Is that Cat Feral?

Tips and Myths about Feral Cat Behavior

ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Margaret Slater, DVM, PhD

Senior Director of Veterinary Epidemiology
Shelter Research and Development
ASPCA

The ASPCA research team:
Dr. Katherine Miller, Dr. Laurie Garrison,
Natasha Drain, Dr. Kathleen Makolinski, Dr. Emily Weiss

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Poll: Can you tell if this cat is socialized?

Submit your answer in the poll box on the right.

a) Yes, this cat is socialized.

b) No, this cat is unsocialized.

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Topics Today

- What we thought we knew about behaviors to identify Socialized Cats
- Behaviors or characteristics that don't do a good job of predicting socialization level
- Behaviors unique to more socialized cats
- Cat behavior in shelters
- Next steps

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

The Fear Factor

Feral? **Semi-socialized?** **Socialized pet?**

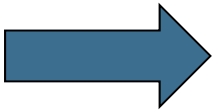
How do we tell the difference?

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Socialization

Level of fear/comfort with humans:

Least Socialized
extremely frightened of humans and unaccustomed to their close proximity



Most Socialized
extremely accustomed to interacting with humans and very comfortable with them

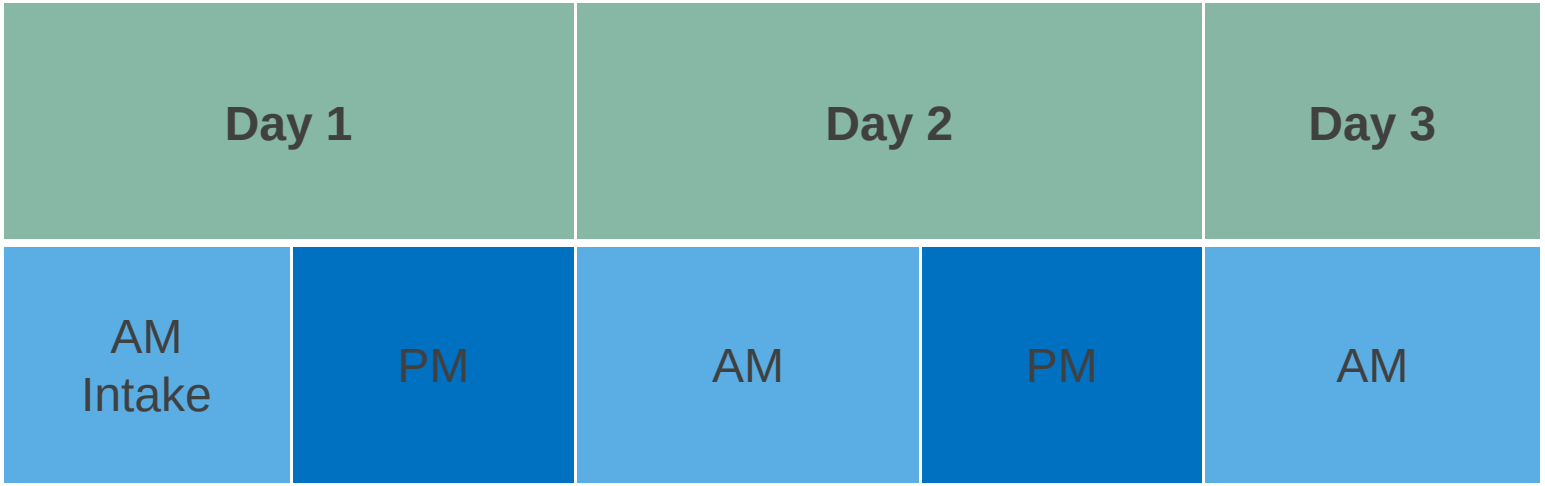
NOT adoptability or aggression

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

HOW DID WE ELICIT BEHAVIORS FROM CATS?

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Four Observation Periods



Four Interactions/Assessments In a Cage

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Four Assessments

- Greet & extend hand to cat, cage condition
- Crack cage door open
- Jiggle string toy at front
- Stroke and push with a rod

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Crack Cage Door Video

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Stroke/Push with Rod Video

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

What are some specific cat behaviors you or your organization use to identify socialized cats?

Type them into chat.

