

# **Interspecies relationships of the dog owner authority on the captive dog behaviors**

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## **ABSTRACT**

It has recently been observed in dogs, a particularly well-adapted species to the living places of humans, as shown by its communication, cooperation and attachment behaviours. This project aims at studying the human-canine social relationship in the particular context of captivity. A survey was given to dog owners in order to identify their perceptions about the importance of dominance. The owner authority or the necessary

of training is important. However, the control of the owner space versus the restricted dog space, the control of the dog habit during feeding time, the effects of punishing the dog on different family members and the family constancy within their relationships were used to identify the effect of the owner's authority. In the majority of cases, with regards to the authority, the results were significant. Dog owners do create dysfunctional behaviours in their dogs. Compliance with their customs and culture were noted. In fact, latent conflicts between species and between family members were significant. The family can refuse to comply with the dog needs. In return, some family member will refuse to comply with other family members. Authority or training can, however, be tied to stressful behaviours. In fact, many owners will interpret the behaviours of captive dog as wild dogs and they forget the social impact of their environment. They tend to implement rules that are not suitable for all family members. Finally results show that dogs do comply to the human rules with difficulties.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Canine behavioural problems are widely recognised. Epidemiological data on dog problems support that assertion. In fact the number of clients who report some behavioural problem in their pet dogs ranges between 42% (Houpt 1985) and 90% (Sigler 1991). In a comprehensive survey in which clients were presented, by phone, a multiple choice questionnaire, we have found that 81% of the 426 clients listed one or more behavioural problems (Beaudet 1996). These results and many more studies (Overall 1997) do support changes in the animal threshold attributed to domestication.

Domestic dogs appear to exhibit an increase in docility and adaptability. Behaviour pattern of persistent play, begging for attention, submission and vocalization are concomitant with the neotenic physical patterns selected by humans (Coppinger et al. 1987). Humans share many aspects of their social system with those of canids. These social systems are not derived from a shared, common ancestor, and thus are not homologous by descent. Unfortunately, because dogs and people share similar social system and signals, it has been very easy for dog owner to assume that when a dog gives a signal that resembles a human signal, the message is exactly the same.

Finally the use of space and the significance are also important in the social behaviour of dogs. It is generally found that a dog on its own territory is dominant but when it is in a stranger territory it is subordinate. However two other factors have been described by Hediger (1950) are flight and critical distance. If a dog is unable to escape from the aversive stimulation, at a certain distance the dog may turn around and threaten the intruder or even attack the stimulation (Fox 1974). Part of the difficulty in getting into a dog Umwelt is related to our own ability to project or to imagine similarity.

These previous observations lead us to the phenomenon of food sharing, which according to most primatologists is a characteristic only of human primates (Jane van Lawick-Goodall) . This altruism behaviour is not unusual in highly social species such as wolves. A common problem in domestic dogs is the development of increasing aggressiveness around food. Quite suddenly a dog may begin to test its owner and may seem to be attempting to elevate itself in the human pack (Fox 1972). However many findings, in different species, correlate pregnancy and birth of young are synchronized with a relative abundance of food. Unfortunately, many do owners tend to draw analogy to the social structure or the social hierarchy. These actions are especially evident during allegiance to the leader. This broad definition encompasses the standard definition of agonistic behaviour and is consistent with those for hierarchical terms that focus to control access to any resources (Immelman & Beer 1989). Canids are, historically, binge and gorge eaters. Protecting food may be an ancestral adaptive behaviour.

Some researchers believe that animal bond is stronger and closer than interpersonal relationship for some people. Families often face a conflict when considering what to do about a pet that demonstrates a behaviour problem (Cain 1983). If the dog is the triangular focus within the family system, a disruption in the relationship may result in an increase in interpersonal relationship difficulties. When the families assume the responsibility of the dog, they may also take responsibility for the pet behaviour problem. They may feel betrayed. Their perception of the problem is often colour by their emotions.

The actual project will try to analyse the human-canine social relationship in the particular context of captivity. A survey was given to dog owners. The goal is to assess

their perceptions about the importance of dominance. The hypothesis implies that many dogs comply to the human rules with difficulties.

