These people feed me, shelter me, and care for me. They must be gods.

These people feed me, shelter me, and care for me. I must be a god.

Pets as Significant Others

By David L. Miller
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Western Illinois University
Macomb, IL 61455

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Abstract.

This paper uses the symbolic interactionist perspective, and the ethnographic approach of participant observation to examine the behavior of people and cats and dogs. The co-present behaviors between people and these animals can be conceptualized as rudimentary social interaction. It is through this social interaction that our pets become significant others, and part of our social selves.

Others have already made the claim that people and animals can interact in a truly social fashion. Collins, (1989), Sanders (1993), and Alger and Alger (1999) identify social exchange, role taking, definition of the situation, interaction ritual and culture as within the capabilities of animals. This paper begins by further elaborating this paradigm by examining the necessary conditions under which people and animals come to behave interdependently.

OPENINGS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

In their analysis of interpersonal behavior, researchers at the Center for Research in Interpersonal Behavior at the University of Iowa did extensive study of how people initiate interdependent, social behavior (Miller, Hintz and Couch, 1975). They referred to this process as “openings” in which people were observed moving from a condition of behaving independently to a condition wherein they are behaving interdependently. Openings consist of five behavioral components:

- Reciprocal sensory access
- Reciprocally acknowledged attention
- Mutual responsiveness
- Congruent identities
- Shared social objective - projected future

While these five ingredients have been shown to be fundamental to human interaction, it is the contention of this discussion that these ingredients also apply to the interaction between humans and many household pets, particularly cats.

RECIPROCAL SENSORY ACCESS A necessary condition for social interaction is reciprocal sensory access. People cannot read one another’s minds, or at least our capacity to do so is very limited. Hence, in order for people to interact they must establish mutual sensory access – they must be able to see and hear one another.

In most instances of social interaction reciprocal sensory access is usually created by physical proximity. In some homes people can make themselves heard to others from anywhere in the house. Our household cats seem to be able to hear almost any sound I make, from anywhere in the house. Our aging dog Rosy is growing deaf. In order to get her attention I have to speak much louder, or get within very close proximity to her.

While we establish conditions of proximity and reciprocal sensory access with our household pets, the cats in our household also appear to seek out and establish reciprocal sensory access with us. We live in a fairly large house with many spaces that would provide solitude and hiding for the animals. However, the cats are nearly always underfoot or at least nearby, in the same room as us. Many evenings, all cats, humans, and the dog are to be found in the living room. Vivian, an overweight silver tabby, has an evening perch on the back of the recliner rocker used by my wife Kitty. Often, Baby, our youngest cat, and a long hair, brown, tabby, male, sleeps on the couch or snuggled next to Kitty’s ankles. Dory, a small, brown, tabby sleeps on an antique chair, and Rosy sleeps by the couch. By this time of the evening, all have been fed, and there
seems to be no other reason for their congregation in our living room other than maintaining reciprocal sensory access.

RECIPIROCALLY ACKNOWLEDGED ATTENTION In order for social interaction to take place, people must give attention to those near them. Usually, attention is reciprocal and mutually acknowledged. In every day conduct attention is given and acknowledged by gross body orientation, posture and eye contact, and verbal cues such as the statement "Go ahead, dear, I'm listening." People can preclude, disrupt or terminate social interaction by withholding attention from one another. Attention is routinely withheld in a socially acceptable fashion by the use of side involvements such as watching television, using earphones, reading, doodling, or playing with interaction props such as jewelry, keys or pencils.

I get the attention of our animals through the use of spoken calls and whistles. Sometimes I open the drawer where the pet treats are kept, open doors to the deck, or click the snaps of the dog leash. After these signals are given, the animals come running, sauntering, or walking into my close proximity.

Often, when I call one animal, the others respond as well. This lack of differential response to my calls could be interpreted as a typical conditioned, non-social, response. That is, the animals are responding to a sound in anticipation of a reward, such as food, or a walk. They are incapable of deciphering that I am calling only one of the animals. A closer examination of the responses by our household pets indicates a more complex and social pattern.

