Dominance and Dogs

Origin of the Dog

- Captured & tamed by early humans

Schenkel's Wolf Studies

- Switzerland Zoo, ca 30s & 40s
- Groundbreaking research in social behavior
  - Alpha male / lead
  - Female bitch
  - Violent rivalries among individuals
- Highly volatile, incessant control & repression
- Scrambling to take/defend alpha position

"Expressions Studies on Wolves."
Mech’s Research

• Studies ca 1960s in zoos and wild
• Supported Schenkel’s theories
• Book popularized:
  • Dominance as key role in lupine social order
  • Natural inclination to dominate each other
  • Competition-based hierarchies
• Republished in 80s

Extrapolation

• Since dogs and wolves are basically the same thing, humans must handle dogs the way alpha wolves handle subordinates

Juuuust One Problem...
It’s NOT true!

Dogs are NOT Wolves!

- Dogs develop faster than wolves (Lord)
- Dogs have smaller skulls, teeth, & brains than wolves (Coppinger)
- Neotony (Coppinger)
- Dogs can read human gestures. Wolves can’t. (Hare)
- Dogs outperform wolves on cognitive social learning tasks. (Hare)
- Dogs have promiscuous mating system (Yin)
  - Free roaming partners, all males get to mate, hierarchy not necessary nor observed!

“Close” Doesn’t Cut It

- Humans and chimps share 99% DNA (Powledge)
- Wolves and dogs share 99% DNA (Budiansky)
- We don’t look to chimps to raise our kids!
We didn’t tame wolves!

- Co-evolution (Coppinger)
- Natural divergence from wolf long ago
- Current attempts to tame wolf pups
- Disclaimer: this is a theory!

Artificial Pack Research

- Artificial packs in captivity
- Individuals unable to get away
- Social groupings not normal family groups found in wild
- Like studying refugee camps to learn about human family dynamics

Modern Wolf Research

- Recent studies of WILD wolf packs
- Formed naturally, stable, non-volatile, aggression rare
- Mech has renounced “alpha wolf” theory

“Science has come to understand that most wolf packs are merely family groups formed exactly the same way as human families are formed.”

(Mech)
Dominance isn’t a personality trait

- A relationship between individuals
- Established through force, aggression and submission in order to gain priority access to resources
- Relationship not established until one animal consistently defers to another
- Describes a relationship NOT an individual

So Why So Pervasive?

Most – Military

- 1910

TRAINING
DOGS
A Manual

Colonel Konrad Most

Walt Kibbe Photography
Mech – Wolf research

- 1970
- Erroneous research

Koehler Method

- 1962
- Barbaric and cruel
- Still popular

“Alpha”

- 1970s
- Mainstream dominance
Modern Dog Training

Pop Culture

2004
Human Nature

- Oil for mange
- Dry nose = sick dog
- A litter can only have 1 father
- Females need to have 1 litter or heat before spay
- Cats steal babies’ breath
- Chewing tobacco kills worms
- Once dogs taste blood, they can’t be trusted
- Dogs eat grass because they know they are sick

Common Myths

- Dogs who ignore you are dominant and don’t respect you.
- Dogs are easily distracted due to sensory sensitivities
- Trained dogs listen
- Untrained dogs don’t
- Thinking in pictures, proofing

Dogs who don’t listen need training, not dominance.
Dogs push past us through doorways to dominate us.

- If it works, it will continue
- You get pushed because you're in the way of what the dog finds interesting and exciting

Pushing is a training problem created by owners, through reinforcement!

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Dogs pull to get ahead because they want to control the walk.

- If it works, it will continue
- A cute pulling puppy becomes and annoying pulling adult
- Walks are fun and distracting!
- Strong walk in front, not leaders (think geese)

Pulling is a training problem created by owners, through reinforcement!

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Dogs that steal food are trying to be in control.

- If it works, it will continue
- Dogs are scavengers by nature
- If food appears, they’ll go for it!
- Bored dogs may counter surf or dig in trash

Stealing and begging are training problems created by owners, through reinforcement!
Dogs jump up to get to our height & show dominance.

- If it works, it will continue
- Jumpers have been inadvertently reinforced by owners
- Attention, physical contact, eye contact, etc. are all reinforcers
- Cute puppies who jump become annoying adults who jump
- Dogs jump up because they want to get closer to our faces to say hello.

Jumping is a training problem created by owners, through reinforcement!

Dogs who get on furniture are trying to show you who is boss.

- If it works, it will continue
- Dogs get on furniture and/or beds for the same reasons that people do – because they’re very comfortable
- If it’s not a problem, don’t worry about it!
- If the dog is guarding the furniture – restrict all furniture and call a pro

Getting on furniture is a training problem created by owners, through reinforcement!

Alpha rolls show who’s boss.

- Dominants do NOT demand
- Subordinates DO offer
- Repercussions
Scruff grabs show who's boss.

- Origin?
- Wolf fight?

He stopped doing it, so it works!

- Fight or flight
- Learned helplessness
- Broken HAB
- Destroyed trust
- Punishment
- Not a language dogs understand

Cessation of Behavior? Or Broken Dog?

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Don’t Take My Word For It

- APDT Position Statement: [http://www.apdt.com/about/ps/dominance.aspx](http://www.apdt.com/about/ps/dominance.aspx)

Veterinary Director Chris Laurence

“Sadly, many techniques used to teach a dog that his owner is leader of the pack is counter-productive; you won’t get a better behaved dog, but you will either end up with a dog so fearful it has suppressed all its natural behaviours and will just do nothing, or one so aggressive it’s dangerous to be around.”

The Research

- Dogs don’t have a clear dominance hierarchy (Bradshaw)
- Punishment associated with increase in problematic behavior (Hiby)
- Dogs presenting for aggression more likely to respond aggressively to the confrontational, dominance techniques (Herron)
- Confrontational training methods was associated with aggressive responses in many cases (Herron)
Think About It

What ARE You Supposed to Do?
Tips for Respect

1. Earn it, don’t demand it
2. Consistency, predictability
3. Clear communication, BOTH WAYS
4. Realistic goals & expectations
5. Rules & boundaries
6. On-going training

Behavior is a Specialty

• Cannot be all things to all people
• Should a suicidal schizophrenic seek mental health advise from a heart surgeon?
  • What if she’s the best in the world?
  • What if she has a schizophrenic sister?
• Professionals have ethical obligation to not give advice on matters they are not trained in

Refer to a Professional

• www.IAABC.org
• www.AVSAOnline.org
• www.animalbehavior.org/ABSAppliedBehavior
• Choose carefully
Questions?

Katenna Jones
Jones Animal Behavior
www.jonesanimalbehavior.com
katenna@gmail.com

Resources

• Dogs: A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior & Evolution (By Raymond Coppinger, Lorna Coppinger)
• The Genius of Dogs: Discovering the Unique Intelligence of Man’s Best Friend (By Brian Hare, Vanessa Woods)
• Animal Behavior and Handling (By Sophia Yin)
• http://drsophiayin.com/philosophy/dominance

• Bradshaw, John, Emily Blackwell; Rachel Casey (2009). Dominance in domestic dogs—useful construct or bad habit? J of Vet Beh. 4:3, 135–144
• Lord, Kathryn; Mark Feinstein; Bradley Smith; Raymond Coppinger (2013). Variation in reproductive traits of members of the genus Canis with special attention to the domestic dog (Canis familiaris). Behavioural Processes. 92, 131-142.