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## Breeding Dogs without Bite Inhibitors?

**There are many misperceptions about dog fights. In addition to plain ignorance, a main reason is that there are many different types of fighting behavior embedded in the genes that control the instinct behaviors of canis lupus, and hence of our dogs. These behaviors are very carefully balanced with each other, so that they *together* support the survival of the species.**

**The problem is that when some of those instincts are no longer there, the balance of that puzzle becomes a very dangerous cocktail...**

### The elements of a fight

Fighting has many species-preserving purposes. For a carnivore, like the wolf, it is obvious that fighting with **prey animals** is a prerequisite for getting food, as no targeted prey animals are likely to allow themselves to be peacefully "converted to wolf lunch". This fighting with prey animals that typically are much bigger than the wolf itself naturally calls for some serious strength, determination, and sound judgment on the wolf's part. Wolves that don't meet the mark here are quickly killed, and their genes not distributed very far. Aside from humans, injuries from fighting prey animals represent the main death reason for wolves in the wild.

But wolves are also pack animals. For them to bring down bison, elk, deer, and other big ungulates, they have to cooperate. They have to live together as a *family* – which is what they truly do. If family members in a pack were to settle small family disputes with the same force and strength as they kill prey, the species would have gone extinct long time ago...

Two things prevent this from happening:

1. Wolves train for their hunting challenges through **play**. Playfighting is just *play* – everything is *pretended*, and nobody does anything for real. All action is reduced to only showing the possibility of it being carried through – but there is no *desire* behind the "attack". Exactly as human kids do when they play games that involve fighting.
2. When playfighting gets more serious and develops into a "quarrel" or an "argument", as typical in a **rank dispute**, strength is now more important to show. The pace goes up to the same level as a used with a fight with a prey, but all attacks are deliberately aimed in such a way that the opponent has an easy parade or easily can avoid the biting, and most importantly: the bite inhibitors stop all biting just before it gets serious, so no harm is done! (This does not work when applied to humans, because humans cannot move their heads fast enough to avoid such attacks that are only meant to "cut the air".)

### The function of bite inhibitors

The bite inhibitors function on two levels:

1. They lock the jaws of the attacker in an *open* position, so the opponent can feel the strength of the attack, but the damage done is very minor; a few puncture wounds, maybe – but generally nothing life threatening.
2. In the moment one party of the fighting wants to pull out of a fight by **fleeing**, the winner will not start a pursuit, but will let the loser get away from the scene. This is in sharp contrast to hunting behavior...

However, if the weak party in the fight decides to give in and accept the other party's superiority and higher rank, it will show **submission**. This is generally done by presenting the throat for an easy attack! However, this behavior functions as a key stimulus for a strong instinct in the opponent, and that instinct will block all use of the jaws! This instinct will simply stop the biting and make it impossible for the winner to launch a deadly bite.

You will specifically note that, in a fight between two pack members, there is no room for hunting behaviors like:

- Locking jaws in closed position
- Shaking the head with then jaws locked around a chunk of the opponent's body
- Ripping, tearing, and jerking with closed jaws
- Continuing a fight when the opponent flees
- Launching an attack when the opponent shows submission.

Any such behavior would destroy the species.

### **How much of these bite inhibitors is still left in our modern dogs?**

My answer is, "hopefully *everything!*"

For the 25 years I have worked with training of dogs in Europe (where I ever met only *one* neutered male I did not know what to do with, all other males have been intact...), I have encountered less than a handful of cases of dogs that did not quit biting when the opponent showed submission. Mind you, in most countries in Europe, the fighting breeds are generally illegal, so I have not met many of those over there. But I have seen thousands of dog fights ending on a tense yet peaceful note of acknowledging submission, as it should be.

If this does not happen, there is something wrong with those dogs!

I have also seen many males hate each other, including two of my own. That is Nature's way of creating new packs. We humans just don't like that, because we impose on our dogs some artificial boundaries for who belongs to whom and who doesn't. But, just as an illustration: those two males of mine fought non-stop for over 25 minutes, once I was at work and my wife was alone with them - and she was unable to split them. Yes, there were a few puncture wounds here and there - and the red blood showed easily on their white coats! But there was *nothing* for the vet to repair.... (I learned the lesson, though, and found another home for one of them, despite him being the best SAR dog I ever had - and everybody was happy again, particularly including the one I let go of.)

