

Understanding cause and effect relationship in problematic dog behaviour

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Problematic dog behaviour can manifest from an array of environmental circumstances and causes that impinge on the dog's inherited temperament. Coppinger (2001) states that there needs to be two properties for behaviour to occur. Firstly, the propensity for a behaviour to happen must be supported within the temperament of the individual, and then an environmental effect must be presented to have the behaviour manifest within the animal's behavioural repertoire. We explain it in the simple terms of temperament plus environment equals given behaviour.

When we start to look at cause and effect of problem behaviour we have to identify the natural drives and instincts that are present in differing degrees within most breeds and types of domestic canines. Such natural drives and instincts have filtered through to dogs from their wild ancestor *canis lupus* – the wolf.

One of the main natural drives and instincts that we refer to is prey drive - the desire to chase as used in the hunt. Once the predator has caught its prey it must move along the behaviour sequence to predatory – the bite, fight, shake and kill type behaviours. In the lesser hunting members these behaviours will be displayed more so in bites that tear flesh and immobilise rather than actually kill. The stronger members of the hunting party will generally be the ones more likely involved in the actual kill. Once this section of the hunting process has been achieved, the animals will then go into the next behaviour sequence which is to guard. Often the highest ranking member of the pack will guard the kill and if challenged by lesser members or even other species, will then become defence oriented over it.

The above sequences may be seen in our domestic canines when they are chasing dog toys. There are four main categories of workable toys manufactured for dogs. These categories are listed below, and it is amazing that almost all toys can be said to work on the canine's natural inherited instincts if they are used inappropriately or in the wrong fashion:

1. Rolls and bounces;
2. Squeaks;
3. Fluffy or furry; and
4. Flies.

After the canine has chased after the toy, how it next interacts gives behavioural cues to its true drives and motivators. If the animal picks the toy up and shakes it, this is an emulation of the shake and kill. Should the canine run away with the toy, keeping it away from other dogs or people in a possessive display, this indicates the start of the guarding response. Should it then growl, bare teeth or come forward in any type of threat display, it would be moving into the next sequence of defence, which is to actively fight and egress to maintain possession of the prize.

There are domestic dogs that display similar behaviours in the early process of the behaviour sequence, that can be identified as play drive rather than prey drive. This presents much less of a problem, as these dogs should not elevate from play to prey, predatory, guarding, defence or possession. Naturally not all dogs that display play possess only play drives, and it is possible for some dogs to possess play which can precede prey and move on to predatory, then guarding and finally defence. However, with good identification and management it is possible to curb the rehearsal of prey, predatory, guarding and defence and to concentrate the dog's motivational focus to play, limiting the

extent of more dangerous drives and instincts.

Some of the natural drives and instincts that we have mentioned are often evident when testing very young puppies for their suitability for particular purposes. Pfaffenberger (1963) identifies critical periods for puppy development that were first named by Scott in 1948. We believe one very important period is the optimum split time for puppies which is between 7 and 9 weeks. This split time is extremely important in the long term development of adult dogs with desirable interaction characteristics. When puppies are split from the litter too early they are known to have incomplete canine association. This is an extremely common situation now in our modern domestic dogs due to how we acquire them. This phenomenon can directly affect the puppy's belief system and the way it interacts with its own species and other species. An incomplete canine puppy is prone to develop either fear based aggression towards other dogs and animals, or an incorrect behavioural repertoire that it becomes obnoxious and overly assertive to other dogs. The other dogs may respond by teaching the perpetrator not to display this assertive or dominant behaviour, which often elicits fear or fighting from the incorrectly behaving dog.

Other symptoms that may be present due to this phenomenon is heavy bonding to its human companions to the point of becoming dependant upon the human. This may finally elevate to separation anxiety, which in itself has a myriad of other behavioural problems associated. Another symptom that is often identified with incomplete canine association is seeming to be sexually attracted to humans and displaying classic leg mounting behaviours, which are not truly sexual derived actions.

On the other end of the scale of split times, we have incomplete Human Association which is where the puppy has been left with its litter and possibly its parent/s for too long. While it develops excellent canine etiquette and interactions, and will bond to its close human companions, it will always have an aloof side to its interaction with most other humans and is definitely not a dog that will excel in any of the sporting or working disciplines at a level that its true temperament should allow due to not enjoying human contact and leadership and often being less than interactive. This same dog will often also display a fear or distrust of unusual humans and is likely to develop either fear based or territorial aggression.