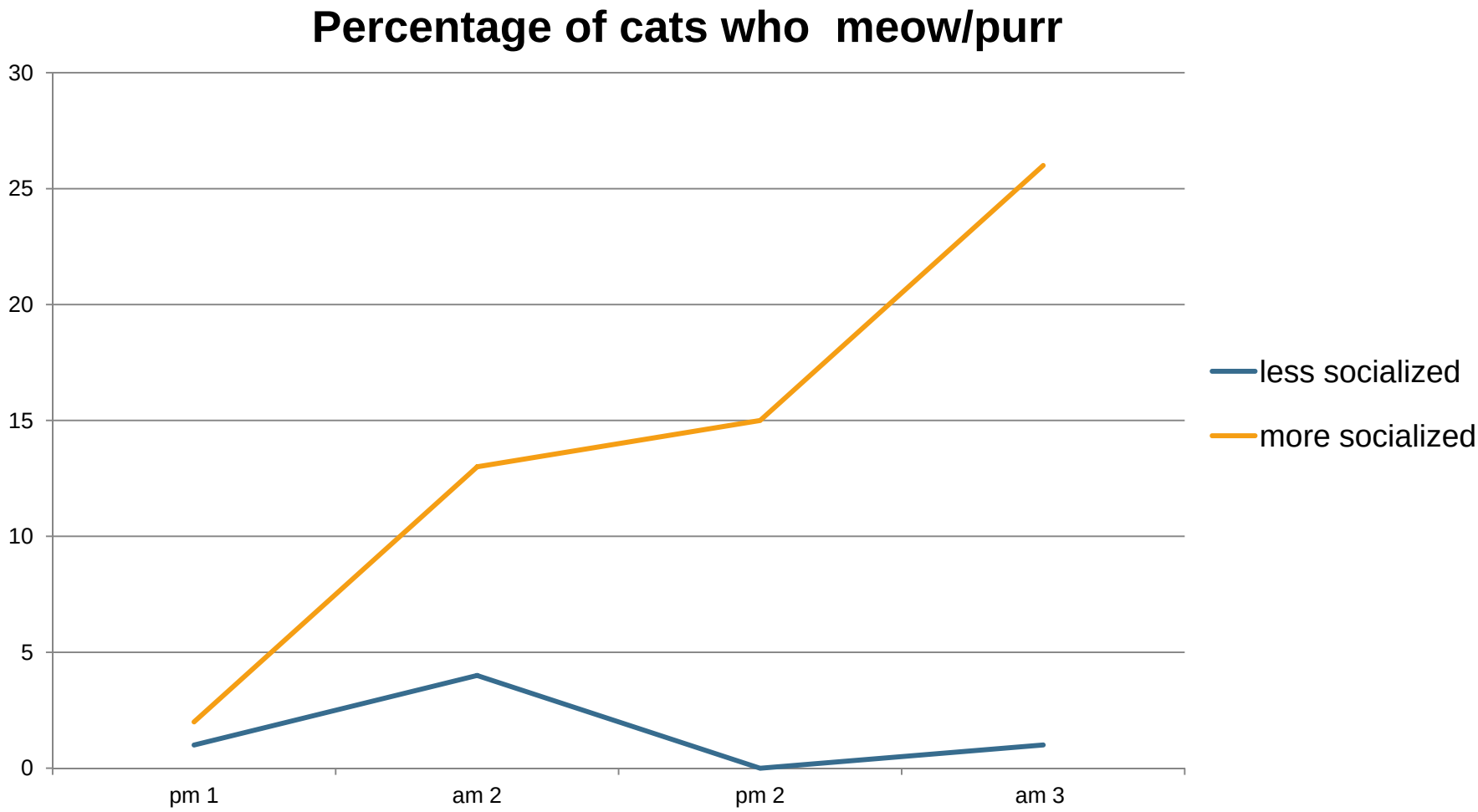
© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

What we THOUGHT was important

Vocalization:	Meow/purr vs. hiss/growl
Aggression:	Paw raise, swat, lunge
Cage messiness:	Litter box dumped, torn up bedding