Calling one animal and having the others respond as well, clearly has its parallel in human social behavior. When my wife calls to me from across the house, the children often "listen up", or even move closer to the conversation, and may even join in. Speaking only when you are spoken to is a rule that is seldom rigidly adhered to by the humans in a household.

I do not call the cats individually to "treat time". I use the opening of the drawer where the treats are kept as the signal that treats are to be served. I sometimes use the drawer, without a subsequent treat, to lure a cat from a closet or the basement. Interestingly, the cat that has been "lured" sometimes shows little interest in the rest of the treat routine. At treat time, each cat has their own perch where they await the serving of their individual treats. They go to their own perches in an orderly manner and await the serving of the treat. This routine, however, is not as rigid as a conditioning model would suggest. Recently, for example, the dog Rosy joins in for treat time. Sometimes a cat does not come to treat time and no treat will be set out for it. Late arrivals for treat time, however, are usually accommodated. There may be delays in getting treats from the bag, and treats may be dropped on the floor, accidentally. Treat time, then, appears to have a clear sense of negotiated order typical of many forms of human-to-human social interaction.

Cats and dogs can initiate activities that result in mutually acknowledged attention from humans. Rosy will give out with little, plaintive howls when the animals' water dish is empty. Cats and dogs will stare at us, which usually result in humans asking them "what do you want?" or otherwise interacting with the animal. The cats often "act cute" to get attention. These actions include rubbing against us, "stomach displays" while rolling on the floor, or loud purring. We are greeted when we return home with "greeting hops", "head bows" and stomach displays (Green, 1984: 32-34).

Cats have the ability to almost force us to give attention to them by interrupting our activities. For instance, they push their way into our laps while we are reading; they will sit in the middle of a game board, during a game of Scrabble; cats will nudge paints, pencils, brushes, and other craft items off our worktables. Finally, cats and dogs appear, at times, to deliberately hinder our walking from room to room, or on stairs by walking very near our feet or flopping down in our way. Some people report that cats paw at them or even use their claws to get attention. Appendix One contains a sampling of people's responses to the statement: To get my owner's attention, I
**sometimes...** This probing statement is part of the standardized format used to create individual home pages on the Purina Cat Chow website (http://216.150.0.236/homepages/search.asp). As of July of 2001, there were 11,145 home pages on this sight. Each home page contains a number of statements, such as the one above, that allow people to characterize and describe their relationship to their cats. A more sophisticated and extensive analysis than I have attempted her could yield much insight into domestic cat — human household relationships. I believe a similar Purina website is maintained for dogs (http://dogchow.com/yourdog.asp).

**MUTUAL RESPONSIVENESS** While interaction can be halting or one-sided, it is usually characterized by mutual responsiveness. Mutually responsive interaction has an open and flowing character. People indicate responsiveness through posture, body orientation, and facial expression. Mutually responsive interaction also contains many small gestures and utterances that indicate people have a sense of where the interaction is coming from and to where it is leading. Mutual responsiveness communicates that all parties to the interaction presently have a sense of commitment to, and involvement with, one another. Mutual responsiveness communicates enthusiasm.

We use the phrase “giving someone the cold shoulder” when we purposively withhold responsiveness. The withholding of responsiveness may precede arguments between spouses, as when one spouse repeatedly asks the other “What’s wrong, dear?” and receives a chilly “Nothing!” in reply. (Ooops! Did someone forget an anniversary or birthday?) Employees may waste time, procrastinate, or deliberately misinterpret the boss’s latest demand to produce a “mission statement” as a way of withholding responsiveness. The withholding of responsiveness is a way of dealing with unjust authorities short of deliberate sabotage or outright rebellion (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina, 1982:61).

Meows, purring, tail movement, eye contact, head and body orientation, and rubbing, are some of the ways cats are mutually responsive. For dogs, mutual responsiveness includes barks, tail wagging, eye contact, head and body orientation and jumping. Cats and dogs are particularly responsive when greeting people, prior to feedings, and during work and play.

Cats and dogs also withhold responsiveness. Cats are notorious for their ability to give the cold shoulder. Dogs may ignore commands. Animals may avoid eye contact when being scolded.

