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1 **THE DARK SIDE OF PLAY: PLAY FIGHTING AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR REAL**  
2 **FIGHTING IN DOMESTIC PIGS (*Sus scrofa*)**

3

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26

27 Play, especially in its social form, is a behaviour that can serve different functions depending on the  
28 species, social and physical environment, dominance relationships and players' individual features,  
29 such as age, sex, hierarchical rank, physical strength and body size (Burghardt, 2005; Fagen, 1981;  
30 Norscia & Palagi, 2011; Palagi, 2011; Pellis, Pellis & Bell, 2010a). Play is considered a rewarding  
31 activity (Trezza, Baarendse, & Vanderschuren, 2010; Vanderschuren, Achterberg, & Trezza, 2016)  
32 that has a fundamental role in favouring the development of physical, cognitive, and socio-  
33 emotional abilities and improving behavioural flexibility. Thanks to this, individuals adapt under  
34 changeable and unpredictable circumstances (Burghardt, 2010; Pellis & Pellis, 2009; Špinka,  
35 Newberry, & Bekoff, 2001). Different from other behavioural systems (e.g. aggressive, foraging,  
36 reproductive), play involves and re-organizes behaviours that are typical of a specific system or, in  
37 some lineages, it can be a by-product of the interaction of diverse systems (Pellis, Pellis, Pelletier,  
38 & Leca, 2019).

39 Play fighting - also named Rough-&-Tumble play - involves prolonged physical contacts between  
40 partners and it is composed (as play, in general) by motor patterns that are repeated, exaggerated,  
41 redundant and unordered (Burghardt, 2005). In play fighting, body contact is not usually associated  
42 with injuries and subjects do not protect a resource or their social status (Smith, 1997). As for  
43 communication, play context-specific movements, facial expressions and vocalizations are used to  
44 communicate the playful intent and to maintain a playful mood between players (Bekoff, 1995,  
45 2001; Palagi et al., 2016a; Smith 1997). Moreover, an affiliative interaction often follows a play  
46 fighting session (Smith, 1997).

47 Across species, there is a remarkable variation in origin and maintenance of play fighting, which  
48 can occur in different forms and have different functions, in support of the idea that different  
49 behavioural systems are involved (Pellis & Pellis, 2017; Pellis et al., 2019). For example, in young  
50 and yearling yellow-bellied marmots (*Marmota flaviventris*), early social play may predict later  
51 dominance relationships between group members (Blumstein, Chung, & Smith, 2013). Conversely,  
52 in wild meerkats (*Suricata suricatta*), play fighting does not seem to either improve individual

53 combat skills or favour success in real fights (Sharpe, 2005). In other cases, different combinations  
54 of play fighting with potentially different functions are present. For example, in grey mouse lemurs  
55 (*Microcebus murinus*), about 80% of play fighting sessions are performed whilst competing to  
56 groom or mount one another (Pellis & Pellis, 2018). This process may lead, in the long run, to  
57 improve social bonding and emotion regulation between subjects and, at the same time, physically  
58 train them for future competitive interactions (Byers & Walker, 1995; Pellis & Iwaniuk, 2000  
59 Pellis, Pellis, & Himmler, 2014; Vanderschuren & Trezza, 2014). Hence, play fighting may include  
60 competition for affiliative or sexual contact, and also mimic aggression. In a way, play fighting  
61 represents a paradox because it can enhance affiliation via playful competitive interactions and real  
62 competition via cooperative affiliation.

63 Here, we aim to explore the possible function of play fighting in domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa*), a  
64 species characterized by complex cognition, psychology, and sociality (Camerlink, Farish, D'Eath,  
65 Arnott, & Turner, 2018; Marino & Colvin, 2015; Norscia, Coco, Robino, Chierito, Cordoni, in  
66 press; Weller, Camerlink, Turner, Farish, & Arnott, 2019).

67 As many other domesticated species, the domestic pig (*Sus scrofa*) also shows the so called  
68 'domestication syndrome' (*sensu* Wilkins, Wrangham, & Fitch, 2014). In this respect, the domestic  
69 pig is characterized by rapid growth, high reproductive rate, precocious physical and behavioural  
70 development, coordinated locomotion and adult behavioural elements since their first days of life  
71 (D'Eath & Turner, 2009; Jensen, 1988, 2002). Within a few minutes after birth, piglets begin to  
72 compete with each other to reach the most productive teats, which are located at the front  
73 (Blackshaw, Swain, Blackshaw, Thomas, & Gillies, 1997; D'Eath & Turner, 2009; Schmitt, Baxter,  
74 Boyle, & O'Driscoll, 2018). Usually, during these conflicts, future dominance relationships between  
75 siblings are determined with heavier individuals winning over lighter ones (Horback, 2014; Ruis,  
76 Brake, van de Burgwal, de Jong, Blokhuis, & Koolhaas, 2000). In natural or semi-natural  
77 conditions, piglets of about 3-7 days of age start to expand their social network by interacting at  
78 first with siblings and then with unfamiliar peers (D'Eath & Turner, 2009; Jensen, 2002).

79 As it occurs for immature individuals of many other species (Fagen, 1981), play is the predominant  
80 type of social interaction between piglets (Camerlink, et al., 2018; D'Eath & Turner, 2009;  
81 Newberry, Wood-Gush, & Hall, 1988; Špinka, 2017). From early phases of life, piglets engage in  
82 vigorous play fighting sessions that are extremely rare in adulthood (Brown, Peters, Nevison, &  
83 Lawrence, 2018; Horback, 2014; Newberry et al., 1988). During play fighting, piglets wrestle head-  
84 to-head, hit at each other's flanks and bite the partner (Brown et al., 2018; Chaloupková, Illmann,  
85 Bartoš, & Špinka, 2007; Horback, 2014; Newberry et al., 1988; Pellis & Pellis, 2016; Šilerová,  
86 Špinka, Šárová, & Algers, 2010). In pigs, the patterns used during play fighting seem to be drawn  
87 from the aggressive behavioural system. As a matter of fact, such patterns are the same as those  
88 used during aggressive encounters by both young unacquainted piglets (Rushen & Pajor, 1987) and  
89 adult pigs (Jensen, 2002). Nevertheless, despite the similarity in behavioural expression between  
90 play fighting and real fighting, the former does not usually result in injury and losers are willing to  
91 initiate new bouts of play fighting (Pellis & Pellis, 2016, 2017). Instead, real fighting, even between  
92 immature individuals, may result in injuries (Rushen & Pajor, 1987).

93 In this study we test the hypothesis that play fighting and real fighting in domestic pigs converge on  
94 serving a similar function. To this purpose, we gathered behavioural data on play fighting in three  
95 litters of domestic pigs (in the period before weaning) and built sociomatrices and social networks  
96 based on both play and real fighting. The social network analysis allows the precise definition of the  
97 network structure and the position of each individual within the structure beyond the dyadic  
98 interaction level for a given behavioural system (Büttner, Czycholl, Mees, & Krieter, 2020; Foister  
99 et al., 2018; Lutz, Ratsimbazafy, & Judge, 2019). We formulated the following predictions.

100 *Prediction 1 - Play opening.* Wild boars and domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa*), as well as some  
101 phylogenetically closely related species (e.g. warthogs: *Phacochoerus africanus*; Visayan warty  
102 pigs; *Sus cebifrons*; Pellis and Pellis, 2016, 2017), can use both contact and non-contact motor  
103 patterns to open a play session. Starting a play session by using a contact pattern seems to provide  
104 an advantage to the subject as it increases the probability to outcompete the partner (Vanderschuren

105 et al., 2016). If in domestic pigs play fighting functions as a substitute for real fighting, we expect  
106 that piglets are less likely to accept play fighting invitations when the playmate tries to gain an  
107 immediate advantage by using body-contact to open the play session.

108

109 *Prediction 2 – Play maintenance.* In domestic pigs, body size is crucial to determine the dominance  
110 status and the access to resources, with larger and heavier individuals more frequently winning the  
111 agonistic interactions (Andersen, Nævdal, Bakken, & Bøe, 2004; Andersen et al., 2000; D'Eath  
112 2002; D'Eath & Turner, 2009; Jensen, 1988; Norring, Valros, Bergman, Marchant-Forde, &  
113 Heinonen, 2019; Turner & Edwards, 2004). The asymmetry in body size between partners can  
114 affect the aggressive contest duration because as disparity in weight increases the fight duration  
115 decreases (Riechert 1998). If, in piglets, play fighting functions as a substitute for real fighting, we  
116 predict that the duration of the playful sessions decreases if the asymmetry in body size between  
117 players increases, as it occurs during aggressive encounters (*Prediction 2*).

118

119 *Prediction 3 - Play ontogeny.* In mammalian species with rapid growth, when social play between  
120 immature subjects mainly serves long-term more than immediate functions (e.g. social assessment,  
121 motor training useful during adulthood), play fighting is usually the main form of interaction until  
122 weaning, with aggressive interactions increasing at a later stage (Camerlink, et al., 2018; D'Eath  
123 & Turner, 2009; Fagen, 1981). Moreover, the outcomes of play fighting can be used, in some  
124 species, to establish dominance relationships, as it occurs with real fighting during adulthood  
125 (Blumstein et al., 2013; Weller et al., 2020). The structure of aggressive social networks in piglets is  
126 defined by the centrality and level of connections from/to each subject (Büttner et al., 2020). In this  
127 view, if piglet play fighting functions as a substitute for real fighting, we expect that: i) play  
128 fighting may be rapidly replaced with real fighting during the early phases of development  
129 (*Prediction 3a*); ii) at the dyadic level, the outcome of play fighting (i.e. being the winner or the  
130 loser) may match the outcome of real fighting (*Prediction 3b*); and iii) at the social network level,



131 the centrality and influence of a subject with respect to others is similar between the networks of  
132 play and real fighting (*Prediction 3c*).

