

The domestic dog as an inherently pack oriented animal for training purposes. YES or NO

I am going to argue that dogs are not pack animals. The pack theory is based on the evidence that dogs are descended from the wolf. Therefore, it is assumed that dogs must behave like wolves. It is reasonable to propose this as a theory but that theory needs to be tested and proved. I will argue that continued research has not supported the pack theory in dogs.

Technology using maternal mitochondria DNA has determined that dogs descended from the grey wolf several thousand millennia ago. The determination of the genetic blue print for dogs and wolves indicates that they share 99.96% of their genetic information.

This evidence would seem to support the theory that dogs should behave like wolves. Conversely, it could lead to the theory that wolves should be expected to behave like dogs.

However, although they have some similar behaviour patterns, it is clear that there are many behaviours that are very different. So the question arises to try to account for the differences. The technology does not yet exist that can determine the paternal DNA, so, it is possible that the paternal ancestor carried the precursors of dog behaviour that wolves don't share. Pennisi (2012) reports that it has recently been discovered that in the human genome there is much more information than originally thought. In fact, the protein based DNA with which we are most familiar accounts for less than 3% of the genome information. This may be where the differences can be found here.

The understanding of DNA to date does not allow us to determine resulting behaviour. The pack theory assumes that the ancestral wolves behaved just like the grey wolves of today but we cannot be sure.

As wolf populations have been protected, it has been easier for them to be studied in their natural environment (Ethology). It is now understood that the 'pack' is a family unit with all the commitment and care associated with successful family living.

Unfortunately, dogs for a long time seemed to be considered unworthy of much study. It has been the increased use of dogs in disaster search and rescue, drug control, assistance dogs and disease detection that has stimulated increased study of dogs in the last decade. Yet, they are seldom studied in their natural environment, that is, with people.

Studies of 'village dogs' (those that live alongside people but 'belong' to no one) have indicated that dogs are social. They have skills to communicate and interact without aggression. They join up in small groups for short periods but do not live in packs as wolves are seen to do. The promiscuous behaviour of dogs seems to lead to indiscriminate mating without apparent commitment of the male to his offspring.

When the pack theory is used as a training philosophy, it supposes that dogs need to know their place and role in the pack unit. When wolf studies were based on unrelated wolves kept in confine spaces the theory arose that the pack hierarchy was one of a fierce fight to the top. Everyone was thought to be wanting the alpha position. In the dog training world this led to the attitude that dogs need to know their place. The humans aimed to use the same procedures to put dogs in their place. However, it is now understood that

those studies were fallacious. The groups were artificial and the animals were under extreme stress. It was harsh. Unfortunately, these attitudes still continue in some places.

It is understood now that wolves living free are in family units. There is a mutual commitment to the survival of the family. In good times when the prey is large this family group can be very large. It is the parents who are the benevolent leaders of their family. In the dog-training scenario this has led to a much kinder approach and expectation of relationship but still tends to be one of controlling the dog. The questions that are unanswered are why would dogs consider us to be part of their pack and why would they consider us as a leader? This concept of another species being seen as a leader is very unusual.

Within this family/pack model the training techniques can be explained by learning theory so do not need the pack theory to justify/explain the effectiveness.

Alternatively, with an approach that uses an in-depth understanding of the motivations, interests and communication skills of dogs help us to recognise the needs of our dogs and respond in a way that builds trust.

Dogs are amazing in their ability to enter into our world and relate to us at such a profound level. It is an inter-species relationship that is unprecedented. It has led to dogs thriving in our world whereas wolves have faced extinction.

I feel that it behoves us, humans, to negotiate our relationship with our dog with an attitude of respect. We can learn what motivates our canine friends who desire to live in peace, so that they are relaxed, self-controlled members of our society that enhance our lives.

Lynn C Hopkins
March 2013

.....

Bradshaw, J. (2011) *In Defence of Dogs*, London: Penguin

Budiansky, Stephen (2000) *The Truth about Dogs*, London, Penguin group.

Cartwright, J. (2002) *Determinants of Animal Behaviour*, USA: Routledge

Coren, Stanley (2005) *How dogs think, understanding the canine mind*, London: Pocket Books

Eaton, Barry (2010) *Dominance in Dogs, Fact or Fiction?*, USA: Dogwise Publishing,

Hoole, J. (2010) *Evolutionary Aspects of Canine Behaviour*, in Appleby, D. (ed) *The APBC Book of Companion Animal Behaviour*, London: Souvenir Press.

Lowry, R. (2011) *Understanding the silent communication of dogs*, UK: Lowry Industries

Miklosi, A. (2007) *Dog Behaviour, Evolution and Cognition*, Oxford: University Press

O’Heare, James, (2008) *Dominance Theory and Dogs*

An in-depth examination of social dominance and its insidious consequences...and an alternative, USA: BehaveTech publishing, 2008

Pennisi, E. (2012) *Human Genome is much more than just genes*, [Online] Available: <http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2012/09/human-genome-is-much-more-than-j.html> [5 September 2012].

Pryor, K. (2002) *Don't Shoot the Dog*, UK: Ringpress

Rugaas, Turid, (2006) *On Talking terms with dogs: Calming signals*, USA: Dogwise Publishing

Semyonova, A. (2009) *The Silliest things People say about Dogs*, England: Hastings Press

Serpell, J. (2008) *The Domestic Dog, It's evolution, behaviour, and interactions with people*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Schade, V. (2009) *Bonding with Your Dog*, NJ: Wiley Publishing

Scott, J.P. And Fuller, J.F. (1974) *Genetics and the Social Behaviour of Dogs*, London: University of Chicago Press

Serpell, J. (2008) *The Domestic Dog Its evolution, behaviour, and interactions with people*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.