Licking lips or nose:	Social behavior
Blinking with eye contact:	Social behavior

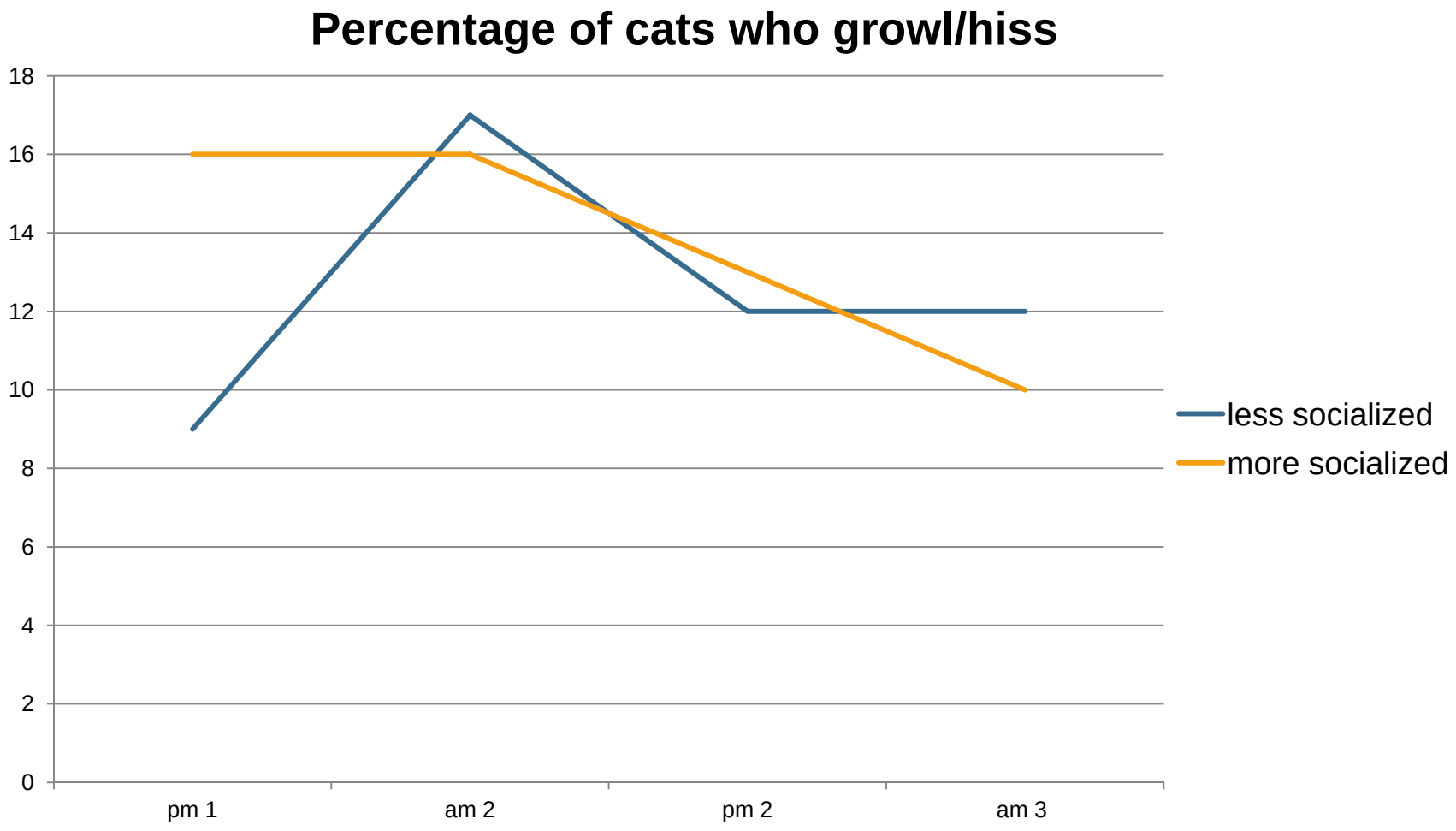
© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Example: Stroke/Push with Rod