133

## 134 **METHODS**

### 135 *Ethic statements*

136 The present research was approved by the Department of Life Sciences and System Biology  
137 (DBIOS) of the University of Turin (Italy). The research was purely observational and non-  
138 invasive; therefore, the necessity of specific permit is waived. This study is part of the broader  
139 project “*So.Pig*” (Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology, University of Turin). This  
140 project focuses on domestic pigs that are not raised under intensive farming, with the aim of better  
141 understanding social dynamics and their relationship with welfare, the effect of domestication on  
142 behaviour, and possible evolutionary divergences and convergences with other social species,  
143 including humans. The subjects under study were reared in an ethical farm (*Parva Domus*, Turin,  
144 Italy) and were housed in large enclosures that were parts of natural habitat with a freely accessible  
145 indoor and outdoor spaces. The enclosures were also enriched with straw, sheds and troughs. Piglets  
146 stayed with their mothers until weaning. Sows and piglets were able to move freely and avoid each  
147 other if wanted. The study did not require that sows and piglets be removed from their group either  
148 temporarily or on a longer-term basis. Piglets could perform their ordinary behavioural repertoire;  
149 no aberrant or stereotypic behaviours were recorded. To ensure welfare control, the farmer weighed  
150 piglets at birth and, then, every two weeks until their weaning week. Periodically, vet visited the  
151 pigs for vaccination or health problems.

152 The authors took all the possible precautions to minimize the imposition of fear, distress or lasting  
153 harm on pig and to reduce the impact of their presence on animal environment. During the first  
154 week after birth the piglets were habituated to the presence of the observers. The authors did not  
155 interact with piglets, which were free to perform their ordinary maintenance and social activities.  
156 For identification purposes, no semi-permanent or permanent markers were used (e.g. tag, tattoo,

157 freeze marking or branding). The authors marked piglets with animal painting spray (Raider ©) and  
158 marking was renewed every 4-7 days depending on weather conditions. This process was fast and it  
159 did not involve physical contact with piglets.

160

#### 161 *The study group*

162 The research was carried out on three domestic pig litters (Parma Black x Parma Black and Parma  
163 Black x Large White) hosted at the ethical farm *Parva Domus* (Cavagnolo, Torino - Italy). The  
164 study included a total of 24 piglets (11 females, 13 males; Table A1) with different mothers (Linda,  
165 Nina, Black Beauty) and same father (Bob). The three sows were kept in individual enclosures with  
166 their offspring until weaning, which occurred at around 8 weeks of life. Each enclosure measured  
167 around 100 m<sup>2</sup> and was located in an area of natural habitat equipped with straw, troughs for food,  
168 water and a shed. The individuals were able to freely move throughout the enclosure and avoid  
169 conspecifics if wanted. Sows received food pellets (Ciclo Unico P, SILDAMIN®) each morning  
170 between 8:30-10:30 am, whereas the maternal milk represented the major food source for piglets  
171 until weaning. No food was specifically given to piglets before weaning although they could  
172 opportunistically feed on the pellets given to the sow. Piglets could supplement maternal milk with  
173 roots, leaves and fruits found in the natural environment or with pellets left by their mother. The  
174 tails and teeth of piglets were kept intact and males were castrated during the first three days of life.  
175 The animals followed the natural day/night cycle and did not perform any aberrant or stereotyped  
176 behaviour.

177

#### 178 *Data collection and operational definition*

179 The behavioural patterns of piglets were video-recorded from September until December 2018  
180 using HD/Full HD Sony HDR-XR200 and Panasonic HC-W3580 cameras, for a total of 130 hours  
181 of videos collected for all three litters (Linda's litter = 46.5 hrs, Nina's litter = 40.5 hrs, Black  
182 Beauty's litter = 43 hrs). During the first week after birth the observers underwent a training period

183 to become skilled at animal identification and behavioural pattern distinction. In the same week,  
184 piglets were habituated to the presence of the observers. Actual data collection started on the 6<sup>th</sup> day  
185 of piglet life. Behavioural observations took place 6 days per week and ranged from 08:00 am to  
186 05:00 pm. During the video collection the observers stayed at a distance of around 10 meters from  
187 piglets and sows. To facilitate the identification of each subject, piglets were marked with animal  
188 painting spray (Raidex ©) by using different combinations of colours (i.e., blue, red and green) and  
189 symbols (i.e., dots, circles and lines). Marking was renewed every 4-7 days depending on weather  
190 conditions. To ensure welfare control, the farmer weighed the piglets at birth and, then, every two  
191 weeks until their weaning week via a mechanical human body weighing scale (Health-o-meter  
192 160LB Professional Floor Scales). Thus, we were able to evaluate the weight difference between  
193 subjects, which remained constant from the first until the fourth weighing session (Spearman  
194 correlation test between  $\text{weigh}_{\text{first}} - \text{weigh}_{\text{fourth}}$ :  $N = 24$ ,  $r = 0.842$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). The subjects were  
195 divided into weight categories obtained by dividing piglet weights in tertiles and assigned each  
196 individual to a specific tertile (1, 2, 3). Two piglets of the same category had a weight difference of  
197  $2.5 \text{ Kg} \pm 1.77$  (mean  $\pm$ SD).

198 By using the all occurrences animal sampling method (Altmann, 1974) we collected 400 play  
199 sessions and 386 aggressive interactions between piglets. Moreover, we employed focal animal  
200 sampling (Altmann, 1974) to gather data on body contact and grooming events. Prior to starting the  
201 video-analysis, M.G. was supervised by G.C. and I.N. in behavioural coding and the video analysis  
202 started when the inter-observer reliability scores measured via Cohen's  $k$  reached 0.83. The inter-  
203 observer reliability between video coders was calculated using the R function "cohen.cappa" and  
204 libraries "irr" and "psych" (R version 3.5.3). The videos were analysed frame-by-frame using the  
205 program VLC 2.2.1 (*Jump-to-time* extension). For each playful/aggressive event, we recorded: i)  
206 the identity of the subjects involved, ii) individual features (gender, age), iii) behavioural patterns  
207 performed (Table 1), iv) time of each pattern and v) only for play, the length of the session  
208 (seconds).

209 Some of the patterns described in the Table 1 are present in both play and real fighting (e.g. biting,  
210 pushing, lifting and head knocking). However, according to previous reports, play fighting is  
211 characterised by behavioural elements that are specifically found in the play context and not in the  
212 aggressive context. These play markers are: scamper, pivot, head-tossing, and object-shaking  
213 (Horback, 2014; Newberry et al., 1988; Rauw, 2013; Špinka, 2017; Table 1). Therefore, we  
214 categorized as play fighting all the interactions in which the subjects performed at least one such  
215 play patterns. On the contrary, if no play marker was present, the interactions were categorised as  
216 real fighting. A play session started when a piglet directed any playful pattern (see Table 1) toward  
217 the littermate and finished when both players stopped the interaction, with one of them moving  
218 away or with a third subject interrupting the session (Palagi, 2008). Two consecutive sessions were  
219 considered as different if the play interruption lasted at least 10 seconds (Cordoni, Nicotra, &  
220 Palagi, 2016; Cordoni, Norscia, Bobbio, & Palagi, 2018).

221 A play invitation (PINV) occurred when a piglet approached a companion (the receiver), performed  
222 a playful pattern toward it and waited or ran away. If, in turn, the receiver responded with another  
223 playful pattern and began the session, the invitation was considered as successful (PINV);  
224 conversely, if the receiver ignored the companion and the play session did not occur, the play  
225 invitation was considered as unsuccessful (PINV-).

226 For the analysis of PINV, we distinguished the playful patterns into body contact (C) and  
227 locomotor-acrobatic (LA, without any body contact). Furthermore, we classified play patterns as  
228 offensive (O, unidirectional patterns of attack, directed by one individual toward another), defensive  
229 (D, patterns of body protection or contact avoidance) and neutral (N, neither offensive nor defensive  
230 patterns) (Table 1).

231 In order to quantify the level of play asymmetry, for each session we calculated the Play  
232 Asymmetry Index (PAI; Cordoni et al., 2016, 2018) as follows: the proportion of "wins" for piglet  
233 A was subtracted from the proportion of "wins" for piglet B divided by the total number of playful  
234 patterns performed by both piglets. The proportion of "wins" for subject A was defined as offensive

235 patterns by A towards B plus the defensive patterns by B toward A. B's "wins" were calculated in  
236 the same way. The PAI ranges from -1 to +1 with zero value indicating a complete symmetry of the  
237 session.

$$238 \quad PAI = \frac{(\text{offensive}_{A \rightarrow B} + \text{defensive}_{B \rightarrow A}) - (\text{offensive}_{B \rightarrow A} + \text{defensive}_{A \rightarrow B})}{(\text{offensive}_{A \rightarrow B} + \text{defensive}_{B \rightarrow A}) + (\text{offensive}_{B \rightarrow A} + \text{defensive}_{A \rightarrow B}) + \text{neutral}_{A+B}}$$

239 The dyadic hourly frequencies of body contact and grooming events (Table 1) were used to evaluate  
240 relationship quality between siblings.

241 Following de Vries (1993), we built squared matrices including the outcomes of dyadic interactions  
242 (number of interactions won or lost by each individual). The matrices were built for both play  
243 fighting and real fighting. For each agonistic event we identified a "winner" - the subject that never  
244 displayed submissive and/or fear patterns (e.g. fleeing) - and a "loser" - the subject that displayed  
245 submissive and/or fear patterns. For each playful event, we defined as "winner" the subject that  
246 performed more offensive and less defensive patterns and as "loser" the subject that received more  
247 offensive patterns and/or showed more defensive patterns (offensive and defensive patterns are  
248 defined in Table 1). Only for the purpose of this analysis, we specifically considered the events in  
249 which there was a clear discrimination between winner and loser (de Vries, 1998).