When considering mutual responsiveness, we are tempted to remember times when our pets seem unresponsive to our words, petting, and gestures. The anthropomorphic stance is to attribute animals’ lack of responsiveness to their “animal nature.” Thus, we assume that animals do not truly interact — that they only show interest in humans as a conditioned response to food and other rewards.

However, if we look at animal/human interaction, we see that people are often unresponsive to the animals in our homes. We do not notice their glances; we push them aside when they rub against us or jump upon us. We often ignore their purring of mewing, whining, and barking. From our pets’ standpoint, our lack of responsiveness may be quite troublesome.

**CONGRUENT IDENTITIES** Openings are built from congruent identities. Can we contend that pets have identity? Traditionally, sociologists have used answers to the question “Who am I?” that are given on a Twenty Statement Test to operationally define identity, or self-concept (Kuhn, and McPartland, 1954). I have grave doubts that my cat, Baby, would answer the question “Who am I?” on a Twenty Statement Test.

More fundamentally, however, our identity arises from, and is held in place, by both our routine and exceptional actions, in the context of the social relationships in which we are embedded. In this regard, I feel that Baby, like the other cats in our home, has a clear sense of identity, of belonging to place, in this case, our house and yard. He is comfortably anchored in daily,
ongoing, relationships with a number of humans, two other cats, and a dog. He is part of an ongoing home and family routine, and has been for all but eight weeks of his life. Being thus embedded in a social order creates an identity for Baby, much like humans who’s identity derives from their being embedded in an active family life and commitments to community, job or career. Perhaps this gives us more insight into why pets often find strangers, other animal intruders and new household appliances or furniture so disturbing. Theirs’ is not a simple fright reaction, but a reaction to a fundamental shift in their social order, and even a challenge to their very identity. What may be but a simple change for us, may represent a very disorienting change to an animal.

Once again, openings are built from congruent identities. In our household, identities are not problematic. We can recognize each of our cats and the dog. Likewise, the cats and dog recognize each of us. The cats and dog respond to each of us in different ways. Congruent identities are clearly part of the social order in this household. In a more general sense, congruent identities may arise whenever humans and animals interact over an extended period of time.

SHARED SOCIAL OBJECTIVE For participants, openings establish a sense of purpose or direction for interaction. In the terminology used by Hintz, Couch, and Miller, a shared social objective, or a projected future, is established at the opening. This may happen without difficulty, as when, at mid-semester, a professor walks into a classroom, steps to the podium and begins a lecture. Students and professor adjust their behaviors in a manner that is consistent with an image of a projected future. They play out, what has by now become a routine sequence of activity, namely, a routine, fifty-minute, lecture.

An opening may not develop so smoothly. A shared social objective or projected future may be unclear, when, for instance, the professor has a coughing attack at the beginning of lecture. When ongoing interaction departs from the projected future, participants may first work to get interaction “back-on-track”. Failing in this, participants may work to improvise a new projected future, such as giving aid to their professor.

Are our animals able to share social objectives or establish projected futures with us? I think the answer to this rhetorical question is “yes”. I have often observed my cats and dogs routinely act in ways that communicate a projected future or shared objective. Often pets will bring their toys to us, the projected future being “play time with me!” Our cats have meowed, pawed at us, or stared at us when one of their toys has rolled to an inaccessible location under a piece of furniture. Rosy the dog communicates with nuzzles, stares, whimpers, and even sharp barks that it is time to share popcorn with her. Of course, there are numerous ways in which our pets communicate that it is feeding time, time for a walk, or time to fill the water bowl. Conversely, there are many sounds, gestures, and actions through which I can communicate, to our animals, shared futures involving the initiation of these familiar activities.

Our animals may resist certain shared social objectives. Rosy, for example resists getting into our car, quite probably anticipating a trip to the vet. Our cats are reasonably tolerant of hair grooming. There are some days, however, that when they see me pick up the pet comb, they glare, and even flee in anticipation of the experience.

