

# Bring Out the Best in Your Pets DAVMS, 2006

*APDT Australia October 2004  
January 2007, District PETsMART Trainers*

## Dangers of “Dominance”



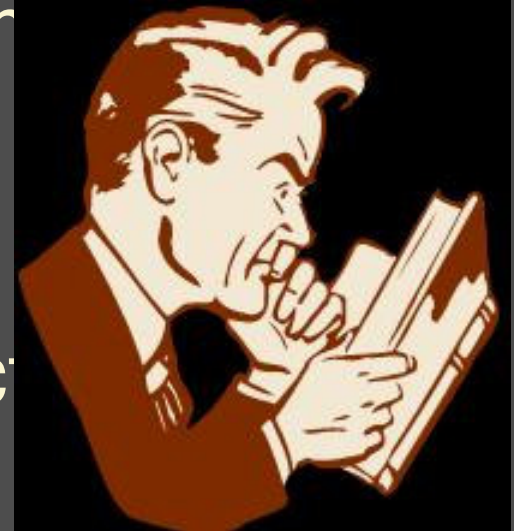
And NOW – AAHA Denver! 2007

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# What Does Social Dominance Really Mean?

- “Dominance” is ingrained in our thinking about dogs
- Mythology exists
- Gross misinterpretations from the scientific literature
- Over worked and over used
- Used to explain every aspect of dog behavior





# Why is Use of the 'Dominance' Concept an Important Issue?

- Negatively influences a person's perception of and feelings toward their dog
  - Rules made which are irrelevant
  - Real cause of the problem or behavior is not addressed or understood
  - Appropriate behavior modification techniques are not implemented
- 

# Why is Use of the 'Dominance' Concept an Important Issue?

- Dangerous, harmful procedures
- Scruff shakes, "alpha rolls"
- Physical, corporal punishment
- "Stringing up"
- Deprivation



# What Do “Dominant” Dogs Do?

## Let’s make a list (not aggressive behavior)

FRED BASSET

Hey, Bruce. Do you want to come up to the front?

I'll gladly sacrifice my leadership for a little respite from this chilly North Wind!



# What Do “Dominant” Dogs Do?

- Don't respond to owner's commands
- Want to go on walks
- Lay in dog's bed
- Mark territory
- Are “pushy”
- Don't do what they're told
- Lean against owner



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# What Does Social Dominance Really Mean?


## About roles and relationships

- In ethological literature, dominance hierarchies constructed from outcomes of competition.
- Make predictions about future outcomes
- Assumes direct competition over something






# What Social Dominance ISN'T

- “He’s barking too much because you aren’t dominant over him”
  - “He’s going after the other dog because you aren’t dominant over him”
  - “He’s not listening to you/coming when called because you aren’t dominant over him”
- 






# What Social Dominance **ISN'T**

- “He’s anxious when he’s alone because he’s worried about you because you aren’t the leader”.
  - “He’s threatening other people because you aren’t dominant and haven’t let him know it’s not his job”.
- 



# What Does Social Dominance Really Mean?

- Social dominance is about roles and relationships
  - “Dominant dog” is a short hand way of saying “dog who is assuming the dominant role in the relationship at this time”
  - Important distinction
- 

# What Does Social Dominance Mean?

- In a relationship, one animal may assume a dominant ROLE, the other assumes a subordinate ROLE
- Roles change
  - Based on context
  - Over time
  - Based on who social partner is
  - Do you assume a different role in your relationship with your boss or parent, as compared to your kids, employees




# What Does Social Dominance Mean?

- “Dominance” isn’t a personality trait
  - Remember the dominance chart
  - Example of Mocha, Katie and Ashley
  - Ashley and Coral – Coral acquiesces except --
- Who is in the dominant role is context specific and social partner specific