250 Finally, we defined three periods spanning 14 days of piglet life from the 6<sup>th</sup> day to the 50<sup>th</sup> day of  
251 life: T<sub>1</sub> (6-20 days; Linda's litter = 16.0 hrs of videos, Nina's litter = 14.0 hrs of videos, Black  
252 Beauty's litter = 14.5 hrs of videos), T<sub>2</sub> (21-35 days; Linda's litter = 14.0 hrs of videos, Nina's litter  
253 = 12.0 hrs of videos, Black Beauty's litter = 13.5 hrs of videos) and T<sub>3</sub> (36-50 days; Linda's litter =  
254 16.5 hrs of videos, Nina's litter = 14.5 hrs of videos, Black Beauty's litter = 15.0 hrs of videos).

255

256 *Statistical analyses*

257 *Prediction 1*

258 To verify which class of play invitation patterns (i.e. locomotor/acrobatic or body contact patterns)  
259 were most likely to be accepted by fellows and followed by play fighting, we employed the non-

260 parametric Wilcoxon's test corrected for ties for two dependent samples comparison (Siegel &  
261 Castellan, 1988). Moreover, for determining which specific type of motor action (see Table 1) was  
262 mainly performed for inviting to play, we applied the non-parametric Friedman test for k-dependent  
263 sample comparison. We employed the Bonferroni-Dunn *post-hoc* test for pairwise contrasts (Siegel  
264 & Castellan, 1988). The use of non-parametric statistics was necessary owing to the non-normal  
265 distribution of data (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test:  $P > 0.05$ ).

## 266 *Prediction 2*

267 In order to evaluate which factors potentially affected the duration of piglet play, we ran a Linear  
268 Mixed Model analysis (LMM). We tested as dependent variable the mean duration (in seconds) of  
269 dyadic playful sessions (Normal distribution; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test  $P = 0.10$ ). The identity of  
270 the players was entered as random factors. As fixed factors we included: sex combination  
271 (sex\_comb, factorial variable: MM = 1; MF/FM = 2; FF = 3), litter identity (group, factorial  
272 variable: Linda's group = 1; Nina's group = 2; Black Beauty's group = 3), relationship quality  
273 (bonding, factorial variable: 1 =  $0.000 \leq$  hourly frequency (body contact + grooming)  $\leq 2.841$ ; 2 =  $2.841 <$   
274 hourly frequency (body contact + grooming)  $\leq 5.333$ ; 3 = hourly frequency (body contact + grooming)  $> 5.3332$ ),  
275 same body weight\_different body weight (SW\_DW, factorial variable: 1 = Same Weight\_SW; 2 =  
276 Different weight\_DW) and Play Asymmetry Index (PAI, scale variable).

277 We tested models for each combination of variables, spanning from the null (the intercept only) to  
278 the full model (all the independent variables included). We applied the Akaike's Corrected  
279 Information Criterion (AICc) to select the best model that is the model with the lowest value of  
280 AICc (Symond & Moussalli, 2011). Then, we calculated the difference ( $\Delta$ AICc) between the lowest  
281 AICc value and the AICc value of each other model. We considered as competing models those  
282 showing a  $\Delta$ AICc  $\leq 2$ . For assessing the strength of each candidate model, we employed  $\Delta$ AICc to  
283 calculate the evidence ratio and the Akaike weight ( $w_i$ ), ranging from 0 to 1. The  $w_i$  is the weight of  
284 evidence or probability that a given model is the best model, taking into account the data and set of  
285 candidate models (Symonds & Moussalli, 2011). The evidence ratio of the model weights is

286 calculated by dividing the  $w_i$  of the top-ranked model by the  $w_j$  of the other models considered  
287 ( $w_i/w_j$ ).

288 The analyses for both *Prediction 1* and *Prediction 2* were carried out via SPSS 20.0.

### 289 *Prediction 3a*

290 In order to determine the possible difference in the individual hourly frequency of play fighting and  
291 individual mean duration of suckling session between the three periods considered (T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, and T<sub>3</sub>;  
292 see *Data collection and operational definition*), we employed the non-parametric Friedman test and  
293 the Bonferroni-Dunn *post-hoc* test (non-normal data distribution; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test via  
294 SPSS 20.0,  $P < 0.05$ ; Siegel & Castellan, 1988). Moreover, we checked for possible correlation  
295 between play fighting and both real fighting and affiliation by using the parametric Pearson  
296 correlation test (normal data distribution; Kolmogorov-Smirnov test via SPSS 20.0,  $P = ns$ ).

297 To test for the possible correlation between the rates of aggression and play fighting at the dyadic  
298 level, we ran a correlation via randomization by using the freeware Resampling Procedures (1.3  
299 David C. Howell; 10,000 permutations owing to data pseudo-replication (the same individual is  
300 included in different dyads)).

### 301 *Prediction 3b*

302 We checked for the possible correlation between the outcome of real fighting (winner/loser) and the  
303 outcome of play fighting via a row-wise correlation test between squared matrices (software  
304 Matman 1.0; 10000 permutations). This test makes no underlying assumptions (the smallest sample  
305 size for square matrices that can acquire a probability value  $< 5\%$  is four) and only compares values  
306 within the same row, thus overcoming data partial dependency (recurring observations concerning  
307 the same individual). The  $K_r$  row-wise matrix correlation coefficient is calculated on the basis of a  
308 weighted sum of the correlation between all dyads of corresponding rows in the two sociomatrices  
309 and it is defined via Kendall's rank order correlation coefficient (de Vries, 1993).

### 310 *Prediction 3c*

311 To check whether the position of a subject in the play fighting network may match with the position  
312 of the same subject in the real fighting network, we employed Social Network Analysis (SNA).  
313 This method has been recently employed also by Turner and colleagues (2020) to evaluate the  
314 positions occupied by pre-weaning piglets in play fighting network and assess the effect of a central  
315 play fighting network position on later aggressive physical consequences. By providing different  
316 parameters, SNA depicts the group network structure and the position of each subject within this  
317 structure (Newman, 2010). We employed the version 9.2 of the open-source and multiplatform  
318 software *Gephi* ([www.https://gephi.org/](http://www.https://gephi.org/), distributed under the dual license CDDL 1.0 and GNU  
319 General Public License v3) that is commonly used for network visualization and exploration  
320 (Cherven, 2015; Saqr, Fors, & Nouri, 2018). A Social Network (SN) is made of two components:  
321 the actors composing the network (nodes) and the relations/interactions between actors (edges). The  
322 edges can be distinguished as undirected, when the direction of the interaction from initiator to  
323 receiver is not considered or directed when each edge has a clear initiator and receiver. In our study,  
324 each piglet represents a node and its playful/aggressive interactions with siblings represent the  
325 directed edges. Both the play and aggression SN of each litter is visually represented with a graph  
326 called a sociogram that is rendered using the Fruchterman Reingold algorithm (Fruchterman &  
327 Reingold, 1991). This is a force-directed layout algorithm that employs physical simulation to  
328 represent each node according to connected edges; the resulting visualization depicts nodes in a  
329 gravitational way (attraction/repulsion). Then we used the layout algorithm Force Atlas 2 to  
330 disperse groups and provide space around the most well connected nodes. The sociogram provides a  
331 useful visualization of the overall playful/aggressive interactions in each group, the relations  
332 between siblings and their position and role within the network. Different parameters can be  
333 calculated for quantifying the prominence of each subject and its value of connection in the SN  
334 (Cherven, 2015; Saqr et al., 2018). For each play fighting and real fighting network, we considered  
335 the following parameters.

336 General Network parameters (Cherven, 2015; Saqr et al., 2018)



337 Modularity - it is a measure of the overall network structure and it evaluates the strength of division  
338 of a network into modules (i.e. aggregated groups or clusters based on shared characteristics). A  
339 network showing a high level of modularity has many connections between the nodes within each  
340 module but fewer connections between the nodes in different modules.

341 Prestige parameters (Cherven, 2015; Saqr et al., 2018)

342 Normalized in-degree prestige - it evaluates how likely other nodes directly connect with a specific  
343 node (i.e. it refers to interactions where the subject is not the initiator) and it can be considered as an  
344 estimate of the size of the ego network: a prestigious node receives many ties from other nodes. The  
345 in-degree prestige parameter is normalized on the network size ( $n-1$ ).

346 Domain prestige - it evaluates the number or proportion of all nodes that can be directly or  
347 indirectly connected with a specific node. It represents a measure of the influence of a specific node  
348 as voted by neighbouring nodes.

349 Centrality parameters (Cherven, 2015; Saqr et al., 2018)

350 Eigenvector centrality - it is an extension of in-degree prestige because it evaluates the prominence  
351 of a node considering its neighbouring nodes: a node is important if it is linked to other important  
352 nodes. This parameter assigns relative scores to all nodes in the network based on the rationale that  
353 connections to high-scoring nodes contribute more to the score of a specific node than equal  
354 connections to low-scoring nodes. In this light, a node connected to prominent nodes will have  
355 higher values of Eigenvector centrality.

356 Bridging centrality - a node lying between modules (i.e. aggregated groups/clusters, see Modularity  
357 definition) is defined as a bridging node. The bridging nodes in a graph are determined based on  
358 their higher values of bridging centrality compared to those of the other nodes. The bridging  
359 centrality of a node is the product of the Betweenness centrality that quantifies the number of times  
360 a node acts as a bridge along the shortest path between two other nodes.

361 We checked for a possible correlation between play and aggressive parameters by using both  
362 Spearman (for non-normally distributed data: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test,  $p < 0.05$ ) and Pearson  
363 correlation test (for normally distributed data: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test,  $p = ns$ ) via SPSS 20.0.