I have concluded that our animals also have a clear sense of the household order of morning, afternoon, and evening activities, as well as mealtimes, hours at which their people are away at work, and bedtime. Like us, animals often display a sense of confusion, disappointment, and even irritation if certain routine, projected futures are not met. Sometimes, the animals appear to pay careful attention to, and even derive amusement from, new or novel activities. For instance, Baby typically shows great interest in any DIY project that I undertake. The cats and dogs actively explore boxes that are brought into the house.
RUDIMENTARY SOCIAL INTERACTION

I have concluded through my extensive observations that animals and humans do, indeed, engage in rudimentary social interaction. By rudimentary, I do not mean that interaction between animals and humans is simple, or of little consequence. We certainly do not totally understand all of the dimensions and features of this interaction. Social interaction between animals and humans is characterized by one-way verbal communication. We sometimes direct verbal statements to our animals, but animals do not make verbal statements in return. Like communication among humans, animal/human interaction also utilizes what we call auxiliary channels of communication. Animal/human interaction is characterized by a mutual exchange of vocalizations, gestures, glances, looks, and postures. It is a communication by touch, pressure, smell and taste. Animals are most certainly more attune to these auxiliary channels of communication than are most humans. There are also probably rules of physical proximity and use of space of which most humans are unaware.

This rudimentary social interaction between animals and humans also includes significant symbols that call out the same or equivalent responses among the interacting parties. These significant symbols arise through interaction, in much the same way they arise among interacting humans. Humans pick out particular sounds, stances, glances, or postures of the animal, and begin to respond in a consistent fashion to these actions. Humans may even feedback their imitations of the behavior to the animal, as when I sometimes try to return an imitation of my animals sounds glances or movements. For instance, Rosy the dog bounds toward me in a playful way, and I try to feedback similar playful postures and movements. My cat glances at me and narrows its eyes, and I try to imitate the expression.

In a similar fashion, animals attend closely to the behavior of humans in their household, and become very attuned to voice tone, and inflection. The movements, posture, and gestures of humans also attain significance to animals. Discussions of cat language often focus on the exchanges among cats, or how cats communicate with each other. I contend that cats, and also dogs, are capable, to a degree, of adapting their language to communicate with humans.

Some humans and animals may share interaction that is emotionally rich and satisfying. Some animals may live out their lives in the company of human companions who share shelter and food with them. These same humans may also comfort animals’ fears, such as fears of storms. Their humans may attend the birth of puppies and kittens. Humans may give care to an animal in its declining years. Their humans may offer the final gentle touch when the animal is dying.

Likewise, animals may be an important part of our human lives. It is not uncommon for cats and dogs to live with us for 10 – 15 years, which may also encompass important phases in our lives such as early childhood, and adolescence. Many peoples’ earliest memories are those of their childhood pets. Adolescents may share their innermost thoughts and insecurities with their pets. I recall, as a young, unmarried adult, how my cats reminded me that I had responsibilities beyond those of meeting my own selfish needs. Many of us may remember vividly the pets we had when we were newly weds, or when our children were first born. Many of us have experienced genuine grief at the death of an animal.

Some humans and animals may share interaction that is charged with negative emotion and not at all satisfying. I recall farmers scolding, cursing, beating, and even killing dogs that would not herd cattle. A few of my college friends would express anger at the destructiveness and filth of the dogs they had taken on as pets during graduate school. One of the Purina Cat home pages indicates:

I found my owner...
My owner found me in the county animal shelter. I was able to fool him into thinking I was a cute cat. When I was
released from "the pen" I was able to show my true colors, so to speak.

My personality...
My personality? Pure evil. No one can stand being in the same room with me for more than 10 seconds. They get really uneasy, and often start mumbling things about "devil worship". … I am Satan Jr. I am a black cat, so naturally I am possessed. Bet you can't say that about your cat! … He doesn't understand how I managed to escape from Hell. Actually, I'm just visiting....

One can obtain further insight into the varied nature of human/animal interaction by examining a familiar sociological concept: the significant other.

PETS AS SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

I was once chided that sociologists use the term “significant other” instead of simply using the word “friend”. My response was to claim that friends are significant others, but not all significant others are friends. In my introductory sociology class, I begin by defining the concept of significant other as “People most important in the development of the social self”, and point out that this includes parents, siblings, friends, coworkers, coaches, and teachers. We pattern some of our own behavior after significant others, and we compare our behavior to the behavior of significant others.