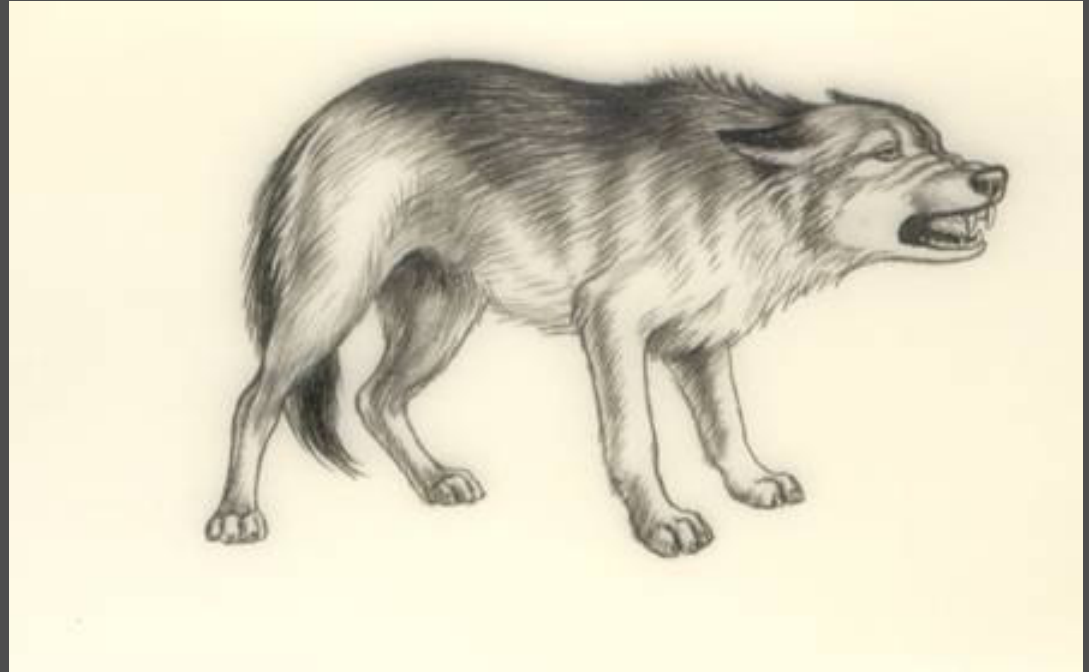
# What Does Social Dominance Really Mean?

- Roles are often context specific
  - If dog won't relinquish toy, not allowing him on the bed is irrelevant
  - “Labeling” dog not as productive as describing behavior that is a problem and using appropriate techniques
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# Terminology Problems

- Submissive behavior
- Subordinate role
- Dominant role
- ??Dominant?? behavior



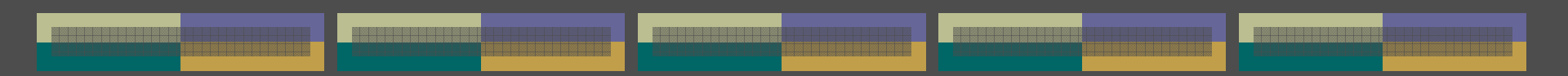


- Dominant/offensive  
aggress/threats dogs VS
- Defensive aggression/threats




# Terminology Problems

- Many dogs mis-labeled as “dominant” are showing defensive body postures
- Would expect “dominant dog” to display offensive posture
- Some do – dogs do get “P.Oed!”
- It’s not just anxiety and fear
- ALL aggression is about conflict – it’s a social conflict behavior



# Examples of Competitive Interactions (?) Between People and Dogs

- Tug-of-war
  - Space in doorways
  - Who goes first through door
  - Can we identify acquiescing or “aggressive contact”?
- 


# Tug-of-War

- What is tug-of-war about?
- If one dog, or person - gets toy, what happens?
- Is this a competitive situation or a cooperative one?
- Is this puppy trying to be dominant?