364

## 365 **RESULTS**

### 366 *Prediction 1 - Play opening*

367 The analysis of the start of play fighting showed that the proportion of successful Play Invitation  
368 (PINV) performed with locomotor/acrobatic (LA) patterns was significantly higher compared to the  
369 proportion of PINV performed with contact (C) patterns ( $PINV_{LA}/PINV_{TOT}$  vs  $PINV_C/PINV_{TOT}$ ;  
370 Wilcoxon exact test  $N = 24$ ,  $T = 70.0$ , ties = 1,  $P = 0.038$ ; Figure 1). In particular, a significant  
371 difference was found between the proportion of the different types of LA patterns  
372 ( $PINV_{LAX}/PINV_{LAtot}$ ) employed in PINV (Friedman test<sub>df=23</sub>  $\chi^2 = 52.885$ ,  $N = 24$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).  
373 Specifically, the proportions of play run, pivot/scamper and head tossing were higher compared to  
374 those of object play, play kneeling/flopping and play laying down (only significant results are  
375 reported, Bonferroni-Dunn post-hoc test:  $N = 24$ , play laying down vs pivot/scamper  $Q = 1.891$ ,  $P$   
376  $= 0.009$ ; play laying down vs play run  $Q = 2.109$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ; play laying down vs head tossing  $Q =$   
377  $2.348$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ; object play vs pivot/scamper  $Q = 1.761$ ,  $P = 0.021$ ; object play vs play run  $Q =$   
378  $1.978$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ; object play vs head tossing  $Q = 2.217$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ; play kneeling/flopping vs  
379 pivot/scamper  $P = 0.06$ ; play kneeling/flopping vs play run  $Q = - 1.804$ ,  $P = 0.016$ ; play  
380 kneeling/flopping vs head tossing  $Q = 2.043$ ,  $P = 0.003$ ).

381 The proportion of unsuccessful Play Invitation (PINV-) performed with C patterns were  
382 significantly higher compared to the proportion of PINV- performed with LA patterns ( $PINV_{-LA}/$   
383  $PINV_{-TOT}$  vs  $PINV_{-C}/PINV_{-TOT}$ ; Wilcoxon exact test  $N = 24$ ,  $T = 23.0$ , ties = 2,  $P = 0.001$ ; Figure  
384 1).

### 385 *Prediction 2 - Play maintenance*

386 The LMM analysis on the distribution of the mean duration of play fighting sessions (dependent  
387 variable, normal distribution) showed three competing models (Table 2). The first model (AICc =  
388 114.99; 32.3% of probability to be the best model) included the SW\_DW variable. The second  
389 model was the null model (intercept only, AICc = 116.11; 18.4% of probability to be the best  
390 model). Finally, the third model comprised the variables PAI and SW\_DW (AICc = 116.25) and  
391 had a 17.1% of probability of being the best model. The variable SW\_DW was statistically  
392 significant with same-weight dyads playing longer than different-weight dyads. The full model was  
393 the worst (AICc = 124.41). See Table A2 for the  $w_i$  and evidence ratio values of the models tested.

394

### 395 *Prediction 3 - Play ontogeny*

396 The individual hourly frequencies of play fighting significantly differed across the three age-periods  
397 considered (Friedman test<sub>df=2</sub>  $\chi^2 = 21.906$ ,  $N = 23$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). In particular, the play rates decreased  
398 from T<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>3</sub> (Bonferroni-Dunn post-hoc test: T<sub>1</sub> vs T<sub>2</sub>  $Q = 0.152$ ,  $P = 1.000$ ; T<sub>1</sub> vs T<sub>3</sub>  $Q = 1.217$ ,  $P$   
399  $< 0.001$ ; T<sub>2</sub> vs T<sub>3</sub>  $Q = 1.065$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ).

400 In order to quantify the time spent by piglets in suckling sessions, we calculated the individual  
401 mean duration (in minutes) of sessions in each of the periods considered. The suckling duration  
402 significantly changed across the three periods (Friedman test<sub>df=2</sub>  $\chi^2 = 37.130$ ,  $N = 23$   $P < 0.0001$ ).  
403 Specifically, the duration of suckling sessions significantly decreased from T<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>2</sub>/T<sub>3</sub> (Bonferroni-  
404 Dunn post-hoc test: T<sub>1</sub> vs T<sub>2</sub>  $Q = 1.261$ ,  $P < 0.0001$ ; T<sub>1</sub> vs T<sub>3</sub>  $Q = 1.739$ ,  $P < 0.0001$ ; T<sub>2</sub> vs T<sub>3</sub>  $Q =$   
405  $0.478$ ,  $P = 0.314$ ; Figure 2).

406 The comparison between play fighting and real fighting rates at the dyadic level showed a  
407 significant difference across the three periods, with play fighting prevailing in T<sub>1</sub> and real fighting  
408 in T<sub>3</sub> (Wilcoxon exact test: T<sub>1</sub> - play fighting  $>$  real fighting,  $N = 39$ ,  $T = 12.5$ , ties = 21,  $P = 0.001$ ;  
409 T<sub>2</sub> - play fighting  $\approx$  real fighting,  $N = 39$ ,  $T = 30$ , ties = 26,  $P = 0.297$ ; T<sub>3</sub> - real fighting  $>$  play  
410 fighting,  $N = 39$ ,  $T = 0.0$ , ties = 23,  $P < 0.001$ ; Figure 3). Moreover, in all the periods considered,  
411 the rates of real fighting positively correlated with the rates of play fighting at the dyadic level

412 (Correlation via Randomization:  $T_1 N = 39, r = 0.770, P < 0.001$ ;  $T_2 N = 39, r = 0.522, P = 0.001$ ;  $T_3$   
413  $N = 39, r = 0.335, P = 0.046$ ). The analysis at the individual level carried out on the entire  
414 observation period, showed that the level of play fighting positively correlated with the level of real  
415 fighting but not with the level of affiliation (Pearson correlation test - Bonferroni correction  $\alpha =$   
416  $0.025$ : play fighting - real fighting  $N = 24, r = 0.695, P < 0.001$ ; play fighting -affiliation  $N = 24, r =$   
417  $- 0.124, P = 0.564$ ).

418 We also found a significant correlation between real-fighting and the play fighting sociomatrices for  
419 Linda' and Nina's litter (row-wise permutation test: Linda's litter:  $N = 10, K_r = 61, \text{Tau}_{rw} = 0.219, P$   
420  $= 0.014$ ; Nina's litter:  $N = 8, K_r = 42, \text{Tau}_{rw} = 0.393, P = 0.003$ ) and a trend was observed for  
421 Black-Beauty's litter (row-wise permutation test  $K_r = 12, \text{Tau}_{rw} = 0.261, N = 6, P = 0.098$ ). Hence,  
422 in the majority of cases, the dyadic outcome of agonistic encounters (winner/loser) was correlated  
423 with the dyadic outcome of play fighting.

424 Finally, the Social Network Analysis (Figure 4) revealed that play fighting and aggression social  
425 networks positively correlated with respect to centrality and bridging measures (Bonferroni  
426 correction  $\alpha = 0.05/4 = 0.0125$ ; Spearman correlation test: Domain prestige  $N = 24, r_s = 1.0, P =$   
427  $0.01$ ; Pearson correlation test: Normalized in-degree prestige  $N = 24, r = 0.693, P < 0.001$ ;  
428 Eigenvector centrality  $N = 24, r = 0.611, p = 0.001$ ; Bridging centrality  $N = 24, r = 0.521, P =$   
429  $0.008$ ). Summing up, the piglets that occupied a central or bridging position in the play fighting  
430 social network had a similar position in the real fighting social network.

431

## 432 **DISCUSSION**

433 In the current study we demonstrated that, during the pre-weaning period, piglets: i) engaged  
434 preferentially in play fighting when locomotor-acrobatic play invitation were involved (*Prediction 1*  
435 confirmed), ii) performed playful interactions for longer with same-weight partners (*Prediction 2*  
436 confirmed), iii) rapidly replaced play- with real-fighting sessions (*Prediction 3a* confirmed), iv)  
437 consistently won or lost play- and real fights (*Prediction 3b* confirmed), and v) occupied the same

438 central or bridging positions in the play- and real-fighting social networks (*Prediction 3c*  
439 confirmed). These results are discussed in detail below.

440 The first step to engage in a playful interaction is represented by a positive response to a play  
441 invitation (PINV) by the partner. In line with our expectation (*Prediction 1*), piglets reached the  
442 goal of successfully starting a play fight by employing locomotor-acrobatic rather than body-contact  
443 patterns to invite the potential playmate (Figure 1). Moreover, unsuccessful PINVs were  
444 significantly more frequent if play fighting attempts were introduced by body-contact actions  
445 (Figure 1). The preferential use of locomotor/acrobatic patterns can be a strategic way to protect  
446 both potential players, which is expected if play fighting is a substitute for real fighting. Piglets may  
447 use exaggerated non-contact motor patterns (i.e. play run, pivot/scamper and head tossing) – typical  
448 of play (Horbach, 2014; Newberry et al., 1988; Rauw, 2013) – to avoid the risk that the subsequent  
449 play behaviour is misinterpreted by the partner (Bekoff, 1995, 2001; Palagi et al., 2016a,b).  
450 Moreover, such patterns can ensure a "security distance" between interacting individuals and  
451 facilitate the escape opportunity in case the receiver responds aggressively. Similarly, in canids, the  
452 play bow can be employed not only as a play signal but also as a strategic posture that the bower  
453 may use to flee more easily from the partner (Pellis & Pellis, 1996).

454 After the beginning of play fighting, it is important to maintain the session for as long as possible  
455 trying to maximise its benefits but at the same time limit the risk of being harmed (Pellis & Pellis,  
456 1996, 2009, 2017). In piglets, play fighting sessions were longer when they occurred between  
457 players with similar body weight (*Prediction 2*), which highlights the competitive nature of the  
458 interaction. As a matter of fact, in pigs heavier individuals (both adult males and sows) win the  
459 majority of conflicts and acquire higher social ranks (Andersen et al., 2004; D'Eath 2002; Norring et  
460 al., 2019; Turner & Edwards, 2004). Weller and colleagues (2020) found that the piglets that  
461 experienced high levels of play fighting then based their aggressive escalation decision mainly upon  
462 their own fighting abilities (Resource Holding Potential; Parker, 1974) with the heavier and larger  
463 subjects winning the contest. Hence, by play fighting preferentially with similar sized mates, piglets

464 can reduce the probability of losing the contest, thus prolonging the session. In this way, piglets  
465 may be able to set the strategy to manage the interaction with the same partners also during  
466 aggressive confrontations.

