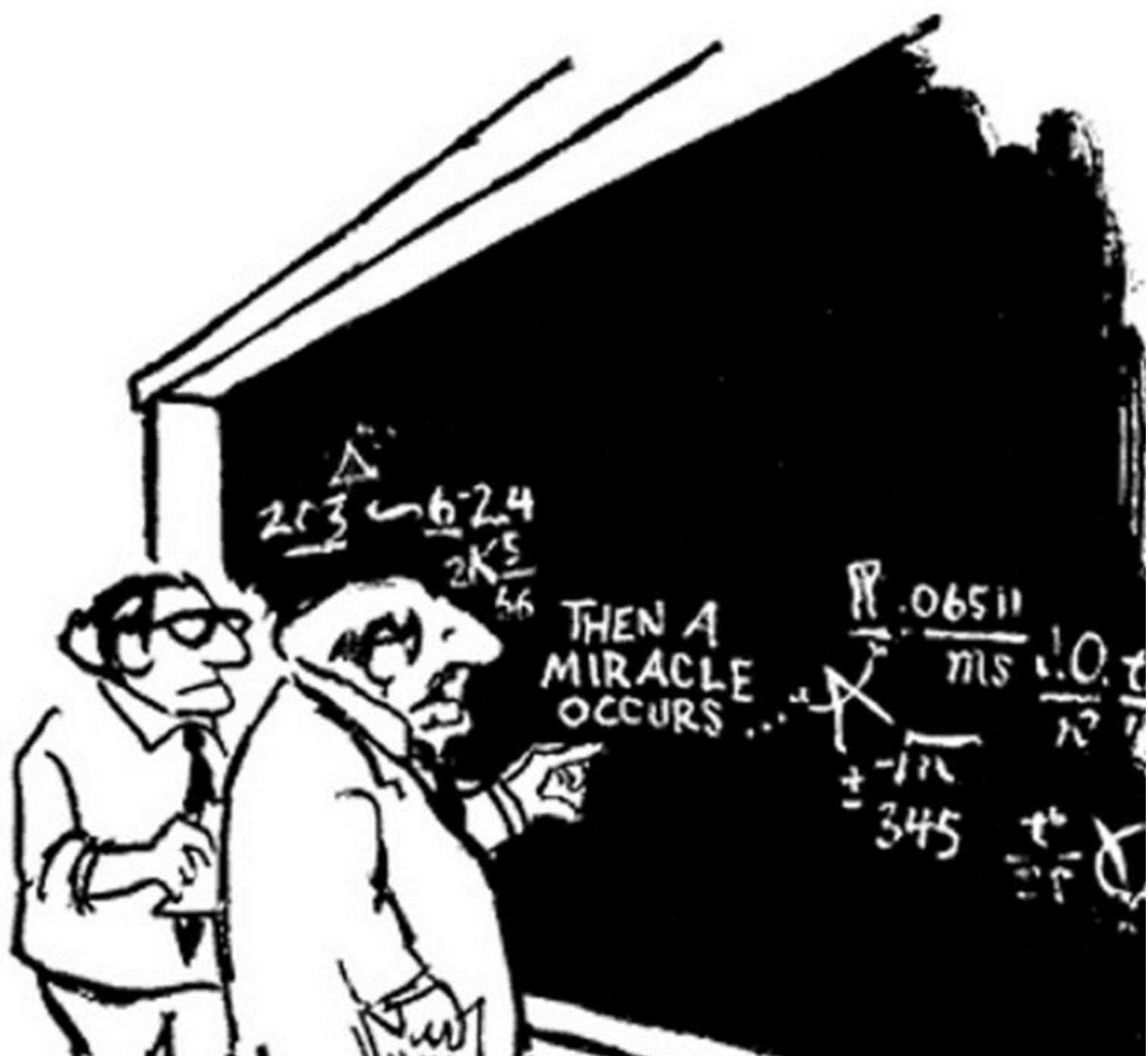
*See DogEd blog posts by Ian Seath*

**and Change Theory**

<http://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theo>

## What is Theory of Change?

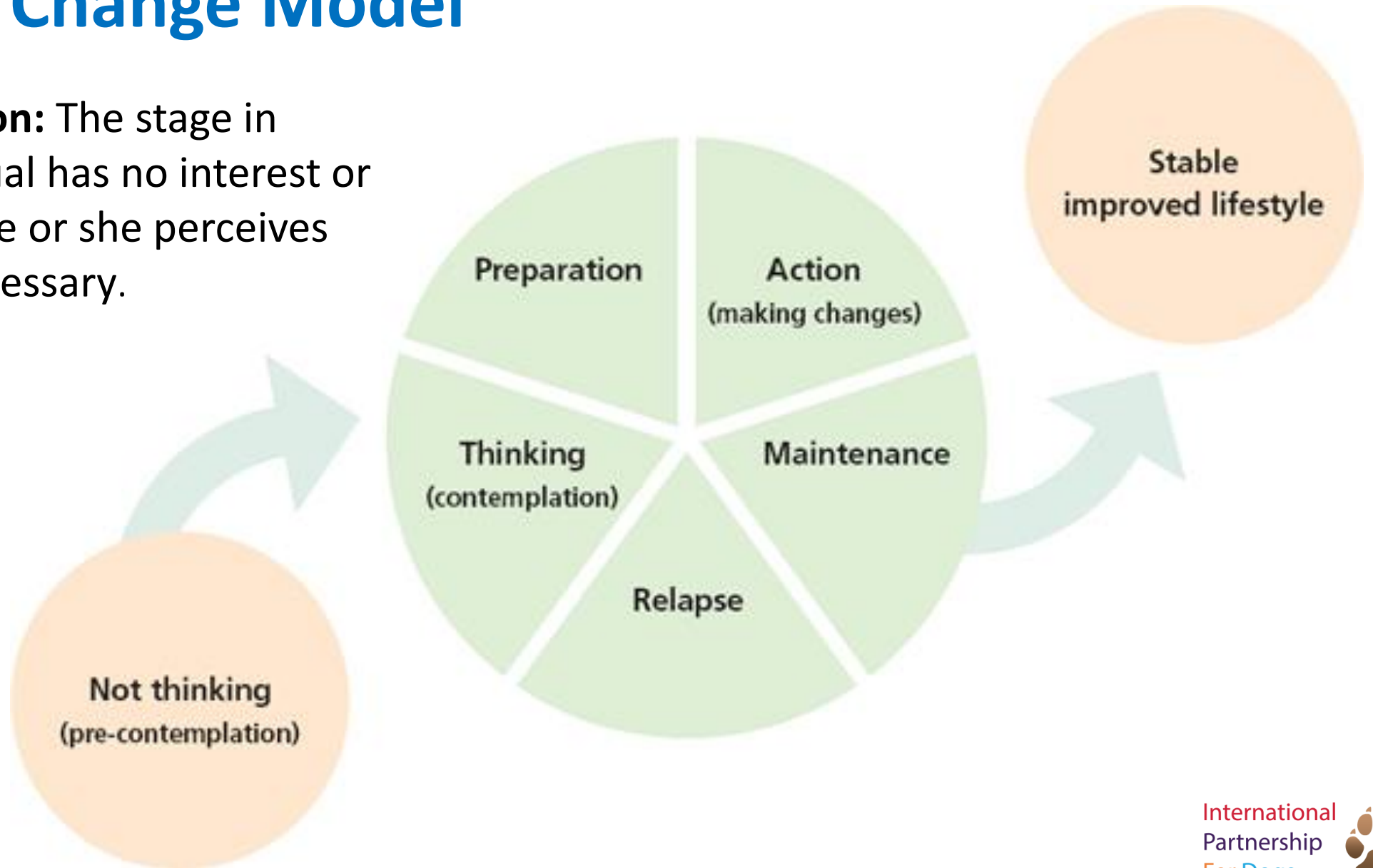
*“I think you should be more explicit here in step two.”*





# Stages of Change Model

**Pre-contemplation:** The stage in which an individual has no interest or intention in 'X'. He or she perceives that 'X' is not necessary.