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Example: Stroke/Push with Rod



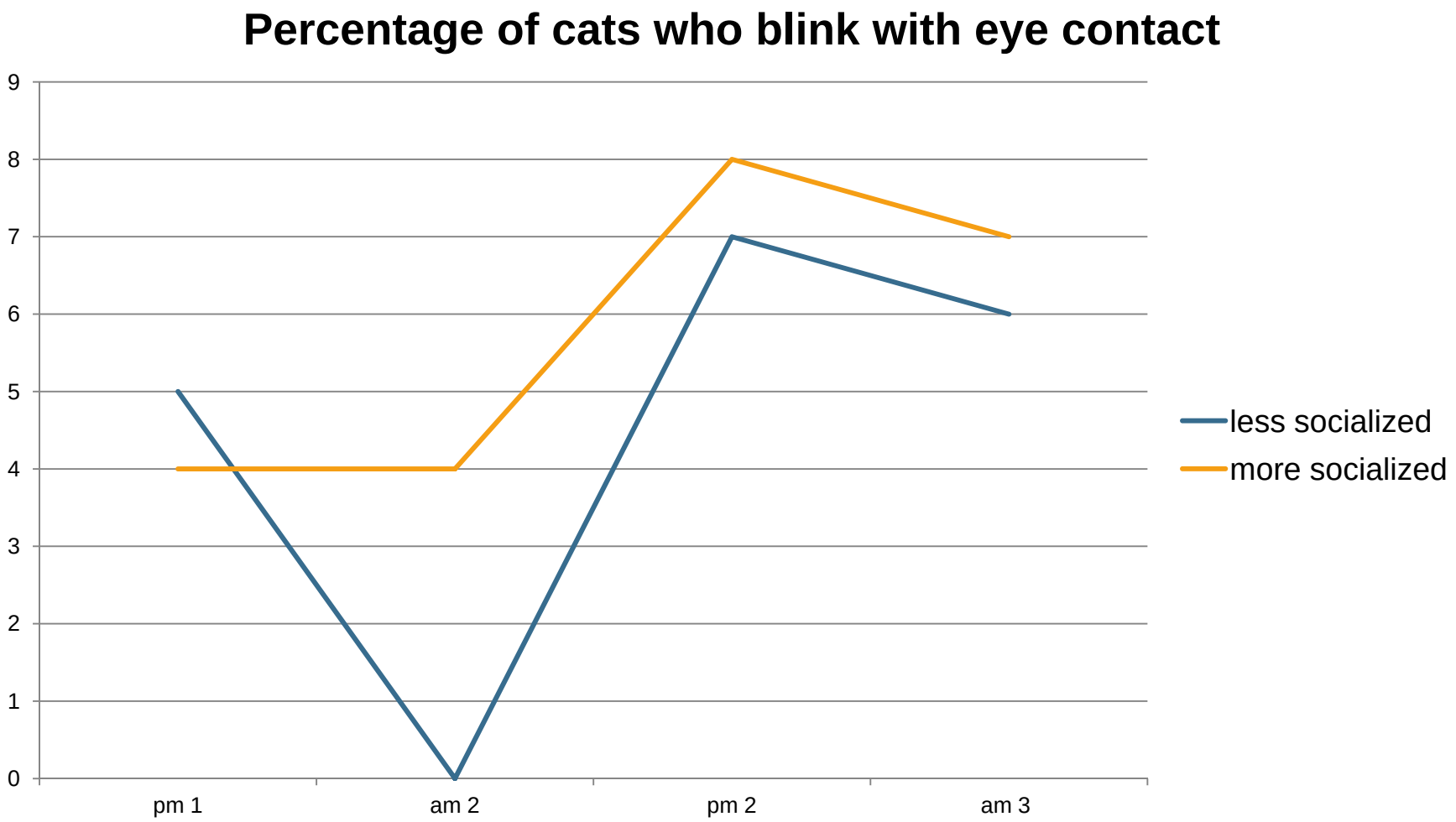
© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