467 Regarding play ontogeny, our results highlight that in the piglets under study play fighting was  
468 rapidly replaced with real fighting during the early phases of development (*Prediction 3a*).  
469 Intriguingly, the decrease of play before weaning came after the decrease of the duration of suckling  
470 sessions. A hypothesis that may deserve further investigation is that the decrease of social play in  
471 piglets might be related to a decrease in oxytocin, a neuropeptide that is consumed via maternal  
472 milk in immature mammals (Mishra, Ali, & Das, 2014; Prakash, Paul, Kliem, Kulozik, & Meyer,  
473 2009) and is generally involved in proximate mechanisms of social affiliation (de Dreu, 2012; Insel,  
474 2010; Shamay-Tsoory et al., 2013), and social play (Vanderschuren et al., 2016). Consistently,  
475 Martin and Bateson (1985) found that in the domestic cat (*Felis catus*) certain aspects of play  
476 (although not necessarily social play) were influenced in kittens by reduced lactation. Romero and  
477 colleagues (2015) showed that dogs sprayed with oxytocin played more and for longer periods  
478 compared to the control condition. Despite some debates and mixed findings on the effect of  
479 oxytocin on the behaviour of domestic pigs (Camerlink, Reimert, & Bolhuis, 2016; Rault et al.,  
480 2013; Rault, Dunshea, & Pluske 2015), with respect to play fighting we cannot exclude that  
481 agonistic interactions might be maintained in their "playful form" under the effect of oxytocin,  
482 which in pigs is highest at early stages of lactation (López-Arjona et al., 2020; Rojkittikhun et al.,  
483 1993). This aspect may represent an interesting research line to explore in the future.

484 Moreover, the fact that real fighting increased as play fighting decreased and that play fighting was  
485 correlated with the aggression levels but not with the rates of other affiliative patterns further  
486 suggest that play fighting in pigs has a competitive more than a cooperative function. We have also  
487 to highlight that the males of our study group were castrated. Although these males can still fight  
488 for dominance (Foister et al., 2018), we cannot exclude that castration may have had a negative

489 impact on the development of aggression, leading to an underestimate of the competitive aspects of  
490 play. In intact pigs, the aggressive nature of play fighting could be even more pronounced.

491 The sociomatrix correlation revealed that the outcomes of play fighting interactions (winner/loser)  
492 matched with the outcomes of aggressive encounters (winner/loser) (*Prediction 3b*). Moreover, by  
493 examining the social impact of piglets on their groups via the Social Network Analysis (SNA), we  
494 highlighted a positive correlation between the centrality parameters of play and aggression (i.e.  
495 Normalized in-degree prestige, Domain prestige, Eigenvector centrality, Bridging centrality;  
496 *Prediction 3c*). This result indicates that the position of central or influence occupied by piglets in  
497 the play fighting network is maintained in the real fighting network. Overall the above findings  
498 highlight that a sort of *continuum* from play to aggression may exist and further supports the  
499 hypothesis that play fighting is a substitute for real fighting. The direct connection between play  
500 fighting and aggression is also supported by the recent study of Weller and colleagues (2020).  
501 These authors showed that the piglet dyads experiencing high levels of play fighting during the pre-  
502 weaning period were better able to gather and act upon information regarding their partners' skills  
503 than dyads experiencing low levels of play fighting. In this respect, subjects can reciprocally assess  
504 their own abilities in a less costly and safer manner and improve their abilities in making tactical  
505 decision in aggressive contests (Parker, 1974; Weller et al., 2020). The findings of the present study  
506 confirm our initial hypothesis that play fighting can be a substitute for real fighting. As a matter of  
507 fact, piglets engaged in play fighting when their chance to win was highest (similar weight players)  
508 and the danger of being harmed lowest (low risk invitation patterns). Importantly, the outcomes of  
509 play fighting predict the outcomes of real fighting, with the social network of the two forms of  
510 competition (serious and non-serious) largely matching. However, these same findings point  
511 towards the more extreme hypothesis that play fighting and real fighting might be mechanistically  
512 the same. In this respect, play fighting might be a different qualitative form of real fighting with  
513 elements typically regarded as play markers. Even though at this stage of knowledge, the most  
514 parsimonious interpretation is considering play fighting as actual play replacing aggression, our

515 results could also suggest that play fighting might be a form of real fighting performed in a less  
516 dangerous way.

517 In conclusion, what remains unresolved by our research is whether the skills acquired from play  
518 fighting involve improved combat ability and/or some form of improved socio-cognitive skills. For  
519 example, the greater capacity to win aggression and obtain a dominant position may arise from  
520 greater capacity in assessing one's own ability relative to that of the opponent (Parker, 1974; Weller  
521 et al., 2020). In other words, the improved ability to assess and maintain dominance relationships  
522 may arise from improved socio-cognitive skills rather than improved combat skills. Although the  
523 mechanisms underlying the competitive nature of play fighting remain to be determined, our study  
524 provides convincing evidence that play fighting in piglets may predict the ability to attain  
525 dominance and can be used as a substitute for real fighting.

526

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540



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764 **Table 1** - Pig playful, aggressive and affiliative behavioural patterns recorded in the current study  
765 (integrated or modified from Newberry et al., 1988; D'Eath, 2002; Jensen, 2002; Bolhuis et al., 2005; Rauw, 2013;  
766 Špinková, 2017; Weller et al., 2019)  
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<b>PLAYFUL, AGGRESSIVE/SUBMISSIVE AND AFFINITIVE PATTERNS</b>	
<b>Behavioural pattern</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Attempt play bite</b> o_c	A piglet attempts to bite the partner, but there is no contact with it
<b>Flopping</b> n_la	A piglet drops to the pen floor from a normal upright position to a sitting or lying position. There is no contact with an object or another individual which could cause the change of position
<b>Head play knocking</b> o_c	A piglet hits another individual with the head
<b>Head-tossing</b> n_la	A piglet gently head shakes from one side to another
<b>Hopping</b> n_la	A piglet has either its two front feet or all four feet off the pen floor at one time through an energetic upwards jumping movement. The piglet continues facing the same original direction for the whole of the behaviour
<b>Leg spreading</b> n_la	A piglet spreads its fore and hind limbs and it moves quickly from side to side
<b>Nudge</b> n_c	A piglet uses its snout to gently touch another piglet's body (excluding naso-naso contact). It is more intensive than touching, but also more gentle than pushing
<b>Object play</b> n_la	A piglet manipulates an item or securely holds it in its mouth, energetically shaking it or carrying it around the pen
<b>Pivot</b> n_la	A piglet twirls its body on the horizontal plane by a minimum of 90°. Pivot is usually associated with jumping on the spot
<b>Play bite</b> o_c	A piglets bites a partner by delicately closing mouth over the other's flesh
<b>Play fight</b> o_c	Two piglets mutually push in a head to head orientation. It can include attempt play bite, play bite, play push etc.
<b>Play kneeling</b> d_la	A piglet goes down on its knees while playing
<b>Play lifting</b> o_c	A piglet attempts to displace a partner by lifting or levering it with snout or head
<b>Play lying down</b> d_la	A piglet places itself in a horizontal position during play
<b>Play mount/climb</b> o_c	A piglet places both front hoofs on the back of another piglet or sow
<b>Play push</b> o_c	A piglet drives its head, neck or shoulders with minimal or moderate force into another piglet's body. Occasionally, this pattern results in the displacement of the target animal. It is significantly more intensive than nudging
<b>Play run</b> o_la	A piglet runs and hops in forward motions within the pen environment. Run can be performed both in solitary and social manner
<b>Play sitting</b> d_la	A piglet sits during play
<b>Scamper</b> n_la	A piglet performs two or more forward directed hops in quick succession of

each other usually associated with excitability

<b>Relaxed Open Mouth</b>	A piglet keeps its mouth open in a relaxed manner. The mouth can be opened just a little revealing only the upper parts of the most forward teeth of the lower jaw or in a wider way completely revealing the lower and upper jaws (Smuts, 2014)
<b>Aggressive bite</b>	A piglet opens its mouth and closes its teeth tight on a small piece of the opponent's flesh (except tail)
<b>Aggressive fight</b>	Two piglets mutually push one another in a head to head orientation. The pattern can include biking, kicking, chasing, pushing, head knocking, ect.
<b>Aggressive head knocking</b>	A piglet lunges or jerks its head with physical contact and mouth closed
<b>Aggressive kick</b>	A piglet kicks with one or both hind limbs the opponent, striking it
<b>Aggressive lifting</b>	A piglet attempts to displace the opponent by lifting or levering it with snout or head
<b>Aggressive mount/climb</b>	A piglet forces the opponent to move away by rising upon the rear of the partner
<b>Aggressive push</b>	A piglet presses its head, neck, shoulder or body against the opponent in an aggressive context
<b>Attempt aggressive bite</b>	A piglet opens its mouth, directs or turns its head toward the body of the opponent and closes its mouth without contact
<b>Avoidance</b>	A piglet moves away with a depressed tail when the opponent approaches
<b>Chase</b>	A piglet pursues the opponent (for more than a three body-lengths distance)
<b>Displacement</b>	A piglet causes the opponent to move and takes its place at a resource spot
<b>Head tilting</b>	A piglet moves the head to the side when the opponent passes or gets closer
<b>Tail biting</b>	A piglet bites the tail of the opponent
<b>Threat</b>	A piglet arches the back to the opponent or makes a forward movement of the head and stares at the opponent with no physical contact
<b>Body contact</b>	Two piglets touch one another with their bodies (but not resting)
<b>Mutual grooming</b>	Two piglets use their teeth to carry out reciprocal hair cleaning
<b>Rest in contact</b>	Two piglets sit or lie in contact
<b>Social grooming</b>	A piglet uses its teeth to carry out hair cleaning on the partner
<b>Social mounting/climb</b>	A piglet places both front hoofs on the back of the partner
<b>Social nosing</b>	Two piglets touch one another with their noses
<b>Social rubbing</b>	A piglet rubs over the body of another
<b>Touch</b>	A piglet touches another with a foot or other body parts