We have noted over the years that often puppies that have had everything done correctly, from having sound temperaments in both their parents, correct split times and even correct social exposure, sometimes still developed quite severe dominance and interaction problems with other dogs, animals or humans. We first started to take anecdotal information from owners of these dogs approximately fifteen years ago. We found that dogs that had early injuries or illnesses and had extremely overactive carers at that time (the puppy was given extra care and attention above and beyond what was necessary to ensure health and recovery), were over represented in the number of adult dogs that developed problems with their interaction with other dogs and people and also dogs that were described as being extremely over active and excitable. This situation of over providing, giving extra benefits and an abundance of attention, actually seemed to directly affect the dog's behaviour by enhancing its natural dominance levels to the point of causing environmental dominance related issues.

Another extremely important point in the cause and effect of problem dog behaviour is incorrectly identifying and utilising the social exposure window. The window of social exposure (as we refer to it), has been explained by many authors as being from 7 weeks through to 16 weeks of age. Some people believe that this window closes by 14 weeks of age but our own experience has shown me that we can still work with pups between 14 and 16 weeks, effectively limiting fears and phobias and instilling an aptitude more open to learning and correct interaction.

We have to consider that within our human population there are a certain number of people that suffer from mental disorders or illnesses. It would be remiss of us to believe that domestic canine populations could not suffer from a similar situation since human emotion and a desire to breed all types of unusual anatomies and breeds as well as cross breeds of dogs would have to also similarly change the mental make up of these dogs that may have been naturally culled out in wild dog populations should there not have been the human intervention. Davis (1990) refers to the dogs temperament as either sound or unsound. His ideology is that a dog can not be nearly sound and will if fact have one of the six or more unsound temperament categories making it unsound by his definition. Coppinger (2001) discusses Belyaev's work with foxes linking temperament changes with phenotypical changes when he selectively bred foxes for genetically tame behaviours and gained a number of other changes some even considered undesirable such as piebald coats, dog like sounds and floppy ears.

We have to be aware that there are dogs that are extremely tough and hard in character that will not react favourably to being challenged or disciplined. These dogs could be owned by virtually anyone. This clearly shows that testing procedures and an understanding of how to pick favourable candidates for any purpose are not well known or even a part of basic canine ownership and interaction education. We have to also be aware that often human emotions and beliefs that dogs have the same ability to deductively reason and possess the same motivators and feelings as humans, could cause these same dogs to become environmentally enhanced to the point of causing behavioural problems and even severe displays of aggression and attacks. A softer dog with an extremely soft handler or person whom is anthropomorphic and believes in giving constant treats, rewards and any other inducement or attention at any inappropriate time, will certainly impinge on a dog's hierarchy belief system. This will also greatly increase the likelihood of demanding or attention seeking behaviours.

All of these aforementioned situations are the very basics of the cause and effect of poor canine human relationship which has to finally spill over into problems for communities and society, requiring much more attention from authorities and government and greatly affecting the amount of resources required to deal with these problems. This effect will flow on to cause an ever increasing need for further regulation and control on dog ownership due to the dramatically heightened increase in behavioural problems and dog bite incidents which we first predicted at our 1996 Queensland University Veterinary Science School lectures. We believe that this current situation quite possibly could be the biggest threat to the domestic canine since its domestication approximately 15,000 years ago. Public education is imperative to balance out this massive problem and to relieve the pressures on dogs, owners and society for the best outcome and the long term survival of canines as mans' best

friends.

References

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About the Author

Craig Murray, Master Training Instructor. 1991 saw Craig live in the USA whilst receiving his Professional Dog Trainer's Diploma (600hrs) approved by the U.S. Senate for Education and the West Virginia Dept of Education.

He was also employed on a police and narcotic dog program within the U.S.A. Craig has been instructing for over 10 years at the Qld. University Veterinary Science School as a permanent part-time instructor. He has been involved in bringing several world authorities to Australia to build his education in all facets of dog training. Craig has trained police and narcotic dogs overseas and has sold mantrailing bloodhounds to overseas police and prisons departments. He trained Australia's first operationally proven cadaver recovery dog and gained international recognition for his involvement in the 'Backpacker' Murders Investigation and has been employed by five states police depts for his specialist dogs and skills. Craig also trained the world's first ambergriss dog and three world first sniffer dogs for the Government including the Fire Ant Detection Dog, and the world acclaimed Chemical Residue Detection Dog. He is currently also training Assurances and Service Dogs - training and supplying dogs to help physically and mentally disabled persons. He is also working with specialist Doctors to develop a seizure response dog training program. 1994 saw Craig back in the USA to receive an International Award for dog training excellence in law enforcement and his master trainer instructor's diploma. He has also run courses overseas to train specialist odour detection dog trainers. He has been travelling to Japan for the previous 7 years teaching throughout colleges in four major cities. He currently provides training workshops for the Animal Industries Resource Centre Certificate IV Animal Control and Regulation, Identify and Respond to Animal Behaviour Unit of Competency. Craig encourages clients to check all his references and has a long-term motto "TALK IS CHEAP!" so a live demonstration of his dogs working will do his talking.