What we THOUGHT was important

Stretch:	Social behavior
Approach toward front of cage:	Social behavior
Sniff:	Affiliative behavior
Stiffen/flinch with touch with rod:	Less socialized behavior

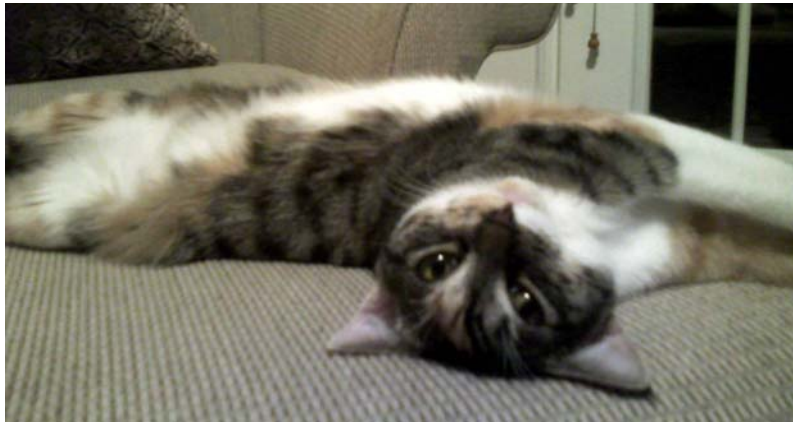
© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Example: Greeting



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

WHAT DO ONLY SOCIALIZED CATS DO?



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

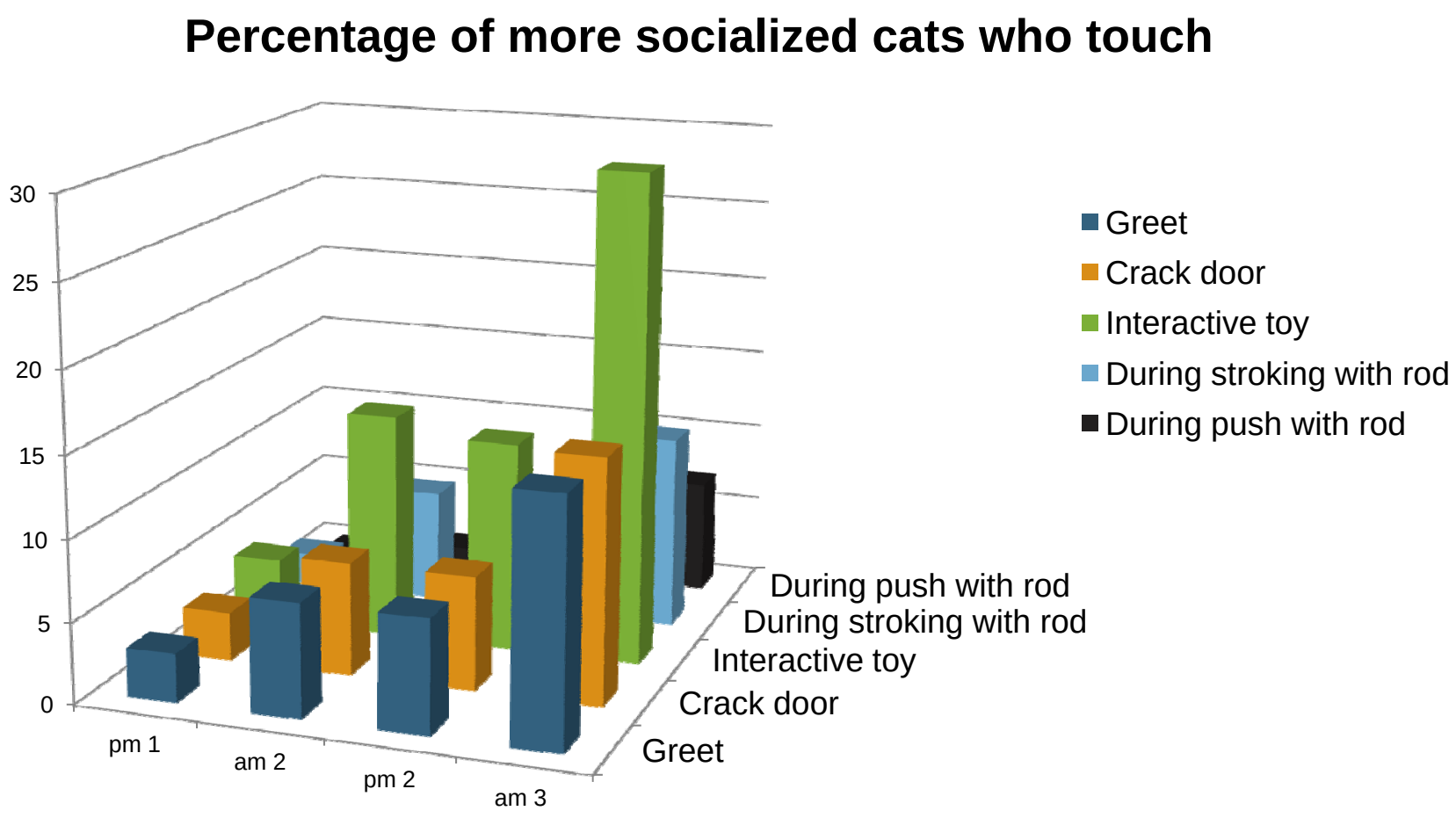
Obvious Ones:
if do once = socialized

- Chirp
- Rub
- Knead
- Touch
- Play

- At the front of the cage
- Tail up in the air

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Touching…



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Less Obvious:
need to do 4 or more = socialized