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771 **Table 2** - The results of the best competing models obtaining for the LMM analyses

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**DEPENDENT VARIABLE: mean duration of play sessions**

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**Model<sub>1</sub>** = SW\_DW (AICc = 114.986);  $w_i = 0.323$

<b>Fixed variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>95%CI</b>
SW	0.238	0.108	2.209	<b>0.03</b>	0.023/0.453
DW			0 <sup>a</sup>		
Intercept	1.932	0.108	17.910	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	1.717/2.147
<b>Random factors</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>95%CI</b>
Player <sub>1</sub>	0.128	0.054	2.342	0.019	0.055/0.295
Player <sub>2</sub>	0.036	0.028	1.283	0.200	0.008/0.167

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**Model<sub>2</sub>** = null model (AICc = 116.111);  $w_i = 0.184$ ; evidence ratio = 1.755

<b>Fixed variable</b>					
Intercept	2.020	20.123	0.100	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>	1.819/2.220
<b>Random factors</b>					
Player <sub>1</sub>	0.129	0.057	2.258	0.024	0.054/0.306
Player <sub>2</sub>	0.037	0.030	1.218	0.223	0.007/0.183

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**Model<sub>3</sub>** = PAI, SW\_DW (AICc = 116.252);  $w_i = 0.171$ ; evidence ratio = 1.889

<b>Fixed variables</b>					
PAI	-0.188	0.167	-1.127	0.264	-0.522/0.145
SW	0.253	0.108	2.353	<b>0.021</b>	0.039/0.468
DW			0 <sup>a</sup>		
Intercept	1.935	0.111	17.402	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>	1.713/2.157
<b>Random factors</b>					
Player <sub>1</sub>	0.143	0.060	2.385	0.017	0.063/0.326
Player <sub>2</sub>	0.039	0.029	1.379	0.168	0.010/0.163

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792 **Table A1** - Composition of the three study litters of domestic pig hosted at the ethical farm *Parva*  
 793 *Domus* (Turin, Italy)

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<b>PIGLET</b>	<b>SEX</b>	<b>DATE OF BIRTH</b>	<b>MOTHER</b>
<b>MGL</b>	M	16/09/2018	
<b>LBL</b>	M	16/09/2018	
<b>LVL</b>	M	16/09/2018	
<b>PBL</b>	M	16/09/2018	
<b>PVL</b>	M	16/09/2018	LINDA
<b>MAL</b>	F	16/09/2018	
<b>FCL</b>	F	16/09/2018	
<b>XVL</b>	F	16/09/2018	
<b>COL</b>	F	16/09/2018	
<b>OCL</b>	F	16/09/2018	
<b>CAN</b>	M	05/11/2018	
<b>PRN</b>	M	05/11/2018	
<b>MMN</b>	M	05/11/2018	
<b>LVN</b>	M	05/11/2018	NINA
<b>FMN</b>	F	05/11/2018	
<b>LBN</b>	F	05/11/2018	
<b>PBN</b>	F	05/11/2018	
<b>PVN</b>	F	05/11/2018	
<b>LRBB</b>	M	03/10/2018	
<b>CVBB</b>	M	03/10/2018	
<b>CRBB</b>	M	03/10/2018	BLACK
<b>CBBB</b>	M	03/10/2018	BEAUTY
<b>ARBB</b>	F	03/10/2018	
<b>XBB</b>	F	03/10/2018	

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799 **Table A2** - The values of AICc,  $w_i$  and evident ratio of each model tested in the LMM analysis  
 800 (duration of the play session = dependent variable, normally distributed)

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<b>Models</b>	<b>AICc</b>	<b><math>w_i</math></b>	<b>evidence ratio</b>
SW_DW	114.986	0.323	*
intercept (null model)	116.111	0.184	1.756
PAI, SW_DW	116.252	0.171	1.884
sex_comb, SW_DW	117.570	0.0889	3.641
PAI	117.820	0.078	4.126
group	118.213	0.064	5.022
sex_comb	119.231	0.039	8.355
bonding	119.553	0.033	9.814
group, bonding	121.749	0.011	29.425
sex_comb, SW_DW, group, bonding	123.416	0.005	67.717
PAI, sex_comb, SW_DW, group, bonding (full model)	124.408	0.003	112.200

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804 **Figure captions**

805 **Figure 1 - *Play opening***

806 Box plot showing the rate of successful (PINV) and unsuccessful (PINV-) Play Invitation in  
807 relation to the type of pattern used by a piglet for inviting a littermate to play. C = body contact  
808 patterns; L/A = locomotor/acrobatic patterns (no body contact). Solid horizontal lines indicate  
809 medians, length of the boxes corresponds to inter-quartile range and thin horizontal lines indicate  
810 range of observed values.

811 **Figure 2 - *Duration of suckling sessions***

812 Box plot showing the individual mean duration (in seconds) of suckling sessions in each of the  
813 three periods considered (T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, T<sub>3</sub>) determined on the basis of the days of piglet life. T<sub>1</sub> = 6-20  
814 days, T<sub>2</sub> = 21-35 days, T<sub>3</sub> = 36-50 days.

815 **Figure 3 - *Play ontogeny***

816 Box plot showing the hourly frequencies of play/aggressive interactions in relation to the three  
817 periods (T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, T<sub>3</sub>) determined on the basis of the days of piglet life. AGG = aggressive  
818 interactions; PL = play interactions; T<sub>1</sub> = 6-20 days, T<sub>2</sub> = 21-35 days, T<sub>3</sub> = 36-50 days.

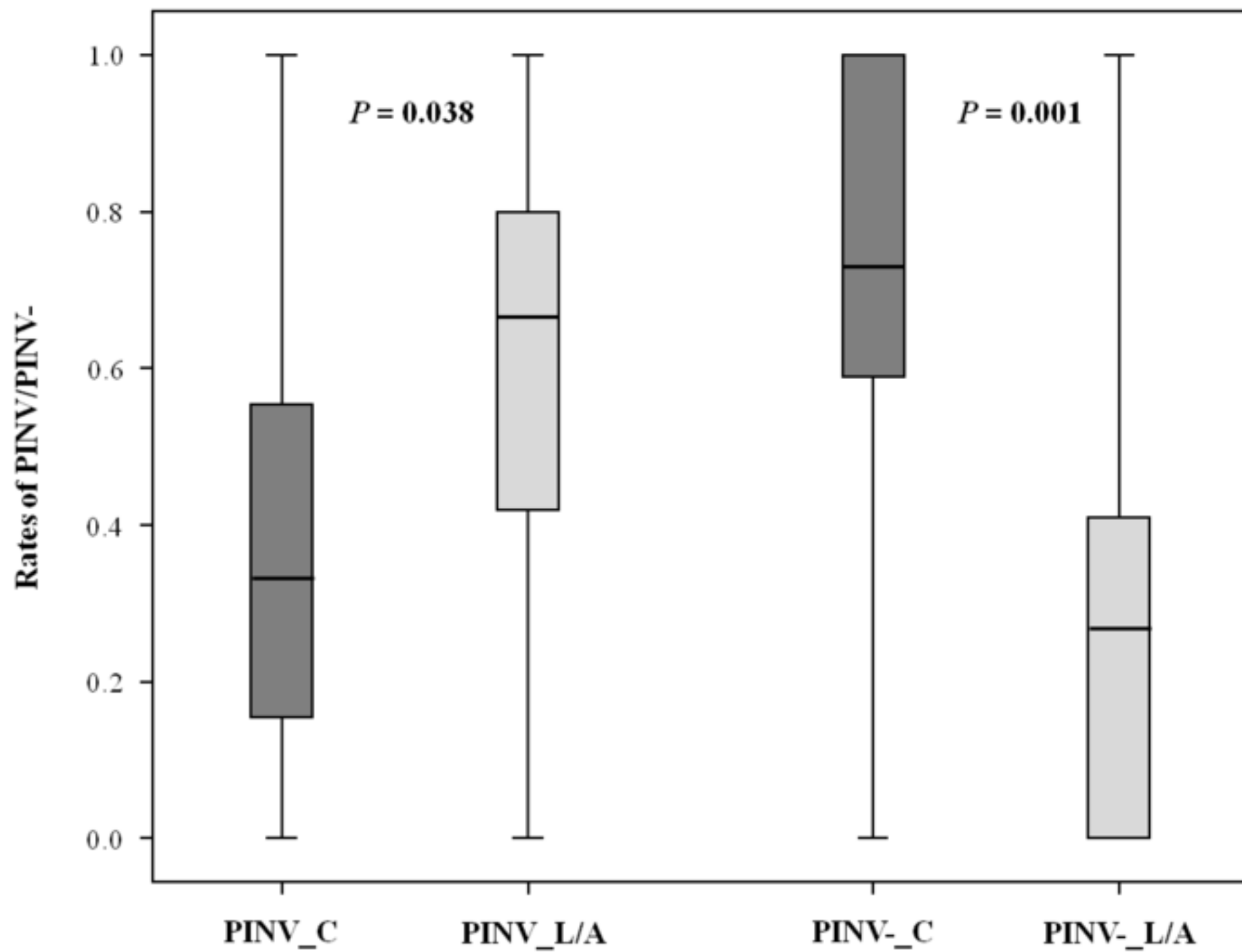
819 **Figure 4 - *Play and Aggression Sociograms***