I go on to point out that public figures, whom we may have never met personally, may be important in shaping one’s social self. For instance, a person closely and publicly identify with a U.S. president or his policies. One can, therefore, include public figures as a significant other.

Students usually find it interesting to contemplate the idea that we may even have fictional significant others, as is the case for ardent fans of Star Trek, Xena, Warrior Princess, or X-Files who spend much time and effort portraying their favorite character from these series. Sherlockians may engage in fantasies as they attempt to live out the adventures of the Great Detective. Along similar lines, some Revolutionary and Civil War re-enactors, and Hitlerphiles have historical figures as significant others.

Finally, I point out that the concept of significant other does not necessarily imply only positive feelings of respect, trust and affection. We do not always respect and trust our parents, siblings, friends, coworkers, coaches, and teachers. We may even hate some of these people. Nonetheless, they are part of our social self – we must take them into account.

While we usually think that we do things to favorably impress significant others, we also may do things to deliberately irritate, mislead, or hurt these people. Instead of patterning our behavior after these people, we may deliberately make choices and do things that communicate we are very different from these significant others.

Clearly, we can conceptualize our cats and dogs as significant others when we consider our depth of personal attachment to these pets. Obviously, we lavish affection on pets. Some people talk to their cats and dogs almost incessantly. We hug, snuggle, pet, and sometimes even kiss our pets. The morning and evening walks, feeding and treat time, may become valued “quality time” for humans.

For some people, and maybe for all of us, it is sometimes easier to express affection to a cat or a dog, than to a parent, spouse, or child. This is the basis of some animal therapies. I feel that some adolescents, elderly, and disabled may derive particular benefit from such relationships in “natural” or non-therapeutic settings. People feel genuine grief at the loss of a pet.

We can judge the social significance of our pets by the amount of material resources we expend on them. Some cats and dogs are boarded at pet hotels whose nightly rates rival those of the finest hotels for humans. We spend surprising amounts of money on transportation, hotels, association dues, and registration to attend dog and cat shows. In many households, the
cost of pet foods can easily exceed a dollar a day. Cat litter costs are not insignificant. Routine veterinary care for a household of pets can approach that of a human member of the household. Household budgets may be raided and squeezed to provide emergency veterinary care for a pet. We have pet funerals, grave markers, and cemeteries.

Information from the pet food industry, veterinary organizations, and other research organizations indicate we spend, as a nation, fantastic amounts annually on our dogs and cats. I do not think that the resources devoted to our pets are a mark of decadence against our society. I think most nations, even some very impoverished nations, devote equivalent portions of their resources to pets.

This discussion concludes with an example drawn from the happenings in my immediate neighborhood, which shows us that, indeed, pets are significant others. Last spring, my wife and I became increasingly concerned about the mistreatment of two dogs. For a few months, a man, his girlfriend, and her 10-year old daughter had been living in a small rental property near us. They had two, fairly large, mixed breed dogs that they confined in a makeshift kennel behind their house. As weeks passed, the kennel grew very filthy and we watched the condition of the dogs deteriorate from a lack of regular feeding, periods of being deprived of water, and a lack of grooming. We never once observed these people exercise or otherwise extend nurturing attention to the animals. Other neighbors called the police to complain of constant barking and the owners of the dogs were given fines and orders to appear in court.

One Saturday morning, my wife was working in our flowerbed, and she saw the man strangling one of the dogs. She challenged him, and he threw the dog to the ground and cursed her. I merely listened to the developing exchange as, clearly, my wife was besting him in the argument, and I did not feel my assistance would resolve the situation.

Moments later, however, he yelled at my wife saying “You won’t be living in your house much longer if you don’t mind your fuckin’ business!”

Because of this open threat, I walked into the yard, where he could see me. He immediately began to stalk toward me shouting “Why don’t you put your woman in line!”

The words “Why don’t I just come over there and kick you ass!” filled my mind as I began to move toward him. My wife, however, stopped me. The dog choker halted when my wife told him she was going to call the police. A violent confrontation was thus averted. Later, I reflected that, as an adult, this was the closest I had ever come to being in a fistfight.