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## **SUBJECTS**

Some dog owners were referred by different veterinary clinics. All other dog owners were recruited by students of the AIIICA organization in Quebec and the ACORE association in France. A total of 151 dog owners were invited to fill in the questionnaire. We therefore had no direct control and we did not wish to influence owners in any manner. Thirteen questionnaires were eliminated. They didn't complete all the questions. Only 138 dog owners had completed the survey.

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## **MATERIAL**

The questionnaire was generally sent by mail. The four pages behavioral questionnaire were return by mail. The survey questionnaire was anonymous. It involves questions on authority; space and feeding management; behavioral management and the relationship within the family. Thirty six questions were eliminated from the analysis. They did not permit discrimination between dog owner answers.

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## **METHOD**

Sixty nine questions were kept to analyze the human-canine social relationship. The five sections of questions divided within authority, space and feeding management, punishment and the relation, were used to identify the owner perception upon their dogs. Percentages were calculated for different categories of answers to facilitate analysis. However means per categories were also submitted to the statistical analysis. The t-test was used to identify significant relationship between means.

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# RESULTS

The percentage for each answer was needed to identify the level of discrimination. In fact, thirty six questions were eliminated from the original analysis. Table I show these percentages for different categories of each answer for each question.

The t-test was performed to identify if the relationship between means exist at the significance level. Table II represent answers significantly related to each other in different sections. At this point its interesting to note the answers such as *MY DOG DO OPPOSE ME* is related to training and space management. While the answer *MY DOG BAFLE ME* is related to training and to the level of relationship within the family unit. On the other hand the answer related to punishment seems to be involved in all sections.

We were interested to identify answers that are involve into the owner perception of dominance and what they do in order to avoid any family conflicts. Figure 1 represents the entire family dealing with the dog behavior in general. While figure 2 shows different family members demands on their dog and figure 3 the importance of their dog obedience level to avoid daily arguments within the family.

**TABLE I:** Represent scores in percentage for the five categories and for each questions.

## Section 1: AUTORITY

| QUESTION   | YES   | NO    | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|--|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 1. Your dog must always obey<br>Why? 38.30 security; 23.20 control; 23.20 harmony; 15.20 no answer   | 81.88 | 00.00 | 11.59      | 6.599     |
| 2. Was your dog train?<br>Who? 68.80 owner; 14.49 trainer; 16.67 no answer   | 60.80 | 37.70 | ---        | 1.50      |
| 3. Training is a daily activity?   | 37.70 | 56.60 | ---        | 5.70      |
| 4. Do you walk your dog on the leash?  | 92.02 | 7.98  | ---        | ---       |
| 5. Do you have a particular difficulty?<br>What kind? My dog does not follow; pull on leash; agitated; aggressive; not constant depending on person  | 92.02 | 7.98  |            |           |
| 6. Do you consider your dog obedient?<br>What reason? Tone of voice; the area; the person; other stimulation   | 57.20 | 39.8  | ---        | ---       |
| 7. Do you like to be obeying by your dog?<br>What are you showing him when you push on his back?<br>42.02 To sit; 4.34 to stand; 17.40 to lay down; 23.20 don't like him; 13.04 no answers | 97.1  | 2.9   | ---        | ---       |
| 8. Does your dog oppose you?<br>Explain? Lack of patience; does not come; difference between owners; bad behavior; attention seeking; the breed.   | 70.01 | 23.2  | ---        | ---       |
| 9. Does your dog baffle you?   | 36.9  | 63.10 | ---        | ---       |

## Section 2: SPACE MANAGEMENT

| QUESTION   | YES   | NO    | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|--|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 10. Your dog is free in all the rooms?   | 62.32 | 37.69 | ---        | ---       |
| YES why? Housebreak; no destruction; he is old; family member; I authorise him.<br>NO why? Not housebroken; shedding; personal space; the presence of cat; destruction; to control.                                    |       |       |            |           |
| 11. During your presence?  | 40.57 | 0.74  | 44.92      | 13.77     |
| 12. During your absence?   | 50.00 | 50.00 | ---        | ---       |
| Where does he sleep? 31.15 bedroom; 18.84 cage; 3.7 dog house; 9.42 in separate room; 36.89 every where.   |       |       |            |           |
| 13. Does your dog obey when being ask to go to his corner?   | 55.79 | 10.86 | 23.18      | 10.17     |
| What are the reasons to restrain you dog?<br>To avoid flight; to control; for security; to prevent misbehavior; during sleep; for obeisance; absence; when aggressive; when he barks; when he growl; to calm him down. |       |       |            |           |