That's what a real dog fight should be! "The noble knight in shining armor" who never fights to harm, but only to *win*, and who always grants mercy to those who ask in defeat. That's what I want to preserve in our dogs. And that's what I hope humans one day will learn too...

I consider these bite inhibitors a crucial part of the genetic make-up of *Canis Lupus*. I don't think humans have the moral rights to destroy a species by breeding such important species-preserving instincts out of the gene pool. I consider such action outright criminal.

### **When human blood thirst enters the picture...**

Unfortunately, not everybody agrees. Those that do not agree are primarily the people who want to make dogs fight *unnaturally* with each other, as they would fight with a prey animal.

When bloodthirsty humans want to see animals fight with each other, it is not acceptable as an outcome of a fight to have one dog lie down showing submission and the other one standing over it, completely locked in its ability to launch the final attack on that tempting throat! These idiots want to see blood – so they don't want to deal with dogs that understand the difference between hunting (for the kill) and fighting with other dogs (for settling a domestic dispute).

The simple way to get this kind of result is by breeding dogs that have no bite inhibitors....

This is what has been done by many irresponsible breeders in the past - and it probably still happens today. I do not think it is limited to any breed in particular, but I am not naive enough to believe that you wouldn't find a lot of "pit bull" breeders among those. This *is* part of those dogs' history, and those kinds of dogs *are* the ones that are best qualified for supporting such sick desires, regardless of all their other qualities. And I have, unfortunately, repeatedly got that confirmed from dog-dog fights that involved such dogs.

I almost once lost my own dog (a Danish Spitz - quite similar to an American Eskimo) to a boxer that attacked him and tried to kill him. My dog instantly surrendered and turned his throat in submission, as his instincts dictated. The boxer just grabbed that throat instead – and there was no way of making him let go! No bite inhibitors. We had to twist the collar on the boxer to choke him so the muscles would get no oxygen. There was no other way he would stop shaking my dog, and death would have been the certain consequence, had we not intervened.

It should be noted that this lack of bite inhibitors has nothing to do with the dog being mean or aggressive. This boxer was well-known for being friendly with kids. Many "pit bull" owners are fast to claim that their dogs are so and so nice to people. Sorry, but that's completely beside the point! This is not about how they behave when they are *not* in fighting mood. It is about how they behave when they *do* fight!

Likewise, Schutzhund work has absolutely nothing to do with fighting. It is completely based on *hunting*, and the agitator generally does not show submission.... Different instincts altogether.

This was clearly demonstrated by Britta Rothhausen in Denmark back in the late seventies. She trained wolves in Schutzhund work, and they were great at almost everything: obedience, retrieving, jumping, and tracking. But *nothing* could get them to bite.... Their bite inhibitors were too strong - they could not see a running person as a legitimate prey, so they did not shift to "hunting mode" in their brains, as most of the dogs did quite easily.

It is the same thing you experience with some of those bigger dogs who seem to react towards smaller dogs as if they were prey. Completely unacceptable lack of manners (and instincts!), as far as I am concerned.

If people do not dare to let their males resolve their rank disputes on their own, this shows to me that they are very much aware of those bite inhibitors missing.... The fact that some

of these "pit bull" people even have special tools around, prepared for splitting fighting dogs, just tells me more than what I need to know about the ethics of their breeding.

### **Instinct extinction is forever!**

Honestly, I see no need on this planet for dogs that can't distinguish between hunting prey and settling a rank dispute with another dog, and I don't care what breed they might be. It is what Konrad Lorenz called "instinct extinction", and I would love to see those (quite many!) responsible breeders of "pit bulls" I know have some serious success getting those bloodlines that miss out on these important instincts go extinct themselves, as they should.

As mentioned, a bite inhibitor is an instinct. An instinct is a genetically controlled mechanism that links a recognizable sense impression (determined by the genes) with a specific behavior (also determined by the genes). For the instinct to work, you need the genes to specify both the sense impression that must act as trigger, the behavior it should trigger, and the combination between the two (facilitated through very complex body chemistry).