The remainder of the summer was terrible. The man became known to all of his neighbors as the “Dog Choker”. Shortly after our confrontation, Dog Choker’s girlfriend tried to explain to some of the neighbors that the animal abuse was really his way of “training the dogs”. The girlfriend and her daughter soon moved out, however, as Dog Choker was also directing much verbal and physical abuse at her. Unfortunately, her “moving-out” consisted of moving to the next-door rental property, and their loud fighting continued. The fighting became even worse when Dog Choker moved a new girlfriend and her dog into his house.

The abuse and fighting led to several police calls, an emergency room visit, and the arrest of Dog Choker’s first girlfriend. In one-way or another, all of these incidents involved disputes over the dogs. Police were called to investigate a fight between Dog Choker and his first girlfriend that involved the throwing of dog feces from one yard to another. A few weeks later, police were called because a screaming and swearing Dog Choker was trying to hurl a 50 lb. bag of dog food through his first girlfriend’s kitchen window. Police were called after a loud and abusive exchange over a veterinary bill. Finally, one afternoon Dog Choker’s present girlfriend kicked the first girlfriend’s dog. The women began to scream obscenities at each other, and fighting followed which led to a broken window, and the first girlfriend’s treatment at the hospital emergency room for a gashed arm. She was arrested at the emergency room for assault, and spent several days
That summer I found myself helping a group of neighbors compile information and photographs that were part of a presentation that we made to members of the city council and police department in an effort to have these tenants evicted and the rental properties condemned. I had never thought I would ever be part of a “concerned citizen’s group” that was attempting to take action against poor people.

Our effort, however, was successful. Oddly, we succeeded with the city council because of the accumulated trash and the poor condition of the property, rather than the treatment of the poor dogs. The police, however, cited Dog Choker and his girlfriends several more times as barking dogs were a violation of the noise ordinance. That summer, over $500 dollars in fines were levied against them. The animal shelter tried to rescue the dogs at least twice, but was unsuccessful, as these people insisted on keeping their dogs. We think the people eventually surrendered a dog to the animal shelter in lieu of paying one of the barking fines. Early in the fall, Dog Choker, his girlfriends, and the dogs moved from our neighborhood, and peace returned.

This paper contends that humans and animals can interact in a rudimentary, but truly social fashion. Further, pets can be very important in the development of a social self. They can be our significant others. However, it would be simplistic to claim that pets are significant others only if we have affection for them or if we go to great lengths to care for them. Dog Choker shows us that pets are significant others even if we do not have affection for them. He routinely vented verbal abuse on the dogs in both anger and jest. While he was occasionally nurturing, more often than not, he neglected, or he used great anger, hostility and even violence on these animals. His treatment and possession of these dogs figured prominently in his abrasive relationships with his girlfriends and neighbors. Humans and animals can find significant other relationships in both harmonious and problematic relationships.
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Purina Dog Chow website
1 Usually, this is not problematic, and close physical proximity is sufficient to establish access. The right to gather together in groups is a fundamental freedom in many societies and repressive authorities use curfews and internal passports to forestall reciprocal sensory access among their opponents.

People also establish mediated reciprocal sensory access by way of television, radio and telephone. Mediated sensory connections between people such as posted letters, email, and faxes do not create reciprocal sensory access because of the considerable delay in the sending and the receiving of messages.

2 The twenty statements test was invented by Manfred Kuhn, a symbolic interactionist. For this test, a person is instructed to provide twenty answers to the question “Who Am I?” Answers are regarded as reflecting that person’s self-concept: the feelings about ourselves that arise from our activities and the social relationships in which we participate.

“Identity” and “self-concept” are not synonyms, even though we may sometimes use them interchangeably. Identity includes how we are known to others, and we can, and sometimes do, manipulate our identities to impress, assure, confuse or deceive others. In one sense, an identity may be seen as more superficial, perhaps, than a self-concept. A con-artist may knowingly assume an identity that is quite at odds with his/her self-concept. Of course, one’s self-concept and one’s identity may be quite consistent with one another.