# Stages of Change Model : CONTEXT

**Pre-contemplation:** There's nothing wrong with my dog / this breed / the way we are breeding these dogs...

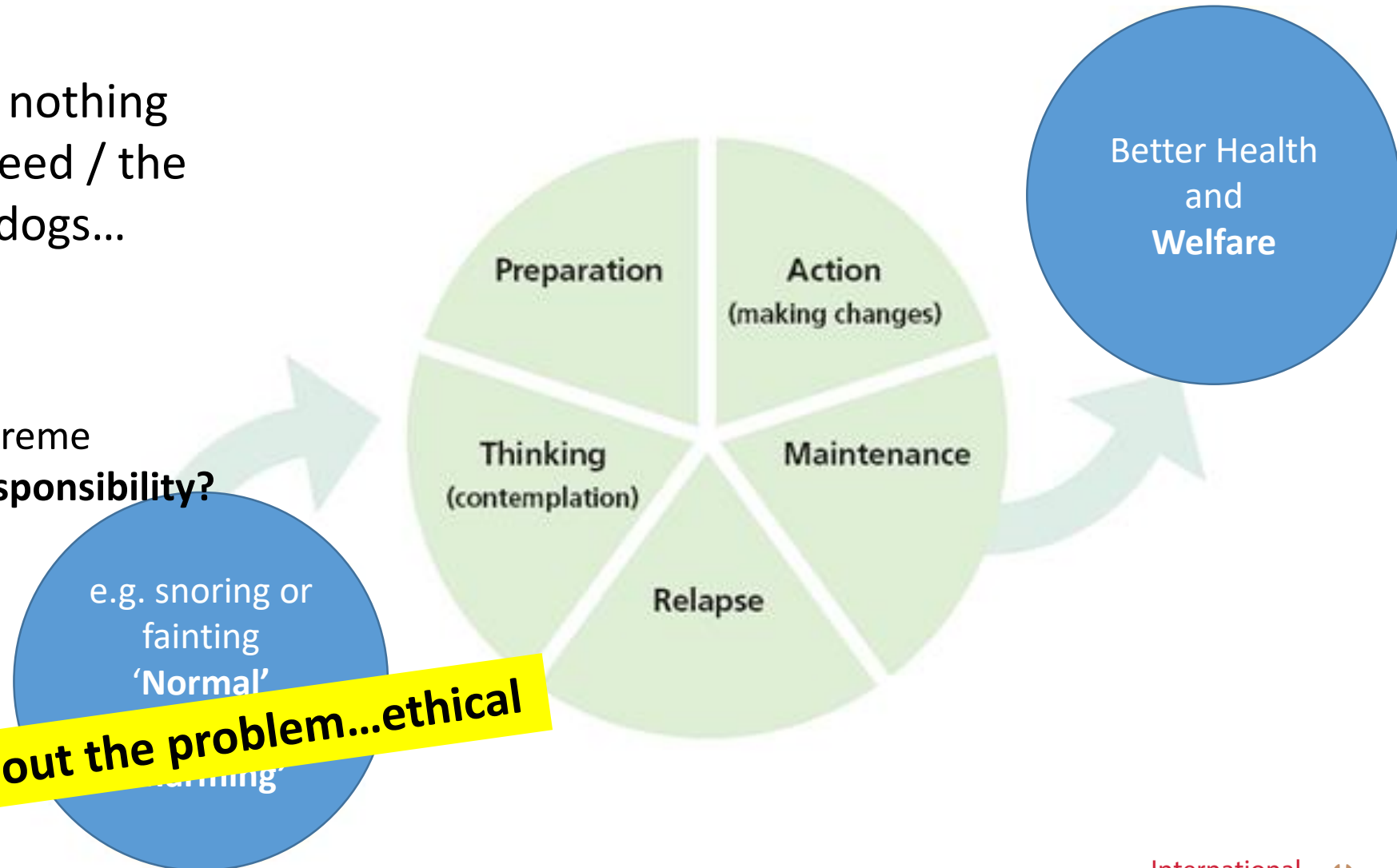
## Resistance?

- Ignorance / lack of evidence?
- Deep personal investment, extreme consequences of accepting responsibility?