## Section 3: FEEDING MANAGEMENT

|  | Morning & night | Ad lib | Morning only | Night only  | No answer |
|--|-----------------|--------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| 14. When do you feed your dog?   | 58.68           | 23.91  | 9.42         | 3.62        | 4.37      |
| Why? Habit; routine; breeder; veterinarian; easier to control; physical reason; I'm the owner; to be calm. |                 |        |              |             |           |
|  | YES             | NO     | NOT ALWAYS   | NO ANSWER   |           |
| 15. It's important that your dog eats every day?   | 89.13           | 8.69   | ---          | ---         | 2.18      |
| 16. At what time?  | Before          | After  | During       | No schedule | No answer |
|  | 33.34           | 34.05  | 15.21        | 15.21       | 2.19      |
| 17. In the same room as you?   | 43.47           | 55.07  | ---          | ---         | 1.46      |
| 18. Your dog is possessive?  | 17.40           | 82.60  | ---          | ---         | ---       |
| 19. Did you take his food away?  | 61.59           | 36.35  | ---          | ---         | 2.06      |
| Why? To verify is aggressiveness; to test my dog; to put more; to habituate; I'm the leader.               |                 |        |              |             |           |
| 20. Do you ask your dog to wait?   | 37.68           | 60.15  | ---          | ---         | 1.82      |
| Why? To be respected; to be obey; I'm the leader; to calm him down; it's easier.                           |                 |        |              |             |           |

## Section 4: PUNISHMENT

|  | YES   | NO    | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|--|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 21. Do you punish your dog?  | 67.39 | 25.36 | ---        | 7.24      |
| How? 68.84 talk loudly; 10.14 isolate; 16.67 hitting; 3.62 nothing.  |       |       |            |           |
| What are the dog reactions toward punishment?<br>7.97 growling; 1.45 biting; 10.14 attack; 41.30 submission; 5.79 flight; 4.34 hiding; 25.36 he knows; 3.65 nothing. |       |       |            |           |
| 22. Was it a success?  | 49.62 | 7.97  | 36.23      | 6.18      |
| What does he learn by your punishment?<br>No idea; to obey; not included in our family; to be frighten; nothing; respect.  |       |       |            |           |
| Why do you punish your dog?<br>I'm not happy; to correct; lo make him understand; to surprise him; lack of patience; I'm the owner; to obey.                         |       |       |            |           |
| 23. Unreasonable demands by the family?  | 11.59 | 69.56 | 18.85      | ---       |
| Why? Some are to lenient; spouse; obeisance; respect; impatience; family rules; his behaviour; size of dog.  |       |       |            |           |
| 24. Home environment is compromise?  | 21.05 | 78.95 | ---        | ---       |
| 25. Does your family argue?  | 41.37 | ---   | 58.62      | ---       |
| 26. Is the family tense about your dog?  | 44.20 | 55.80 | ---        | ---       |
| Enumerate all types of punishment?<br>Obeisance; talk loudly; hitting; crate; isolate; shaking; choke; outside; secluded.  |       |       |            |           |

## Section 5: RELATION

|   | YES   | NO   | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|---|-------|------|------------|-----------|
| 27. Do you leave your dog smell other dogs? | 74.63 | 7.24 | 16.67      | 1.46      |

Yes? To socialized; it's natural; to habituate; it's important; likes to play.

Why not? Too small; aggressive; not right to do so; I don't like this situation.

Not always? Not obedient; I must decide; disease; dominance; barking; I'm afraid; agitated.

|   | YES   | NO    | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|---|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 28. Do you leave your dog smell other people? | 68.11 | 13.77 | 17.39      | 0.73      |

Yes? To socialized; it's natural; to socialized; to habituate; it's important; likes people; to stop barking; to be calm; his needs.

Why not? Aggressive; not right to do so; I don't like this situation; don't like men; it's not polite; jumping on them.