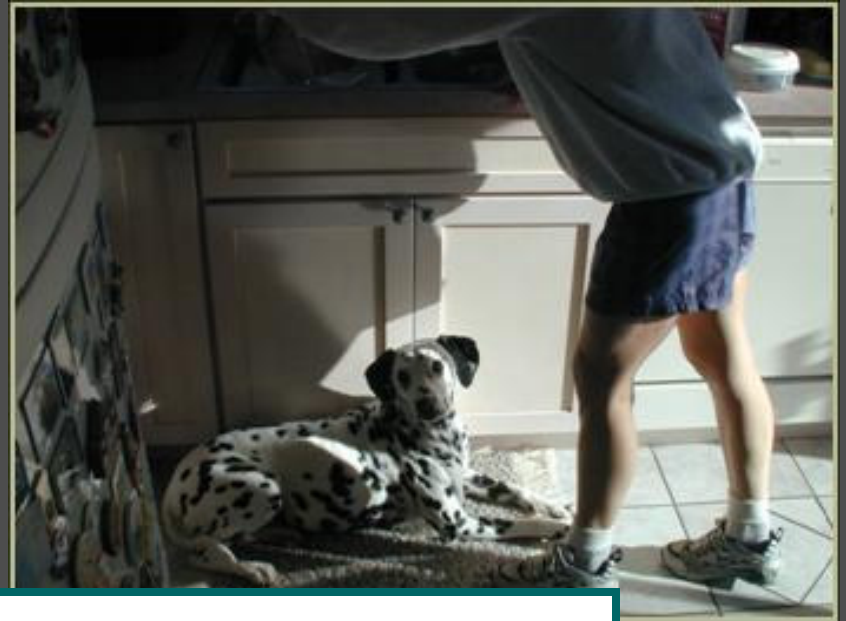


# Tug-of-War

- If this was a social conflict interaction – what would it look like?
  - Dog take toy – show threatening behaviors
  - Two research studies show no correlation between tug-of-war and aggression
- 

# Space in Doorways

- Dog resting in doorway
  - you step over him
    - He lays there and ignores you
    - No social challenge
- Is dog viewing this as a competition?



Dog isn't viewing it as a competitive situation

# Space in Doorways

- Alternative explanations
- How is this behavior “working”?

verboard



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by Chip Dunham

- To keep him part of the group
- To monitor his environment



# Space in Doorways?

- If this was a social conflict interaction – what would it look like?
  - You step over – dog shows threatening behaviors
  - What usually happens instead?
- 



# Walks and Being First

- Never let dog be ahead on walks
- Does this have anything to do with “dominance”?

Fred Basset

by Alex Graham



# Walks and Being First

- When dog pulls ahead – is he challenging?




# Walks and Being First

- What would interaction look like if dog saw it as a challenge?
- Dog would growl if you tried to catch up
- What usually happens instead?
- Isn't a social challenge






# Are these competitive / agonistic interactions?

- Conclusion – NO
  - Or at least not 99% of the time
  - Dogs are not viewing tug-of-war, pulling on leash, lying in doorways, etc. as competitions
  - Nor are they aggressive encounters
  - There are alternative interpretations
- 



# Alternative Explanations

- Tug-of-war – cooperative play
  - Space in doorways – monitor movements, cooler, etc.
  - Who goes first through door – dog is excited, not trained to wait
  - Homework – behaviors you've attributed to “dominance” – think of 2-3 alternative explanations
- 

# Fallacy # 1

Dogs are viewing interactions as a competition – they are not, therefore not related to ‘dominance’



- Dogs typically do not use aggression and agonistic behaviors to get what they want





- Dogs use other strategies
- This is a TRAINING problem, not a “Dominance” problem



# Constraints On Learning

- They do however, choose the path of least resistance – what are the limits
- They try to figure out what works