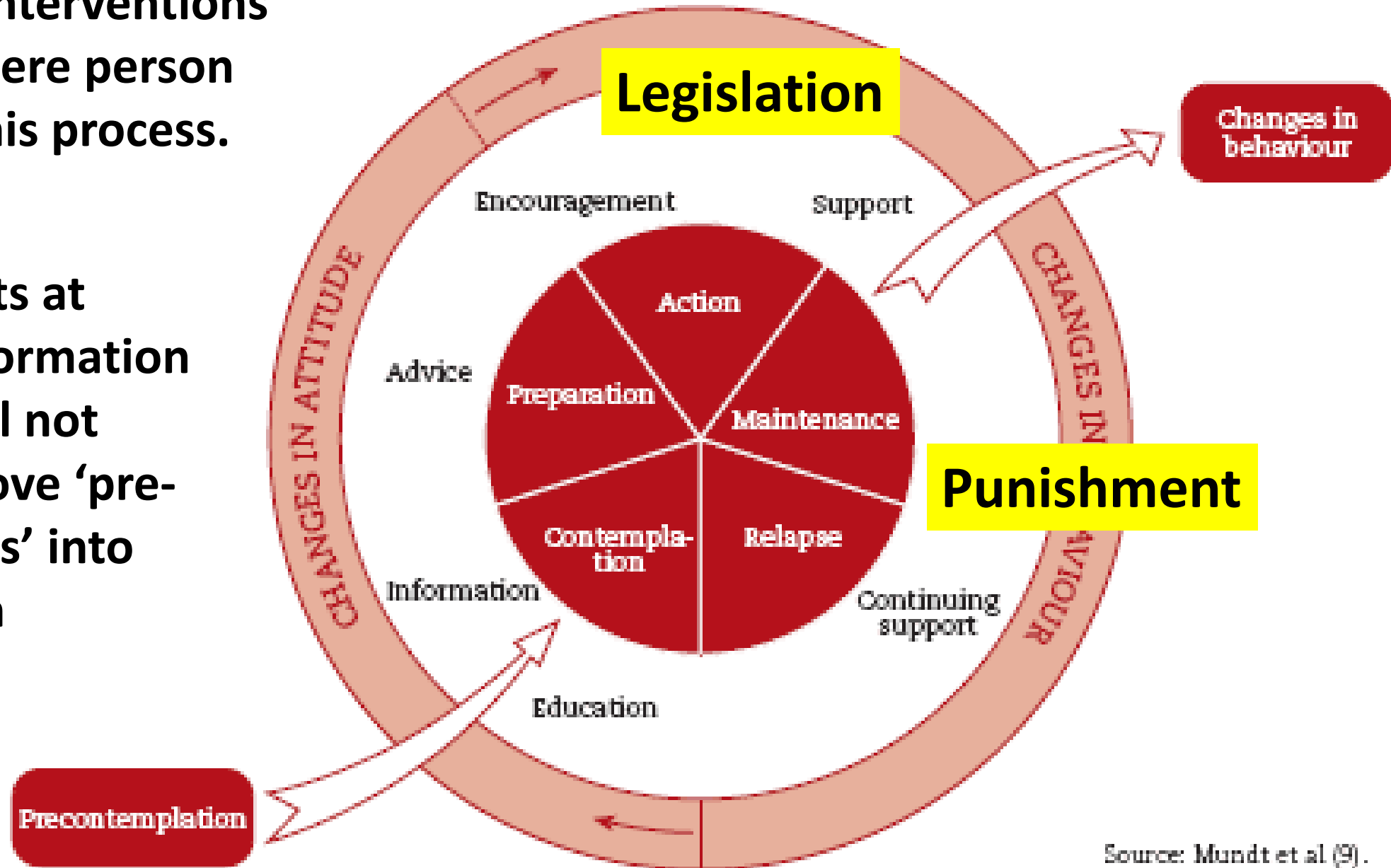
## And/or

- Problem is so **complex** ... any hope of resolution seems impossible.

**..or... Strongly disagree about the problem...ethical**



- Appropriate ‘interventions’ depend on where person (group) is in this process.
- The best efforts at education, information and advice will not necessarily move ‘pre-contemplatives’ into contemplation



Source: Mundt et al (9).



# Take Home Messages

- We must understand the **humans** behind these problems
  - Accept diversity; broaden our understanding
- Use **empathy** and motivational communication
- Learn from other fields: **change theory** and **complex systems**
- Simplifying (oversimplifying) complexity
  - Good – choose one thing a pre-contemplative might address
  - Challenge – can it be effective?
- People may have deeply seated psycho-social reasons for their behaviours – **more innovative strategies are needed**