3 In recent years students have shown me their pet ferrets, scorpions, snakes, lizards, and my daughters had hermit crabs and even a pygmy hedgehog as pets. I do not include pets such as these within this framework.

The Anderson paper provides a compelling argument for including some birds within this framework. Intuitively, I also think we should include horses and even the Indian work elephants within this framework. Most of these animals have normal life spans in of between 12-60 years. Further, their relationships to humans are documented even in our earliest writings. All of these animals have been the objects of worship in different societies.

i It is assumed here at the outset, that much of what is said about intention, meaning, and feelings in this paper can be, or has been already explained with the basic tenants of the classical, operant conditioning model of psychology. It is doubtful, however, that the operant conditioning model could be expanded in such a way as to characterize the behavior of co-present humans and domestic household pets as genuine “interaction”.

ii I have lived in multi-pet households nearly my entire life. With the exception of four years as a university undergraduate, I have always had at least one cat as a household companion. Presently, my household animals include three cats and a dog:

Vivian: a short hair, silver tabby. She is five years old and is overweight. She is the most reclusive of the animals. She is also the most vocal.

Dory: a small short hair, brown tabby. She is five years old. She seems very attuned to the feelings of the humans in the household and is referred to as the “nurse cat”.

Baby: a long hair, brown tabby male. He is almost two years old. He is very curious and seems to seek out the most contact with humans.

Rosy: an undersize, black and tan, Shetland sheep dog. Rosy is thirteen years old and appears to be loosing her hearing.

We also have four cockatiels that are not part of this analysis.

Our cats and dog are well housebroken and quite docile. They are all neutered, but we have not de-clawed, “de-barked” or otherwise altered them. They are kept well groomed and we feed them on a fixed, but not rigid, schedule. While they do many things that amuse us, we have not trained the cats and dogs to do tricks. We have never specifically given them “obedience” training. Our relatives and friends have a number of well-trained hunting and herding dogs. Our community also includes a number of service dogs trained for police, rescue, and guide work. Some of our friends show cats.

iii As an aside, much the same can be said of feral cats and wild dogs. They may well have an identity that is part of a given territory or neighborhood locale. Their world, largely concealed from or ignored by, humans, probably has a distinct and predictable routine and order. Animals of their own and other species are part of this anchoring. Close relationships to humans are not part of their identity. Feral cats and wild dogs have a much different identity than household pets.
It is not unusual for dairy farmers to name and recognize as individuals all of the cows in their herds. In part, this may be a function of keeping records of milk production. Cows usually come to know their stall in the milking parlor. My daughters claim to have named each of over sixty offspring of their Siberian hamsters. They also claimed to know each baby hamster by sight. They did keep written records of the birth dates of the hamster litters. Nearly all of these hamsters were sold to the local pet store.

Studies disagree on the actual number of feline vocalizations, but three categories of sounds generally are recognized: vowels, murmurs and High-intensity sounds (Animal Planet website, 2001)

The classic "meow," originating in the kitten's plaintive or anxious "mew," contains vowel sounds. Adult cats express variations of this vocalization to state their demands for food or attention, register complaints and convey bewilderment. A slight alteration in tone, pace or punctuation changes the meaning.

Murmurs are usually happy sounds, along with purrs, trills and chirrups of greeting or contentment, uttered through closed mouths.

The feline's repertoire of high-intensity sounds, such as angry or fearful hissing, spitting, growling and shrieking, is most often directed at other cats. And the ultimate purpose of a female's wail while in heat is to attract males.

Another discussion of cat talk is found in Green (1984) who identifies three major elements of cat talk: murmurs, calls, and cries. He identifies nine types of murmurs, sounds that cats make with their mouths closed. Green identifies five types of calls made while the cat's mouth slowly closes, and three types of cries made with the mouth open and facial muscles tense. Green also identifies elements of cat body language, including four tail signals, eight facial expressions, two ear signals, as well as numerous postures and other body movements.
Appendix One

Taken verbatim from Purina Cat Chow website (2001):

To get my owner’s attention, I sometimes...

1. I just talk a LOT. That normally gets their attention.

2. I rub up against her legs or meow for treats. I also like to drive her crazy by scatching on her bedroom door real eary in the morning!