# Constraints On Learning

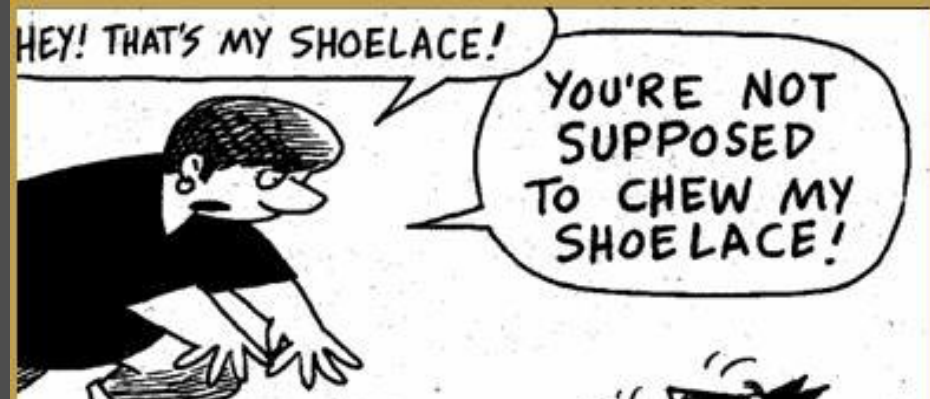


- Dogs choose different strategies to see what works
- Behavior that works is repeated, behavior that doesn't work isn't
- Make a subordinate role work for dog



# Behaviors Attributed to “Dominance”

- Doing things dog ‘knows’ the owner doesn’t like




# What Does Social Dominance Really Mean?

- Control and “obedience” are different from competition and from dominance





# What Does Social Dominance Really Mean?

- Easy to be in a dominant role with your dog yet have minimal control over him, as far as responsiveness to directions
  - Most problems labeled as “dominance problems” are *training issues*
- 

# Establishing “Dominance”



Are these dogs being “dominant”  
or just annoying?



# Fallacy # 2

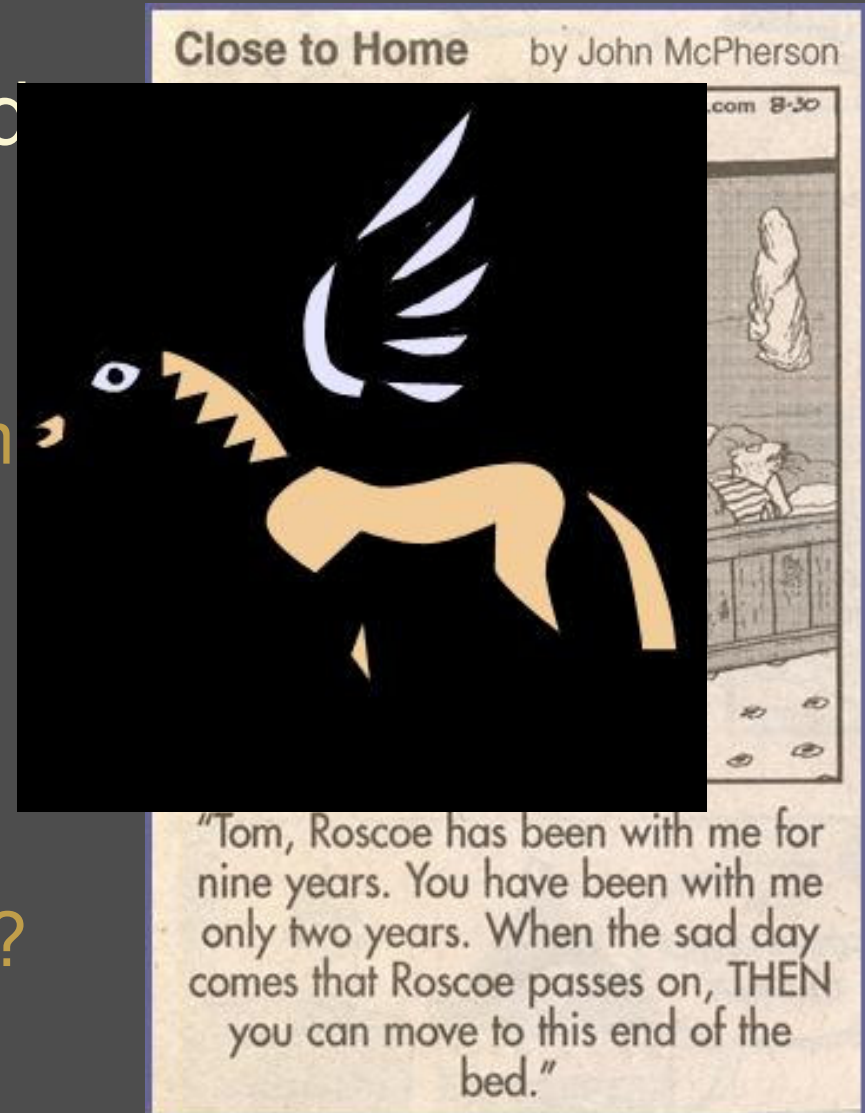
“Control”, having your dog do what you want is not the same thing as social dominance