Not always? To habituate; depend on the person; we never know; only friends; I decide too;

|                                | YES   | NO    | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 29. Do you play with your dog? | 93.47 | 4.34  | 2.29       | ---       |
| 30. On a regular basis?        | 57.56 | 31.78 | ---        | 10.66     |

What other exercise? Walking every day; walking occasionally; obeisance; agility; nothing; in the yard; swimming; no time.

|  | YES   | NO    | NOT ALWAYS | NO ANSWER |
|--|-------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 31. Your dog is obedient when he sees another dog? | 21.16 | 23.35 | 55.46      | ---       |

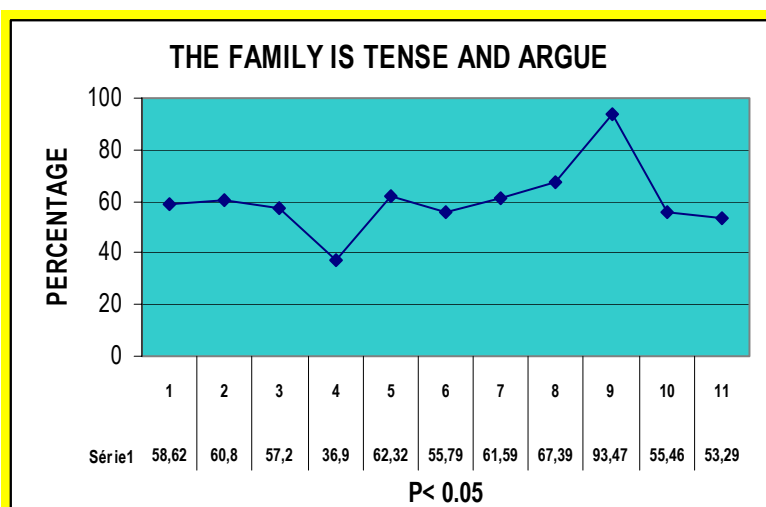
At your home? Happy; ignore; scan; social; barking; jealous; fear; never had opportunity; dominant; protective; anxious.

Else where? Fear; braking; social; scan; submissive; I don't know; never; happy, independent; growling; aggressive; flight.

|                                     |       |       |       |     |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| 32. Similar behavior with stranger? | 21.16 | 23.35 | 55.46 | --- |
| 33. Your dog always comes?          | 53.29 | ---   | 46.71 | --- |

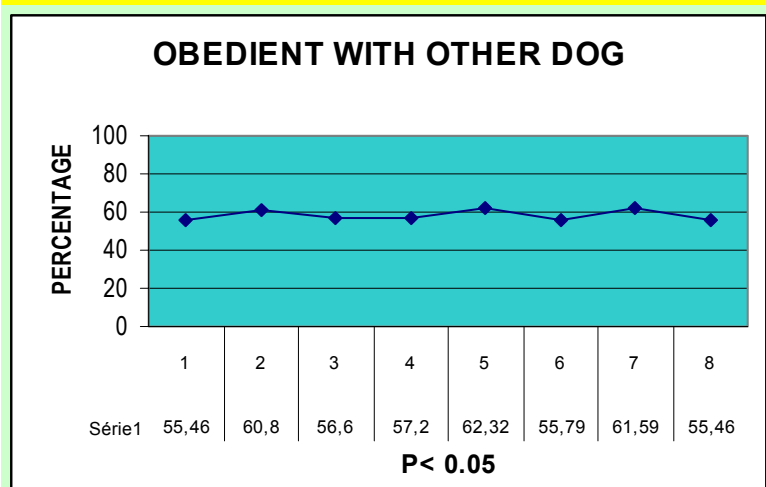
What is the social status of your dog?