- Yawn
- Groom/shake

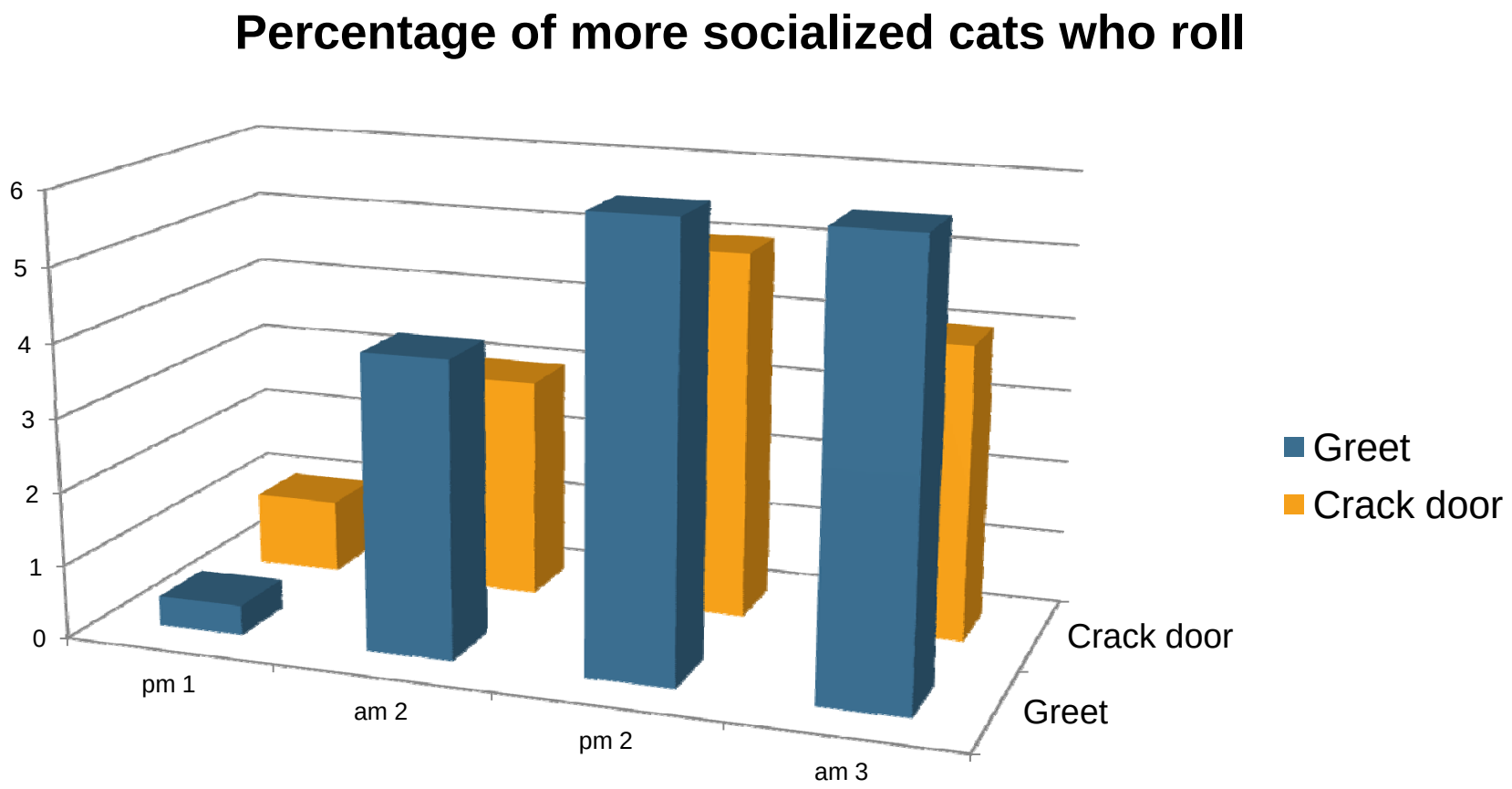
- Approach toward front of cage

- Sniff
- Roll
- Reach

- Standing or still moving around in the cage

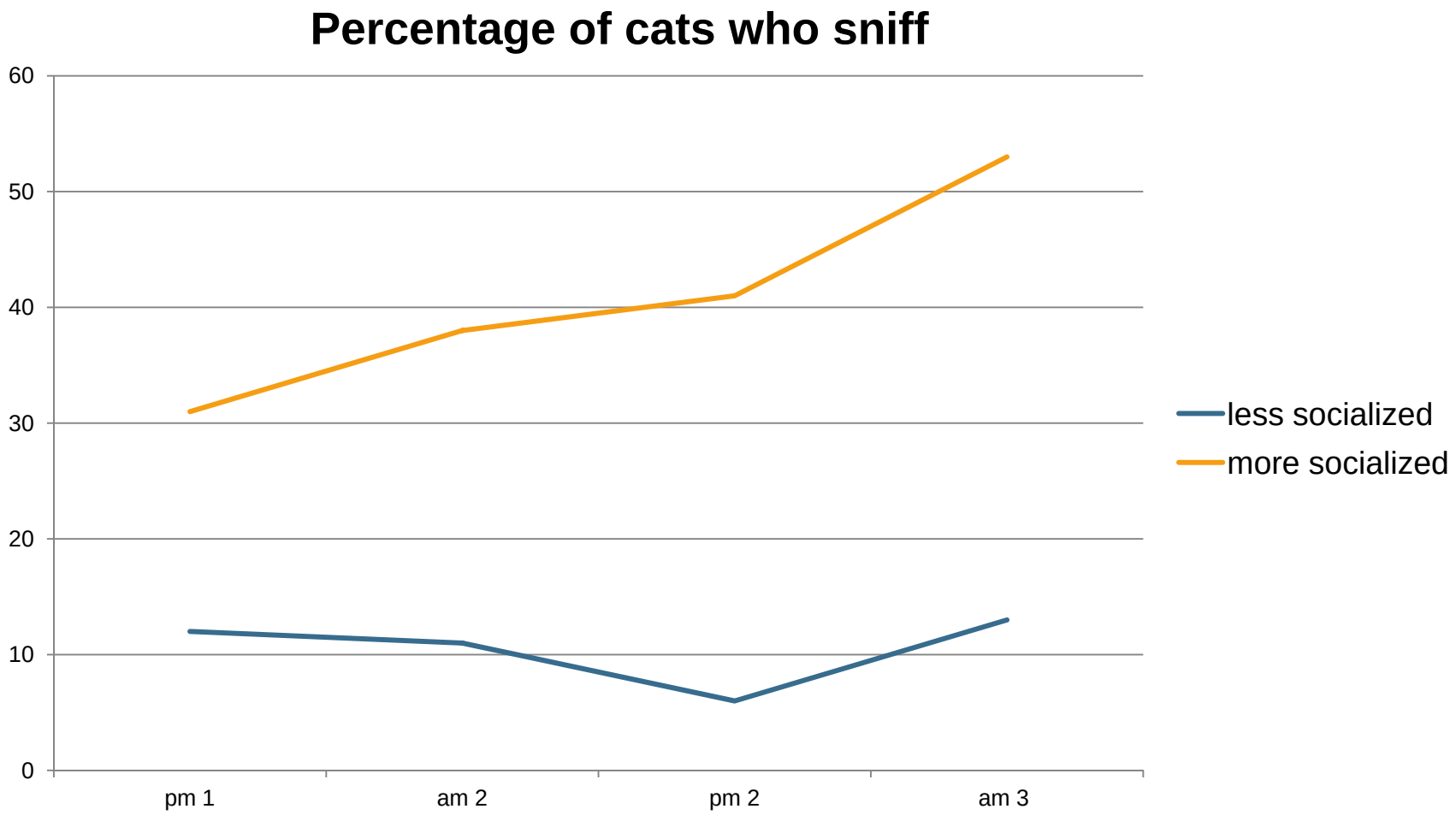
© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Most Common Assessments for Rolling



