



Pack Theory and how it applies to dogs

Is the dog is an inherently pack orientated animal?

Dog behaviour does not show that they have the same packing and social order behaviour as wolves and they have evolved and adapted to fill a different niche. . It is also suggested that dogs and wolves are two branches from the same ancestor and one is not descended from the other Belyaev's foxes are a good example to show how quickly diversification occurs.

Pack formation in dogs seems to be an exception rather than the rule. Although dogs are social, they play with each other, other animals and humans, they can also suffer anxiety when left.

Domestic dogs have no need to form a pack as their needs are catered for but they are able to live in social groups while attending to their own business; as an aggregation. If there is no reason to form a pack then there is no reason for us to try to be "alpha". While we accept dogs into the family they cannot relate to humans as part of a pack due to the imprinting that occurred in the first few weeks of life. Packs are conspecific; that is dogs relate to other dogs as the same species but they do not relate to other animals or humans as if they were dogs.

Conversely some people believe that dogs are anxious to have a pack leader and to accept a person in that role and that every generation of dogs has to be socialised.

During the 1980s and 1990s literature around raising dogs and using rank reduction programmes become popular; assuming the dog wanting to be dominant caused any problems. Dominance in wolves is eliminating the threat of another wolf for breeding purposes and incorporates a lot of ritualised behaviour, the wolf concept of dominance wouldn't apply to family pet dogs and people are not anatomically equipped to mimic canid ritualised behaviour.

Many people say that domestic dog dominance is about control of resources, to understand this we need to look at what the resources are, food, water, shelter and other things depending on the dog and its environment and if the dog can truly control these.

What is pack theory, what are the rules and where did they come from?

In his presentation at the UKCRB symposium in 2009 David Montgomery stated that he has been unable to find anyone who can confirm where pack theory originated, where it is published or what facts it explains.

It is suggested that the theory stems from studies of captive wolves by Rudolph Schenkel and referenced in *The Wolf: Ecology and Behaviour of an endangered species* by L David Mech. Semyonova believes that pack theory is a result of believing that dogs must do everything that wolves do, another proposition is that pack theory has been used as a justification for the use of aversives in training and that any disobedience on the part of the dog is because the human isn't alpha in the pack.

David Sands in an article in *Dogs Monthly Magazine* makes the point that there are many factors influencing dog behaviour including the personality of the mother, breed genetics, diet, early environment and health.

Sue Hull at the UKRCB conference in 1998 recounted her experience of raising a wolf cub during which she remarked that wolves and dogs are similar and yet very different. She also noted that in order for a wolf to be tame around people it needs to be removed from its mother before 21 days old. She commented that the main difference between dogs and wolves is that the former seem to be born with the knowledge of how to behave around people, something that wolves do not.

The list of pack rules is inconsistent but generally include, not allowing the dog on furniture, to lie in doorways, to start or end games or attention seeking behaviour or to pull on the leash; to always eat before your dog, go through doorways first, to be able to remove your dog's food while it is eating and to put your dog into a down (alpha roll).

Taking the rules one at a time it is possible to unpick them and how they do not relate to wolf or dog behaviour and how as humans we are not equipped to mimic canine behaviour. For instance always eating before your dog is impractical and can also send mixed messages if you are unable to eat first. Wolves packs do not adhere to this rule, if there is plenty of food then all the wolves will eat together, if there is not enough then the adult parent wolves will ensure their survival by consuming the kill. If they don't survive there is no support for the cubs.

People can teach dogs to behave how we want them to using operant conditioning and positive reinforcement and dogs can learn how to use operant conditioning to manipulate people and their environment to gain reward.

In conclusion as dogs are not inherently pack animals, pack rules are based on canine communication behaviours, which we cannot mimic; dogs are conspecific, we provide all the dog's needs, they are adaptable to living in a social structure and a dog will do what it finds rewarding; it is possible to teach dogs how to behave using motivational methods, operant conditioning and positive reinforcement the use of this theory as it stands cannot be reasonable with more research and development needed to make the theory useful.

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