Dominant 16.78; neutral 38.78; submissive 21.89; fearful 8.75; independent 10.21; multiple answer 3.69



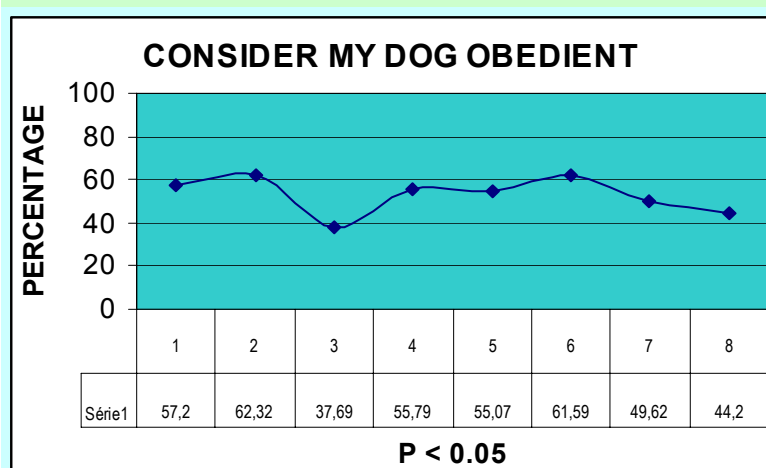
**FIGURE 1:** Represents the family dealing with the behavior of their dog. Each column displays questions that are significant between them.

1. Does your family argue?
2. Was your dog train?
3. Do you consider your dog obedient?
4. Does your dog baffle you?
5. Your dog is free in all the room?
6. Does your dog obey when being ask to go to his corner?
7. Did you take his food away?
8. Do you punish your dog?
9. Do you play with your dog?
10. Your dog is not always obedient when he sees another dog?
11. Your dog always comes?



**FIGURE 2:** Shows the obedience demands by the owner over his dog. Each column displays questions that are significant between them.

1. Your dog is not always obedient when he sees another dog?
2. Was your dog train?
3. Training is not a daily activity?
4. Do you consider your dog obedient?
5. Your dog is free in all rooms?
6. Does your dog obey when being ask to go to his corner?
7. Did you take his food away?
8. Similar behavior with stranger than other dogs?



**FIGURE 3:** Displays the owner perception for his dog obedience level. Each column displays questions that are significant between them.

1. Do you consider your dog obedient?
2. Your dog is free in all rooms?
3. Your dog is never free in all rooms?
4. Does your dog always obey when being as to go to his corner?
5. My dog eats in the same room?
6. Did you take his food away?
7. Punishment was a success?
8. Is the family tense about your dog?

**TABLE II: ANSWERS THAT ARE SIGNIFICANTLY RELATED TO EACH OTHER.**

| ANSWERS   | PERCENTAGE   | ANSWERS                              | PERCENTAGE   |
|---|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>MY DOG MUST OBEY</i>                           | <b>81.88</b> | I DO WALK MY DOG ON THE LEASH        | <b>92.02</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | I DO HAVE A PARTICULAR DIFFICULTY    | <b>92.02</b> |
|   |              | MY DOG DO OPPOSE ME                  | <b>70.01</b> |
|   |              | I DO PUNISH MY DOG                   | <b>67.39</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |
| <i>MY DOG WAS TRAIN</i>                           | <b>60.80</b> | I DO CONSIDER MY DOG OBEDIENT        | <b>57.20</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | MY DOG DO OPPOSE ME                  | <b>70.01</b> |
|   |              | MY FAMILY ARGUE                      | <b>58.62</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |
| <i>MY DOG OBEYS WHEN BEING ASK</i>                | <b>55.79</b> | I DON'T FEED MY DOG IN THE SAME ROOM | <b>55.07</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | I DO TAKE HIS FOOD AWAY              | <b>61.59</b> |
|   |              | I DO PUNISH MY DOG                   | <b>67.39</b> |
|   |              | PUNISHMENT WAS A SUCCESS             | <b>49.62</b> |
|   |              | MY FAMILY IS TENSE ABOUT THE DOG     | <b>55.80</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |
| <i>MY DOG IS FREE IN ALL THE ROOMS</i>            | <b>62.32</b> | I DO CONSIDER MY DOG OBEDIENT        | <b>57.20</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | MY DOG DO OPPOSE ME                  | <b>70.01</b> |
|   |              | MY DOG OBEYS WHEN BEING ASK          | <b>55.79</b> |
|   |              | MY FAMILY ARGUE                      | <b>58.62</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |
| <i>TRAINING IS A DAILY ACTIVITY - P &lt; 0.05</i> | <b>37.70</b> | MY DOG BAFFLE ME                     | <b>36.90</b> |
| <i>MY DOG BAFFLE M - P &lt; 0.05</i>              | <b>36.90</b> | MY FAMILY ARGUE                      | <b>58.62</b> |
| <i>MY DOG DO OPPOSE ME</i>                        | <b>70.01</b> | MY DOG IS FREE IN ALL THE ROOMS      | <b>62.32</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | I DO TAKE HIS FOOD AWAY              | <b>61.59</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |
| <i>MY DOG IS FED IN DIFFERENT ROOM</i>            | <b>55.07</b> | I DO TAKE HIS FOOD AWAY              | <b>61.59</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | I DO PUNISH MY DOG                   | <b>67.39</b> |
|   |              | PUNISHMENT WAS A SUCCESS             | <b>49.62</b> |
|   |              | MY FAMILY IS TENSE ABOUT THE DOG     | <b>55.80</b> |
|   |              | MY FAMILY ARGUE                      | <b>58.62</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |
| <i>I DO TAKE HIS FOOD AWAY</i>                    | <b>61.59</b> | MY FAMILY ARGUE                      | <b>58.62</b> |
| <b>P &lt; 0.05</b>                                |              | I DO PUNISH MY DOG                   | <b>67.39</b> |
|   |              | PUNISHMENT WAS A SUCCESS             | <b>49.62</b> |
|   |              |                                      |              |