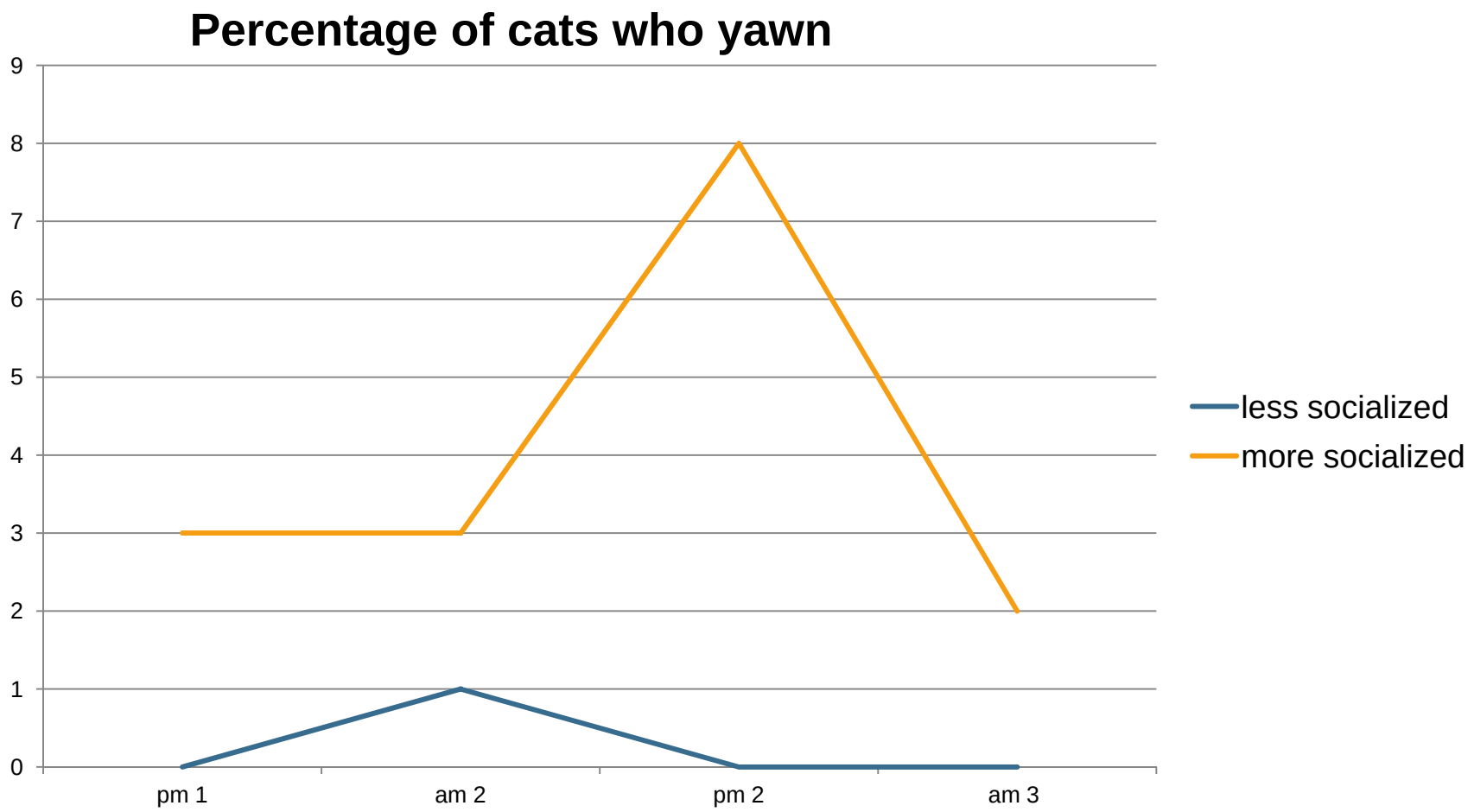
© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Example: Stroke with Rod



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Example: Crack Door



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

BUT:

- Not all socialized cats did these behaviors

  Didn't do every time period

  more than ½ did NOT do on first day

  Didn't do in all assessments

- Probably won't see if shy or not very demonstrative or "needy"

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Poll: Which of these less obvious behaviors did you find most interesting or surprising?

Submit your answer in the poll box on the right.

a) Yawn
b) Groom/shake
c) Approach toward front of cage
d) Sniff
e) Roll
f) Reach
g) Standing or still moving around in the cage

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

SOME OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS WE LEARNED

ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

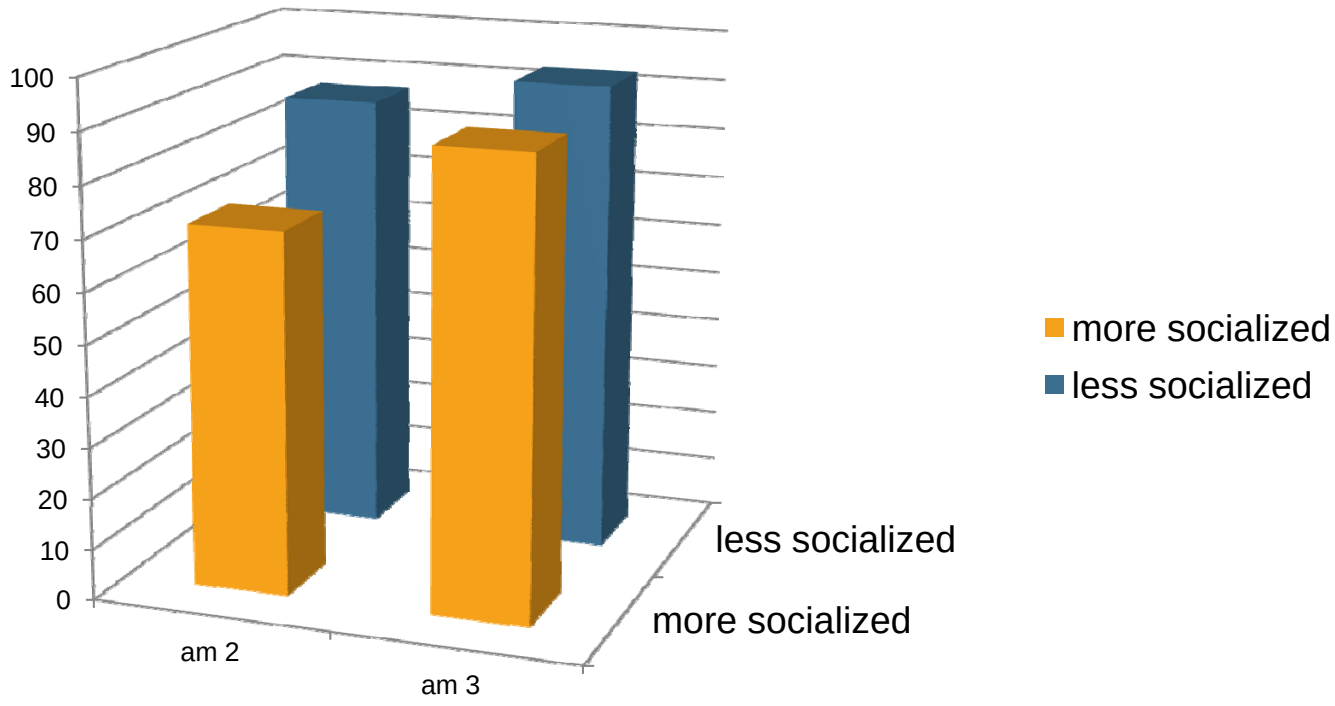
Next Steps

- Evaluate the consistency of different people for in-cage measures
- Put together a training package
- Test in several shelters
- Revise
- Share on ASPCApro.org