Submission, as shown by another dog, is supposed to be the trigger for the neurologic action that intersects the attacker's desire to bite, when that signal is given by another pack member - which, again, is genetically/empirically defined through the Imprinting. (Please refer to ["The Dog's Social Behavior"](#) for more on this.)

If the other dog in a fight surrenders and shows submission, the "winner" *must* stop biting. If not, he is missing that bite inhibitor - or unable to tell the difference between another potential pack member and a prey, which just is a different way of explaining the same thing. It is that plain simple. A fight between two dogs must have only one of two possible outcomes: the weak party flees - or surrenders with submission. If death were an option, a carnivore pack animal would quickly commit genetic suicide.

Unfortunately, people in general have no idea about what "aggression" is - and they are quick to add ridiculous labels and draw outrageous conclusions from those stupid labels in the very moment a dog is showing that is actually is a carnivore and it does have some very strong instincts for how to deal with conflict. Now, if people don't want that, then they should buy themselves a rabbit or a hamster instead!

But that is still no excuse for accepting instinct extinction among those strong instincts that *should* be there in order to ensure that conflict *is* managed, also on the dog-to-dog level. And particularly not instincts that are in place to *reduce* the damage from such conflicts!

In my opinion, dogs are a gem we have borrowed from Nature. We owe it to Her that we do not destroy that gem. That means that we preserve the fundamentals of the behavior that is embedded in the genes of Canis Lupus. Anything that results in creating or maintaining dogs that no longer possess those natural behaviors that are crucial for Canis Lupus and for our value of using Canis Lupus as companion, is irresponsible and unacceptable.

I count the absence of such important genes as the bite inhibitors as one such unacceptable result, regardless any "justification through history". I count that history itself as a result of a criminal mistake that definitely is not rectified by being continued/repeated in modern times!!!! And I do not condone any breeding that results in dogs no longer being able to live as pack animals in harmony with each other. Aiming for such results is morally unacceptable to me, no matter what names people put on the phenomenon, and no matter what other desirable features you want to put into the bargain. I do not accept such a deal, out of pure principle - it is treason to Nature, and nothing but a result of human ignorance, arrogance, and selfishness - all of which I detest.

Whoever wants to take offence from this can do so freely.... 🐾

I am an old Army officer - I have been close enough to death often enough - and I see *no* justification for breeding dogs that promote more violence, no matter how and why, against other dogs or people - it makes no difference, as my dogs are part of *my family*, and I will not hesitate defending them with whatever it takes, if someone tries to kill them, dog or human.

## **What is the solution?**

That said, I must also say that I have seen many very responsible owners of those fighting dogs in my training classes - and they are even more welcome than "average people", as I find that their need for learning how to control their dogs is greater than it is for "Joe Average". I have never had a problem with those owners or with their dogs. But I do have a problem with people who find it morally acceptable to continue breeding such "live killing machines", well knowing that that is exactly what they do.

I don't care what names we put to the breeds. This is *not* breed specific. And breed specific legislation does not solve this problem in any way whatsoever - it just a judicial farce of unenforceable abuse that makes the problem continue to grow, but now in illegal ways. Plus it sure turns a lot of responsible dog owners into criminal law-breakers.

I know - this issue is *not* simple. Particularly not for those who have come to love those breeds that are the prime candidates for being notorious part of this problem... The thing gets emotional - yet it really boils down to something very simple: dogs are supposed to be born with four legs. If not, we don't breed them. But they are also supposed to be born with effective bite inhibitors. If not, we don't breed them. That's it.

But you still take good care of a three-legged dog, I hope. Same thing with the one that has no bite inhibitors, although the care for that one takes some additional responsibility and diligence. It is *not the dog's fault* that some humans once found pleasure in violence and dangerous, bloody, unnatural dog fights, and the dog does *not* have any keys to solving the problem.

Finally, may I remind everybody about Einstein's saying: "Make everything as simple as possible, *but not simpler!*". This is a prime example of an area where applying that wisdom should be mandatory.

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