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This article focuses on the criteria used by dog owners to define their animals as minded individuals with whom they maintain viable and satisfying social relationships. The discussion is based on field data drawn from a study in a veterinary clinic, interviews with dog owners, and autoethnographic materials compiled by the author as he observed and interacted with his own dogs. Special attention is directed at caretakers' understandings of their dogs' thought processes, emotional experiences, and unique personalities. The significance of investigations of animal-human interaction to enlarging sociological views of mindedness and the construction of social identities is emphasized.

## UNDERSTANDING DOGS

### Caretakers' Attributions of Mindedness in Canine-Human Relationships

CLINTON R. SANDERS

Words are the source of misunderstanding.

—Antoine de Saint Exupery  
(from *The Little Prince*)

Few associations are as intense and emotionally involving as those we have with companion animals. Despite the frequency and importance of relationships between humans and animals, analyses of interspecies interaction are noticeably rare in the social scientific literature (for exceptions, see Arluke 1988; Bryant 1991; Crist and Lynch 1990; Helmer 1991; Hickrod and Schmitt 1982; Mechling 1989; Nash 1989; Sanders 1990; Robins, Sanders, and Cahill 1991; Wieder 1980).

To a major degree, this lack of attention to animal-human exchanges is due to the conventional sociological belief that "authentic" interaction is premised on the abilities of social

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** An earlier version of this discussion was presented at the International Conference on Science and the Human-Animal Relationship, Amsterdam, March 1992. I am indebted to Patti Adler, Peter Adler, Arnold Arluke, Emma, Ann Goetting, Isis, Eleanor Lyon, Raven, Gaye Tuchman, Françoise Wemelsfelder, and two anonymous reviewers for their assistance.

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHY, Vol. 22 No. 2, July 1993 205-226  
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actors to employ conventional linguistic symbols. Language enables interactants to construct and share a mutually defined reality and provides the vehicle for the internal conversation that constitutes mind.

Because they are presumed to lack the ability to understand and use shared linguistic symbols, animals are, in the conventional sociological view, excluded from all but the most simple social exchanges. Mead ([1934] 1964) presented nonhuman animals as ongoingly involved in communicative acts involving the use of natural signs. He conceived of animal exchanges as immediately situated and involved in direct references to physically present objects or intentions. The only connection between the sign/gestures presented by animals and the subsequent behaviors of their cointeractants was due, according to Mead, to instinct or conditioning.

In establishing this phonocentric view, Mead effectively excluded the routine encounters of people with their nonhuman companions from all but the most cursory of examinations. Because animals are not full-fledged social actors from the Meadian point of view, their encounters with humans are one-way exchanges, lacking the intersubjectivity at the heart of true social interaction. People interact with animals as objects. From the conventional perspective, dog owners' babbling endearments to their canine companions are simply taking the role of the animals and projecting humanlike attributes onto them (see Pollner and McDonald-Wickler 1985). Interpreting the behavior of dogs as authentic social responsiveness is the same form of anthropomorphic projection in which people engage when they "interact" with a computer (Turkle 1984), automobile, or other inanimate object (Cohen 1989).

In contrast, caretakers of companion animals and others who live in everyday situations entailing frequent and intimate interaction with nonhuman animals and who have practical interests in making ongoing sense of their behavior consistently see animals as subjective actors and define interactions with them as being "authentic" and reciprocal social exchanges (see Crist and Lynch 1990; Griffin 1984; Hearne 1987; Shapiro 1990; Ristau 1990). People grant this (at least, limited) mindedness

to animals even when the situation in which they encounter the animal-other is formally constrained by a reductionist ideology demanding that they be seen and dealt with as scientific objects. Arluke's (1988, 1990) studies of animal care technicians in medical research facilities and Wieder's (1980) work with chimpanzee researchers, for example, amply illustrate the persuasiveness of everyday encounters in prompting people to regard nonhuman animals as minded coactors.

This discussion focuses on dog owners' definitions of the companion animals with whom they have ongoing relationships. Based on routine, intimate interactions with their dogs, caretakers come to regard their animals as unique individuals who are minded, empathetic, reciprocating, and well aware of basic rules and roles that govern the relationship. Caretakers come to see their dogs as consciously behaving so as to achieve defined goals in the course of routine social exchanges with people and other canines. The dogs are regarded, in short, as possessing at least a rudimentary ability to "take the role of the other." This interpretation of the dogs' actions and reactions as "expressions of competence" (Goode 1992)—as thoughtfully constructed and reciprocating—requires owners, in turn, to take the role of the animal other in order to establish the "natural rituals" (Collins 1989) that constitute their ongoing relationship.