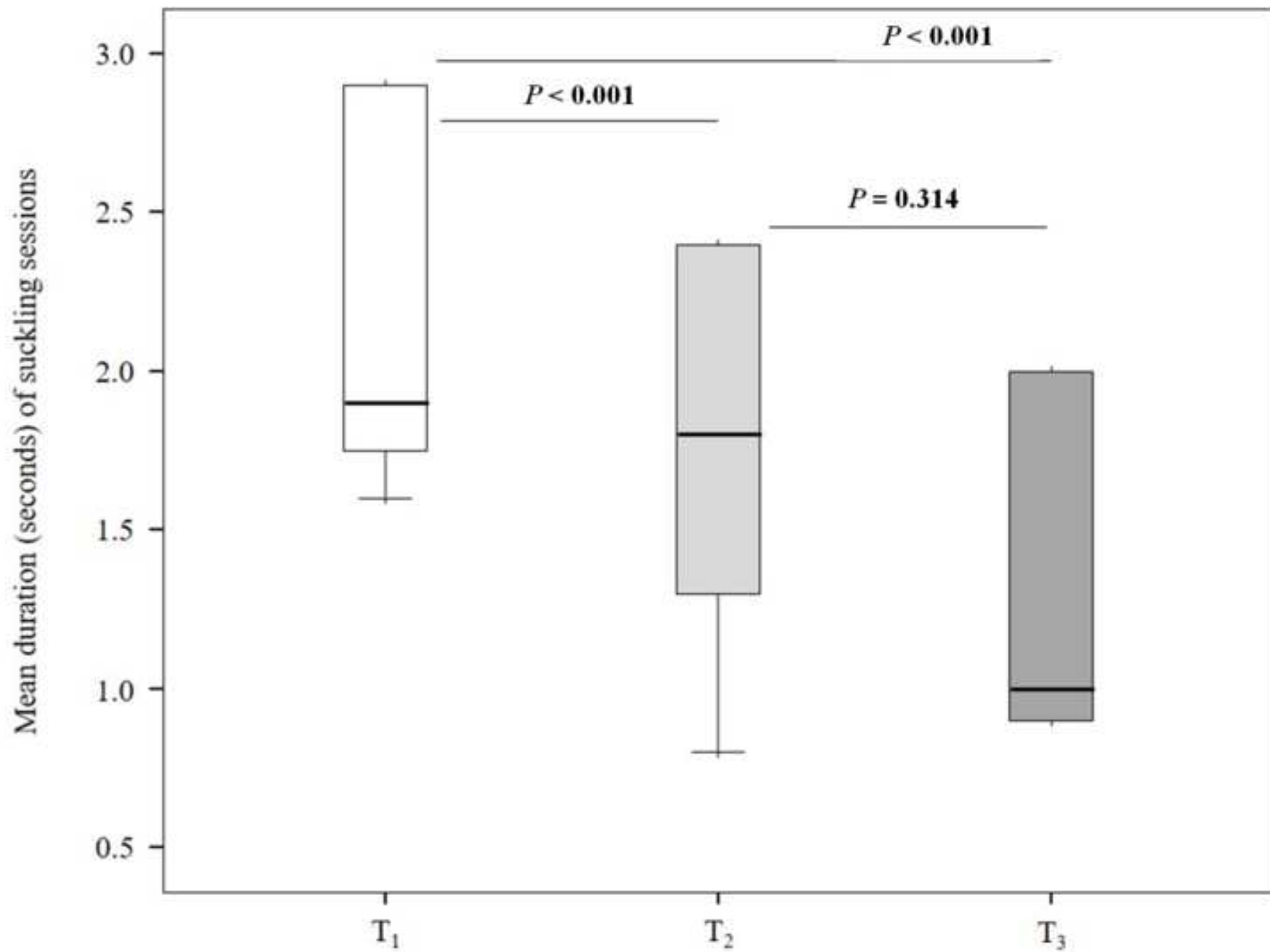
820 The play and aggression sociograms of each study litter (Linda, Nina and Black Beauty's litters).  
821 Nodes (i.e. piglets) are represented as circles and edges (i.e. play/aggressive interactions) as arrows.  
822 Each circle size corresponds to the degree centrality (i.e. quantity of play/aggressive interactions).  
823 The two different colours of the nodes (i.e. gray and white) represent the subgroups within each  
824 litter determined by the *Modularity* parameter. No subgroups were obtained for the sociogram of  
825 aggression in the Black Beauty's litter.

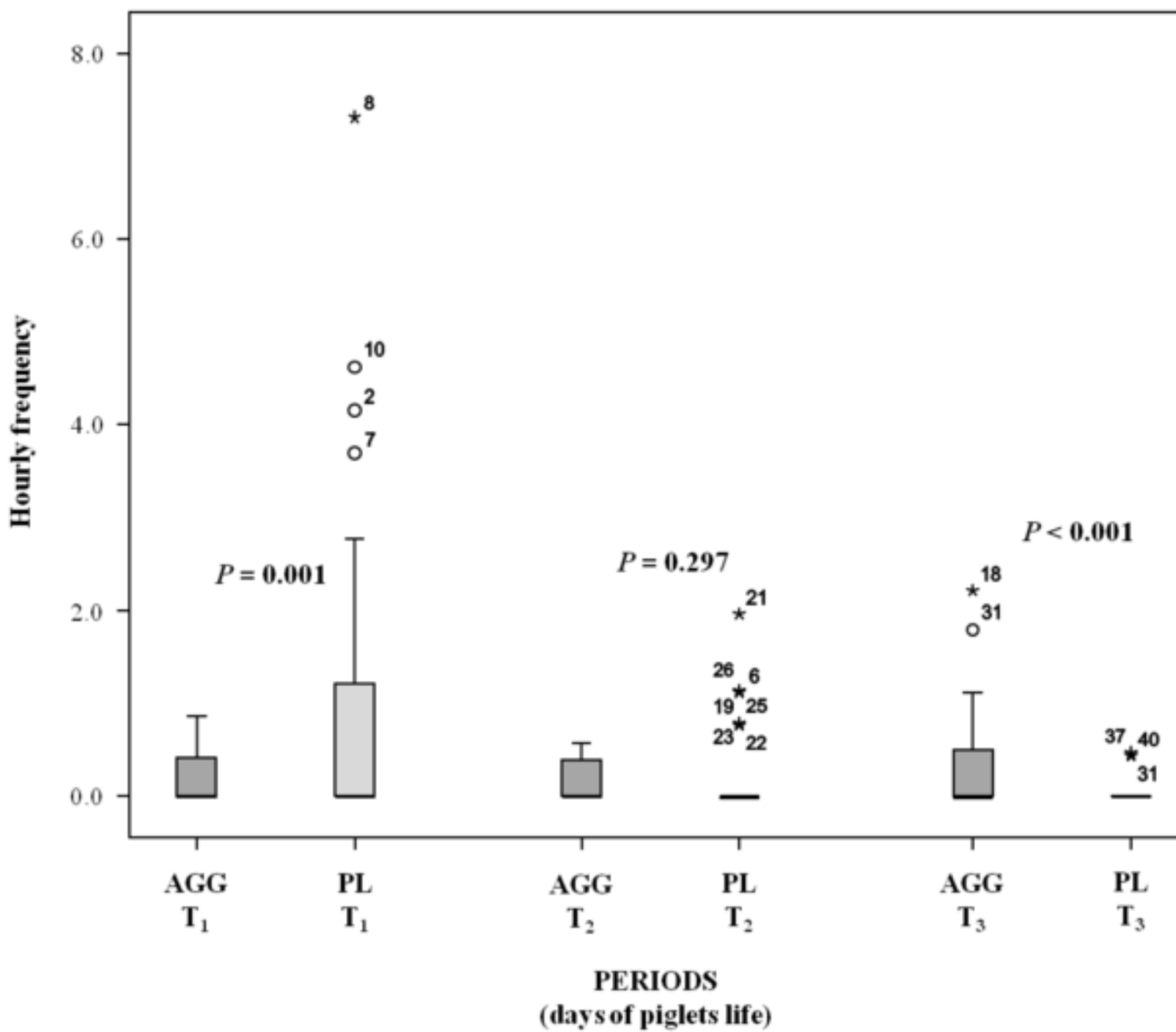
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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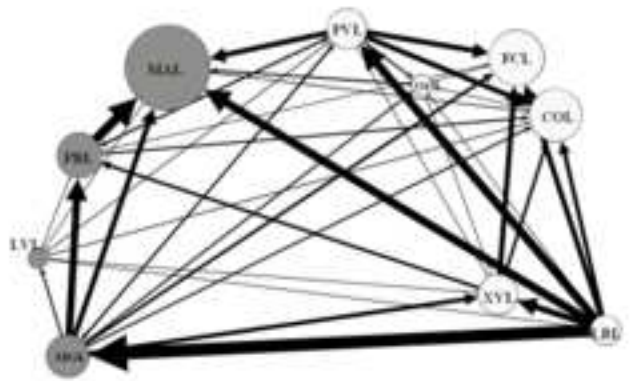