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## DISCUSSION

Dog owners do create, no intentionally, dysfunctional behaviors in their dogs. This study does support Delatour (1984) observations and define situations where non adaptive responses or anxiety will the outcome from the environmental pressure or stressful situations. S. Milgram (personal communication in M. Chanton 2005) discuss that any individual under environmental pressure or the constant authority or dominance can either be violent or passive. It seems that most owner obligate dog to be obedient only for their personal unconscious needs. Despite positive reinforcement, many owners will either punish or threaten their dogs. This latter observation was obtained by the use of our questionnaire. Dogs' owners commonly solve the behavior problem by punishment, space management and obeisance. Obeisance seems the more critical aspect of the relationship. Other option considered acceptable is the access to food. Again this form of control is base on obeisance or conditioning. Therefore it is usually too late to take the necessary time to modify the owner perception when requested.

Many species, including humans, are thriving to maintain a proper emotional level. However many threaten situation will trigger fear. This emotion is important for the survival of any individual. Most dog owner assumes that dog gives a signal that resembles a human signal. These messages are not identical. Into the intra-species relationship, the owner will use obeisance. He will even extrapolate that his dog is obedient but in fact the dog display fear. It's seems difficult to distinguish between the fear behavior and the perception of submissive behavior. These observations are significant when we take an objective look at conflicts between members of the human family.

Some members will implement rules that are not suitable for all family members. Instead working on individual differences they will try to justify the reasons underlying the dog behavior. In fact, it was notice that an insufficient socialization, associated with a lack of training and inadequate interactions between animal and owner are generally thought to be the causes of numerous behavior problems (Beaudet et al 1994). The family will refuse to comply with the dog needs. In return, some family member will refuse to comply with other family members. However when the families assume the responsibility of the dog, they may also take responsibility for the pet behaviour problem.

Scott, J.P. and J.L. Fuller (1965), Fox, M.W. (1978) and Whitney, L (1975) confirms the alpha role in the pack of wolves. Many recent authors (Serpell et al. 1995) do support these initial observations. This trend is being observed in most owners. In fact, many owners interpreted the behaviors of their captive dog as wild dogs and they forget the social impact of their restricted environment. Space and feeding management do support the control and in turns that the dog need is to flight (misinterpreted as submissive) or fight (misinterpreted as dominance).

Authority or training, different home management, and punishment are stressful situations for many dogs and owners. Some dogs will baffle their owners while others will display some unruly behaviors. The outcome of these adaptive behaviors is seldom perceived as a form of dominance. Part of the difficulty in getting into a dog Umwelt is related to our own ability to project or to imagine similarity.

Finally there is a high level of ignorance about animal behavior in the owner population. A large number of people are not fully happy with their dog and will try to control the situation with either positive reinforcements or punishments. These data provide important information about the owner perceptions and address the value of control.

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