Following a brief presentation of the various sources of data on which this discussion is grounded, I expand on the key elements outlined above. Drawing parallels to the sociological work on interactions between able-bodied people and ostensibly less competent human others (e.g., Bogdan and Taylor 1989; Goode 1992; Gubrium 1986), I first describe how owners construct perspectives on their dogs as minded actors and what they see to be the nature of their subjective experience. Next, I present the owners' definitions of their animals as possessors of unique, historically grounded personalities. I then focus on the central emotional component of the canine-human relationship. Owners typically view their canine companions as having an emotional life and as being ongoingly aware of and appropriately responsive to the emotional experience of their human companions. The substantive discussion closes with a descrip-

tion of how caretakers incorporate their dogs into the social networks and key routines that encompass and comprise their intimate lives. The article's conclusion points to areas of further research and focuses on how investigations of animal-human relationships can expand sociological perspectives on such central issues as mind, identity construction, and interpersonal intimacy.

### THE RESEARCH

The data on which this discussion is based are drawn from three sources. First, I call on material included in an "autoethnography" constructed as I systematically observed and recorded personal experiences with my own dogs (three Newfoundland females) over a 4-year period. As the term implies, autoethnography is a combination of autobiography and ethnography. As such, it rejects the traditional ethnologic convention of positioning the researcher as an objective outsider describing and interpreting observed events. Instead, autoethnography emphasizes the value of information drawn from the systematic examination of personal experiences, emotions, and interpretations (see Denzin 1989; Ellis 1991; Hayano 1979; Shapiro 1990).<sup>2</sup>

The second body of data was amassed during 9 months of participant observation in a large veterinary clinic located in the Northeast. The field data of central importance to this article consist of detailed observations of owners and their dogs as they waited for a veterinarian to come into the examination room, the conversations that owners had with me during this time, and the exchanges that occurred between clients and veterinarians in the course of the service encounter. Unless asked directly who I was, I did not identify myself as a sociologist to the clients. In general, clients assumed that I was a veterinary student or a technician employed by the clinic. As a participant in the setting, I routinely made myself generally useful, holding animals for various procedures, fetching equipment and supplies, helping clean examination rooms, offering nonmedical

advice, and in a variety of other ways assisting with the business of the clinic.

Finally, information is drawn from relevant portions of a series of in-depth, semistructured interviews conducted with 24 dog owners initially contacted when they presented themselves at the veterinary hospital or who agreed to be interviewed following their involvement in an 8-week-long puppy-training class sponsored by the clinic. These interviews averaged between 60 and 90 minutes in length and were tape-recorded with the interviewee's permission. All interviews were conducted in the interviewee's homes, and in all cases the owner's dog was present during the encounter, thereby allowing me to observe exchanges between the informant and his or her animal in their most familiar interactional setting.

I do not maintain that this description of owners' orientations toward and interactions with their dogs encompasses all such exchanges. It is certainly the case that owners construct a variety of identities for their dogs—from object through make-believe person to surrogate child—and consequently treat them in a variety of ways. I do contend, however, that the interactants and canine-human exchanges presented here are fairly typical of the people, dogs, and relationships one finds in the average American household.

The informants were drawn from and observations were made in a veterinary practice that provided services for a largely middle-class clientele. A recent national survey commissioned by the Veterinary Medical Association (1988) reveals that approximately 38% of American households include an average of 1.5 dogs and that close to 78% of dog owners visit a veterinarian an average of about 2.5 times a year. People with canine companions encountered in a veterinary clinic, therefore, can reasonably be seen as fairly typical dog owners. Certainly, one would expect to encounter rather different orientations and relationships (probably more on the functional/object end of the continuum; see e.g., Jordon 1975) were research done with lower-class owners and/or those who never seek veterinary services.<sup>3</sup>

### ASSIGNING THE DOG A HUMANLIKE IDENTITY

The designation of another as "human" is an eminently social activity. The exclusion of certain people from this category has been a fairly common sociohistorical phenomenon. "Primitives," African Americans, and members of various other human groups routinely have been, and continue to be, denied the status of human (see Spiegel 1988), and studies of interactions in total institutions (e.g., Bogdan et al. 1974; Goffman 1961; Goode 1992; Vail 1966) are filled with descriptions of the "dehumanization" of inmates by staff members, principally on the grounds that the inmates do not possess the requisite level of mind.

In their study of the interactions of nondisabled people with severely disabled family members, Bogdan and Taylor (1989) discussed the ways in which the social meaning of humanness is created and the criteria used by "normals" to assign a human identity to severely disabled intimates.<sup>4</sup> This definitional activity entails attending to four basic factors. First, the nondisabled *attribute thinking* to disabled others. The latter are seen as minded—able to reason, understand, and remember. The caretakers regard the disabled individuals as partners in the intersubjective play of social interaction, interpret their gestures, sounds, postures, and expressions as indicators of intelligence, and are adept at taking the role of the disabled others.

Second, the nondisabled see the others as *individuals*. They regard the disabled persons as having distinct personalities, identifiable likes and dislikes, authentic feelings, and unique personal histories.