# Procedures Recommended for Establishing “Dominance”



# Establishing “Dominance”

- Not allowing dog on bed and furniture
  - Dog is on the bed
  - You lie down next to him
  - Dog cuddles with you and you pet him
  - No correlation between bed and aggression
  - What’s wrong with this??



# Establishing “Dominance”

- Dog must eat after family
  - Is when dog eats a direct competition?
  - NO
- Is dog learning anything about social hierarchy because his dinnertime is 4pm and family's is 6pm?



# Establishing “Dominance”

- No temporal connection –
  - “I ate 2 hours earlier, so I’m the boss”
- A non-event in terms of learning about social hierarchies



# Establishing “Dominance”

- Initiate and end play
- Don't give free access to toys
- Otherwise dog thinks he's in control



# Establishing “Dominance”

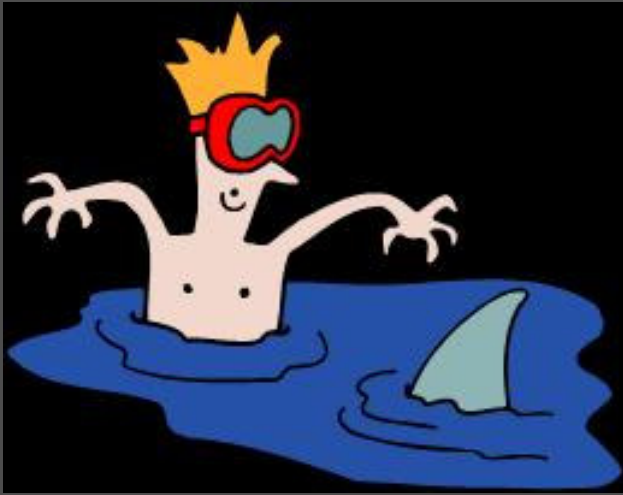
- Dogs need some control over their environment
- Need to know how to ask for what they want
- Learned helplessness, stress
- Some recommendations would never let dog have any control over anything
- Control ≠ dominance





Dogs aren't like sharks -  
waiting to get you

WHY?



Are not constant social climbers

Don't always want to be the  
"Captain"



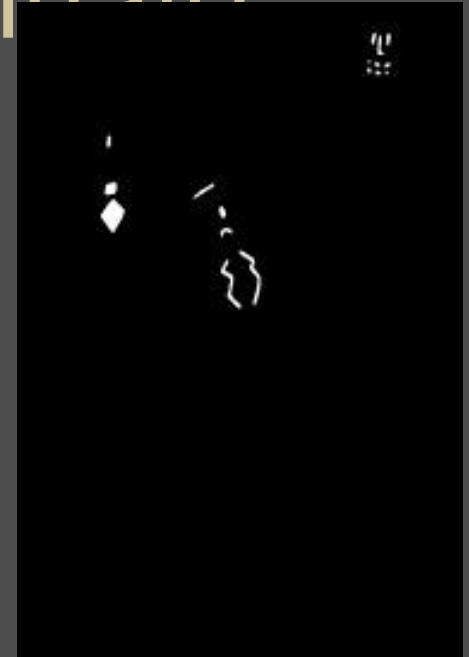
# Constraints On Learning

- “Biological preparedness”
- Predispositions and limitations on what an animal can learn
- Dogs biologically prepared to be subordinate to us most of the time



# Benefits of Being Subordinate

- Assuming a dominant role –
  - Reward may be priority access (R+)
- Assuming a subordinate role –
  - Reward may be avoiding conflict (R-)





The stability of the brain and spine are essential in this technique.