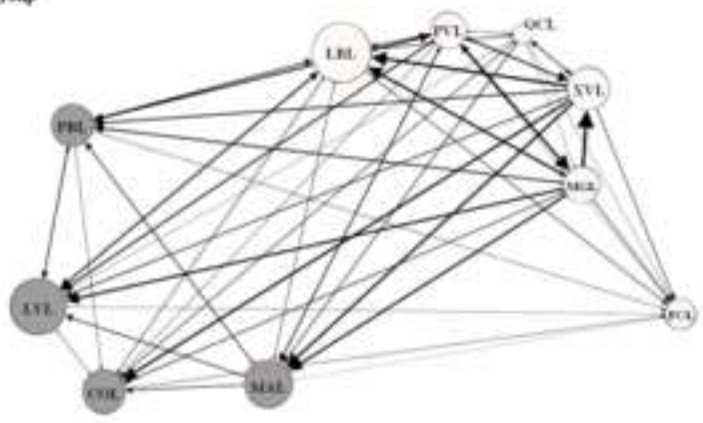




LINDA's group

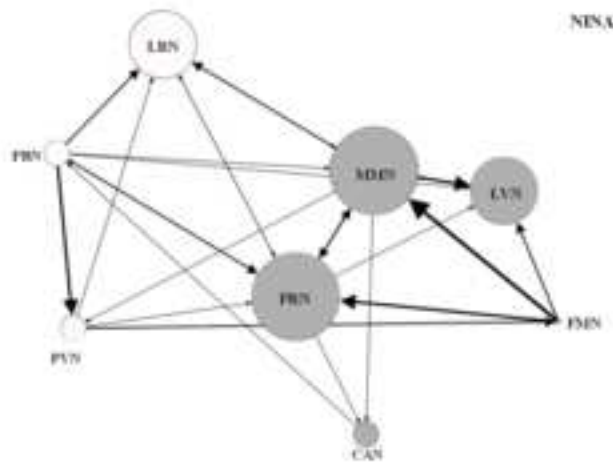


AGGRESSION

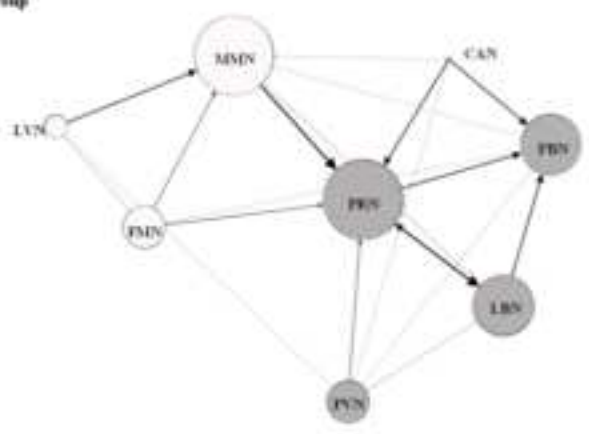


PLAY

NINA's group

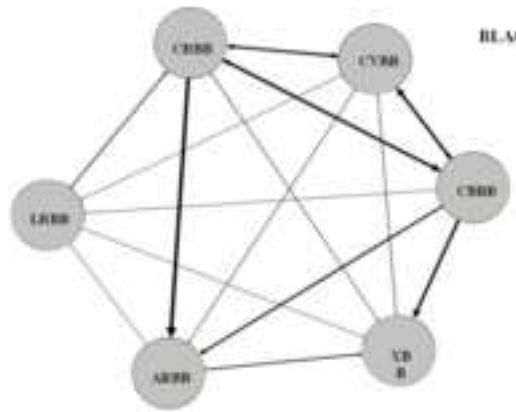


AGGRESSION

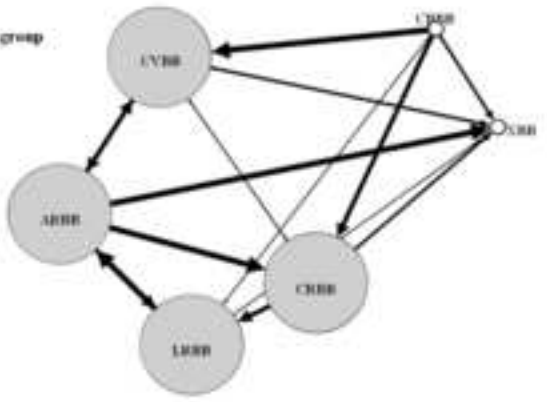


PLAY

BLACK BEAUTY's group



AGGRESSION



PLAY

**Table 1** - Pig playful, aggressive and affiliative behavioural patterns recorded in the current study (integrated or modified from Newberry et al., 1988; D'Eath, 2002; Jensen, 2002; Bolhuis et al., 2005; Rauw, 2013; Špinková, 2017; Weller et al., 2019)

<b>PLAYFUL, AGGRESSIVE/SUBMISSIVE AND AFFINITIVE PATTERNS</b>	
<b>Behavioural pattern</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Attempt play bite</b> o_c	A piglet attempts to bite the partner, but there is no contact with it
<b>Flopping</b> n_la	A piglet drops to the pen floor from a normal upright position to a sitting or lying position. There is no contact with an object or another individual which could cause the change of position
<b>Head play knocking</b> o_c	A piglet hits another individual with the head
<b>Head-tossing</b> n_la	A piglet gently head shakes from one side to another
<b>Hopping</b> n_la	A piglet has either its two front feet or all four feet off the pen floor at one time through an energetic upwards jumping movement. The piglet continues facing the same original direction for the whole of the behaviour
<b>Leg spreading</b> n_la	A piglet spreads its fore and hind limbs and it moves quickly from side to side
<b>Nudge</b> n_c	A piglet uses its snout to gently touch another piglet's body (excluding naso-naso contact). It is more intensive than touching, but also more gentle than pushing
<b>Object play</b> n_la	A piglet manipulates an item or securely holds it in its mouth, energetically shaking it or carrying it around the pen
<b>Pivot</b> n_la	A piglet twirls its body on the horizontal plane by a minimum of 90°. Pivot is usually associated with jumping on the spot
<b>Play bite</b> o_c	A piglets bites a partner by delicately closing mouth over the other's flesh
<b>Play fight</b> o_c	Two piglets mutually push in a head to head orientation. It can include attempt play bite, play bite, play push etc.
<b>Play kneeling</b> d_la	A piglet goes down on its knees while playing
<b>Play lifting</b> o_c	A piglet attempts to displace a partner by lifting or levering it with snout or head
<b>Play lying down</b> d_la	A piglet places itself in a horizontal position during play
<b>Play mount/climb</b> o_c	A piglet places both front hoofs on the back of another piglet or sow
<b>Play push</b> o_c	A piglet drives its head, neck or shoulders with minimal or moderate force into another piglet's body. Occasionally, this pattern results in the displacement of the target animal. It is significantly more intensive than nudging
<b>Play run</b> o_la	A piglet runs and hops in forward motions within the pen environment. Run can be performed both in solitary and social manner
<b>Play sitting</b> d_la	A piglet sits during play
<b>Scamper</b> n_la	A piglet performs two or more forward directed hops in quick succession of each other usually associated with excitability

<b>Relaxed Open Mouth</b>	A piglet keeps its mouth open in a relaxed manner. The mouth can be opened just a little revealing only the upper parts of the most forward teeth of the lower jaw or in a wider way completely revealing the lower and upper jaws (Smuts, 2014)
<b>Aggressive bite</b>	A piglet opens its mouth and closes its teeth tight on a small piece of the opponent's flesh (except tail)
<b>Aggressive fight</b>	Two piglets mutually push one another in a head to head orientation. The pattern can include biking, kicking, chasing, pushing, head knocking, ect.
<b>Aggressive head knocking</b>	A piglet lunges or jerks its head with physical contact and mouth closed
<b>Aggressive kick</b>	A piglet kicks with one or both hind limbs the opponent, striking it
<b>Aggressive lifting</b>	A piglet attempts to displace the opponent by lifting or levering it with snout or head
<b>Aggressive mount/climb</b>	A piglet forces the opponent to move away by rising upon the rear of the partner
<b>Aggressive push</b>	A piglet presses its head, neck, shoulder or body against the opponent in an aggressive context
<b>Attempt aggressive bite</b>	A piglet opens its mouth, directs or turns its head toward the body of the opponent and closes its mouth without contact
<b>Avoidance</b>	A piglet moves away with a depressed tail when the opponent approaches
<b>Chase</b>	A piglet pursues the opponent (for more than a three body-lengths distance)
<b>Displacement</b>	A piglet causes the opponent to move and takes its place at a resource spot
<b>Head tilting</b>	A piglet moves the head to the side when the opponent passes or gets closer
<b>Tail biting</b>	A piglet bites the tail of the opponent
<b>Threat</b>	A piglet arches the back to the opponent or makes a forward movement of the head and stares at the opponent with no physical contact
<b>Body contact</b>	Two piglets touch one another with their bodies (but not resting)
<b>Mutual grooming</b>	Two piglets use their teeth to carry out reciprocal hair cleaning
<b>Rest in contact</b>	Two piglets sit or lie in contact
<b>Social grooming</b>	A piglet uses its teeth to carry out hair cleaning on the partner
<b>Social mounting/climb</b>	A piglet places both front hoofs on the back of the partner
<b>Social nosing</b>	Two piglets touch one another with their noses
<b>Social rubbing</b>	A piglet rubs over the body of another
<b>Touch</b>	A piglet touches another with a foot or other body parts

**Legend:** O = Offensive play pattern; D = Defensive play pattern; N = Neutral play pattern; LA = Locomotor-Acrobatic play pattern; C = Contact play pattern

**Table 2** - The results of the best competing models obtained from the LMM analyses

<b>DEPENDENT VARIABLE: mean duration of play sessions</b>					
<b>Model<sub>1</sub></b> = SW_DW (AICc = 114.986); w <sub>i</sub> = 0.323					
<b>Fixed variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>95%CI</b>
SW	0.238	0.108	2.209	<b>0.03</b>	0.023/0.453
DW			0 <sup>a</sup>		
Intercept	1.932	0.108	17.910	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	1.717/2.147
<b>Random factors</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>95%CI</b>
Player <sub>1</sub>	0.128	0.054	2.342	0.019	0.055/0.295
Player <sub>2</sub>	0.036	0.028	1.283	0.200	0.008/0.167
<b>Model<sub>2</sub></b> = null model (AICc = 116.111); w <sub>i</sub> = 0.184; evidence ratio = 1.755					
<b>Fixed variable</b>					
Intercept	2.020	20.123	0.100	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>	1.819/2.220
<b>Random factors</b>					
Player <sub>1</sub>	0.129	0.057	2.258	0.024	0.054/0.306
Player <sub>2</sub>	0.037	0.030	1.218	0.223	0.007/0.183
<b>Model<sub>3</sub></b> = PAI, SW_DW (AICc = 116.252); w <sub>i</sub> = 0.171; evidence ratio = 1.889					
<b>Fixed variables</b>					
PAI	-0.188	0.167	-1.127	0.264	-0.522/0.145
SW	0.253	0.108	2.353	<b>0.021</b>	0.039/0.468
DW			0 <sup>a</sup>		
Intercept	1.935	0.111	17.402	<b>&lt; 0.001</b>	1.713/2.157
<b>Random factors</b>					
Player <sub>1</sub>	0.143	0.060	2.385	0.017	0.063/0.326
Player <sub>2</sub>	0.039	0.029	1.379	0.168	0.010/0.163