3. Zoro howls. It’s a very funny-sounding, pitiful wail. But it’s quite loud if he wants it to be, and can get attention even if I’m asleep.

4. get in her lap and brush my tail in her face. I look really cute!

5. I will wrap my paws around her ankles and then nibble at her.

6. GIVE HER THE SQUINTY EYES AND SIT UP AND BEG FOR A KITTY TREAT. ACTUALLY I’M THE CENTER OF MY PEOPLES WORLD!

7. I crawl onto her lap and start sinking my claws into her legs or if she is in the kitchen i keep circling around her legs and rubbing up against her

8. I use my shrill meow very loudly.

9. I meow, lay on them, follow them around, and rub my face on them.

10. I rub against her leg and start purring.

11. If my person is not already carrying me around, I have found the easiest way, other than yelling at her, to get her attention is to jump on her shoulder, regardless of the circumstances.

12. Meow consistently

13. I plop over onto my back/side-not very gracewful-like either, I just throw myself down until my belly is rubbed.

14. Grab her hands with my paws

15. I have this little trick I’ll share with you. Jump on owners lap look owner directly in eyes cock head slightly extend paw to owners cheek stroke owners cheek Works every time!

16. I just jump up into her lap! Can’t exactly ignore me that way!! :-)

17. Meow meow meow meow...

18. I Walk around in circles and go over to the refrigerator for my treat. And I do this until they give me my treat, I also let them know when my water dish or food dish is near empty, I tell them (meow)

19. I climb my mommy’s leg to get to her waist, then she says “Ouch!!! oh Cali, you’re cute” and pickes me off of her and holds me close to her chest where I am safe and warm
against her.

20. I will bite your toes if you don't listen to me!

21. I like to nuzzle my Mom with my cold wet nose at night when I want attention. I love to head butt too.

22. I MEOW TO GET MY OWNERS ATTENTION

23. I either meow or just go rub up against her legs. That seems to work pretty well.

24. I usually just jump up on my Mommy or Daddy when I'm trying to get their attention. I also have a "mew" (it's like a half-meow.) That usually works also.

25. I open my eyes really wide and try to scratch my ear.

26. Jumping in to her arms and lap.

27. I jump on her and start needing.

28. meow and rub up against me

29. meow and bat at things until she notices me.

30. I claw my owner's leg. That generally gets his attention.

31. Kay hates it when I rub against her legs. She really goes ballistic when I do this, and her legs need shaved! It does the trick! I like waiting for ANYONE to come up the stairs, cause I reach thru the Rail and grab them. This works real well for getting attention.

32. I go between her legs or chase her feet until I can bite her ankles.

33. I am a crybaby. I have found the squeaky wheel gets the grease *grins*

34. I DIG MY NAILS IN HIS LEG!

35. meow or walk around there feet

36. when she walks by, i meow lightly and if she's close enough, i grab her with my paw to get her attention so she'll hug me, or feed me.

37. hitting her foot

38. If Mom is awake, I will rub her legs or "spray" a nearby object. Mom always laughs at my spraying because I was neutered at an early age and it never occurs to me to actually release any urine. I am content to go through the motions of a spraying and then stagger stiff-legged off to another adventure. When Mom is asleep, I sometimes have to rouse her because my dish is empty. I usually sit on her head and knead her hair or I keep restlessly moving on her side of the bed. Once, I even bit her nose, but that was a bad move 'cause she took a reflexive swat at me that woke up Dad and I had to do a reverse bunny-hop down the center of the bed to avoid the wrath of the two of them. I try not to disturb Mom if she and Dad happen to be sleeping face-to-face. That's asking for trouble.

39. To get my owner's attention I brush against his legs and then give him a "love nip" on his leg or arm when he bends down to pet me. If he doesn't hurry and pick me up to give me some real affection, I will give him more "love nips" and then run like crazy so he can't get
me!!

40. I like to stay mysterious, they come to me on there own desire!

41. I screech as loud as I can and then hit the door until I get attention.

42. walking between her legs when she tries to walk, this ensures that she is aware of my every need.