# Fallacy # 3



It is necessary to be a “bully”, get physical with your dog, deprive him of control over his world in order to be “dominant”

# Fallacy # 4




Being “dominant” over your dog is the most important thing in building a mutually beneficial relationship



# What To Do Instead

## ● CORRECTLY ANALYSE THE PROBLEM - e.g.

- not responding to commands - incomplete training
  - don't do what they are told - incomplete training or reward better than 'punishment'
  - threats and aggression - may often be defensive rather than dominance
  - elimination, barking and destructive behavior have many causes, none of which are related to dominance
- 



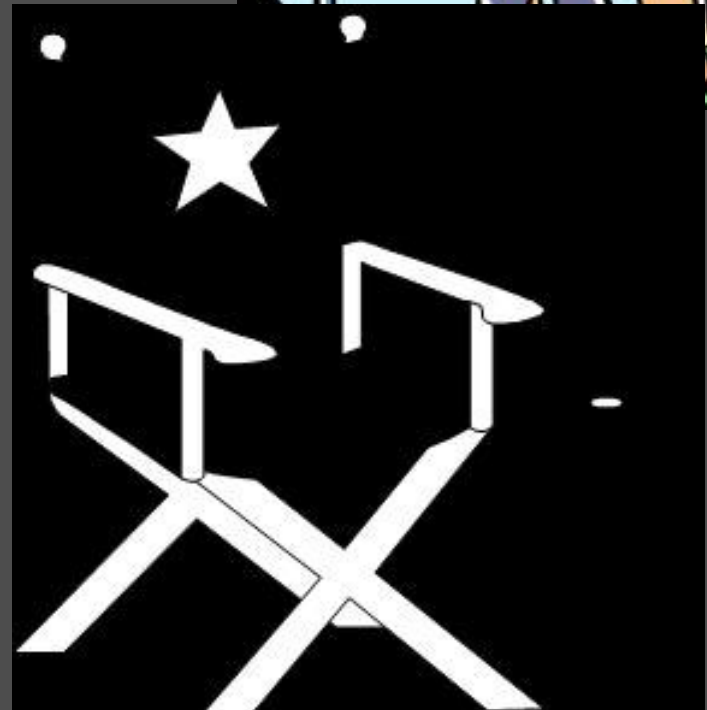


# Better Alternatives

- Follow through with requests
  - Don't "give in" to undesirable behaviors
    - Don't allow pushy behaviors to work
  - Understand dogs' communication signals
    - Many dogs are fearful and defensive
    - Confrontations are not going to help and are dangerous to both people and dogs
  - Solutions depend on problem, and are beyond scope of this talk
- 


# Social Hierarchies Have Value

- Be a good “pet parent”
- Show what you want
- Set reasonable limits
- Avoid physical techniques
- Allow dog some autonomy and control over his environment
- Be a good director – dog wants to do what you want





# Better Alternatives

- Make acquiescing enjoyable
    - Reward dog for assuming subordinate role, submissive behaviors
      - Avoiding eye contact, lying down, rolling over
  - Avoid physical punishments
  - Make interactions consistent and predictable
- 

Time is up  
THE END



# What Does Appropriate Role-Relationship Look Like?

## ● Social communication -

- eye contact
- Reaching/looming over head, neck
- Hugging, restraint, touch collar
- “discipline”

## ● Gives up control of space

- Bed, furniture, etc.
- If disturbed while resting