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Welfare Implications

Cats eat during the night in the dark and quiet
Cats use their litter boxes then too

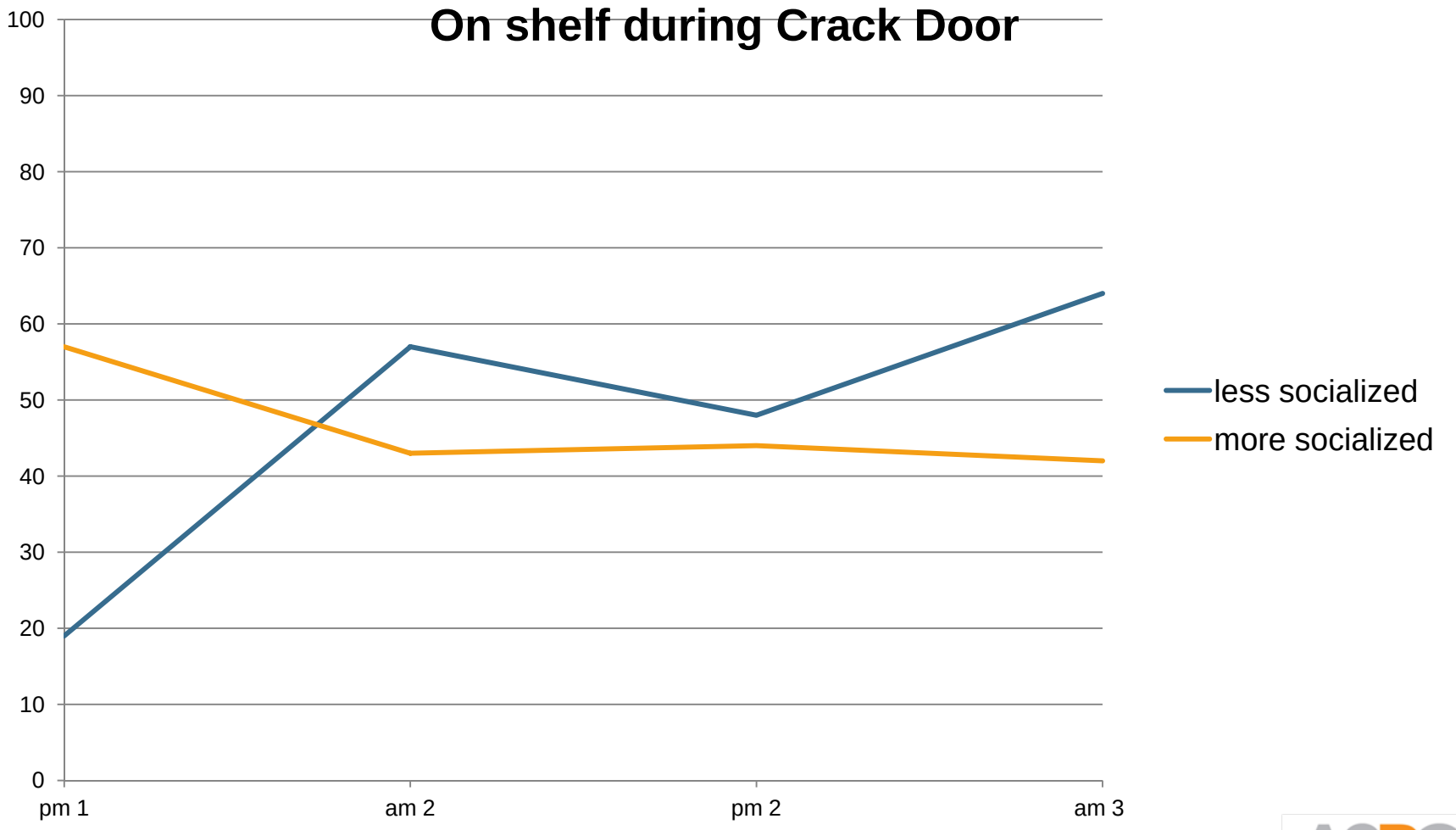


© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Bed and Shelf

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Soft Bed and Shelf or Kuranda Bed Used



© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

What was the most important thing you heard about in this webinar?

Type your answers into chat please!

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.

Upcoming ASPCApro Webinars

aspcapro.org/webinars

- Fast Tracking to Save Lives (Oct. 8)
- Saving Lives with Animal Relocation (Oct. 29)
- Successful Financial Management for Nonprofits (Oct. 30)
- Beyond the Box: Closing After-hours Drop Boxes (Nov. 14)
- Parvo 101 (Dec. 5)

© 2013 ASPCA®. All Rights Reserved.