Third, the disabled persons are seen as *reciprocating*, as giving as much to the relationship as they receive from it. For nondisabled associates, the others are true companions who help to expand their lives by providing companionship, acting as objects of caring, and opening up situations in which they can encounter new people (see Messent 1983; Robins, Sanders, and Cahill 1991).

Finally, Bogdan and Taylor (1989) described how disabled persons are humanized by being *incorporated into a social place*. Through defining the disabled persons as integral mem-

bers of the family and involving them in ongoing domestic rituals and routines, the nondisabled actively situate the others into the intimate relational network.

The owners I interviewed and encountered in the veterinary hospital engaged in a process of identity construction very similar to that described by Bogdan and Taylor. They routinely used their day-to-day experience with their dogs to define their animals as minded social actors and as having, at least, a "person-like" status.<sup>5</sup> Caretakers typically saw their dogs as reciprocating partners in an honest, nondemanding, and rewarding social relationship.

The skeptical reader of what follows may well discount caretakers' identity construction of their dogs as "mere" anthropomorphic projections. Even if this were the case, we should not disregard people's definitions of the other as the central element in understanding how human-animal relationships—or relationships between "normals" and alingual others more generally—are organized (see Pollner and McDonald-Wickler 1985).

Evaluating the subjective experience of others is always a tricky procedure (Schutz 1970; Goffman 1959). Most basically, the chaining of interactions is a practical endeavor; estimations of coactors' perspectives are assumed, altered, or discarded with regard to what works. Intimate familiarity with others—animal or human—is an effective teacher.

As I write these words, for example, one of my dogs comes to my study and stares at me. She then walks back down the hall to the door opening onto the porch and rings the bell she uses to signal her desire to go outside. Because I am not immediately responsive, she returns to my study, pokes me with her nose, and returns to the door. Grumbling about the intrusion, I get up, open the door, and she goes out to lie down in her usual spot.

I maintain, and the dog owners presented below would maintain, that the most reasonable interpretation of this mundane sequence of events is to see it as an authentic social exchange. My dog has encountered a problem, realized on the basis of remembered past events that my actions hold the potential for solving her problem, purposefully behaved in a manner that

effectively communicated her "request," and, in so doing, shaped my behavior to her defined ends.

Seeing this simple encounter as involving communication of a definition of the situation, mutual taking the role of the other, and projection of a short-term future event does not, however, require that we *literally* see dogs as people. Defining companion animals as "people in disguise" (Clark 1984, 24) is as degrading to them as is the view that they are mere behaviorist automata. My informants, in describing their dogs' humanlike qualities and actions, did not regard them as literally human. Nor did they facilely place them in a "keyed frame" as "pretend" people (Hickrod and Schmitt 1982). The point they were making, and the focus of this discussion, is that their animal companions were far more than objects; they were minded, creative, empathetic, and responsive. The animal-human relationships they shared were authentically social.

#### THE DOG AS MINDED ACTOR

The owners with whom I spoke had little doubt of their dogs' cognitive abilities, and all could recount examples of what they defined as minded behavior. Dogs' thought processes were generally seen as fairly basic ("He's not exactly a Rhodes scholar"), and, to a certain extent, thoughtful intelligence was seen as varying from animal individual to individual and from breed to breed. Because they were dogs and not humans, the companion animals were typically described as engaging in thought processes that were "wordless" (Terrace 1987). Thought was characterized as being nonlinear, composed of mental images, and driven largely by emotion (see Gallistel 1992). When asked if she thought that her malamute cross could think, an interviewee replied,

Yes I do. I don't think [dogs'] heads are empty. I think their thinking process is different from ours. I think they think on emotions. If the environment is happy and stable, they are going to act more stable—pay more attention to what you are doing. They are going to be more alert. If everything is chaotic, they would not be thinking externally but be more concerned with

themselves internally—protecting themselves and not paying attention to my cues. I would call that thinking, but it is not what you would call linear thinking. . . . They are making decisions based on emotional cues.

No matter what the mode of mental representation defined by caretakers, most agreed that the issues *thought about* were rather basic. The dog's mind was focused predominantly on immediate events and matters of central concern to his or her ongoing physical and emotional experience:

I think that [my dogs] are here just to get approval. [They are here for] feeding or to get petted or get their ears rubbed. I think they think enough not to get yelled at, not to get into trouble. That's the way dogs are. I don't think they can reason like people.

On the other hand, some owners did see their animals as going beyond these basic physiological and emotional concerns. One typical type of example offered by informants focused on their dogs' play activities and the adjustments they made while being trained. The dog's purposive modification of behavior was seen as indicating a basic ability to reason. For example, one owner described the actions of his hunting dog in the course of learning to retrieve objects from the water:

This is the smartest dog I have ever had. We are having him trained professionally, and we were with the trainer with my dog and some of the other dogs he was training. He said, "Look here. I'll show you how smart your dog is." He threw the retrieving dummy out into the middle of this long pond there. My dog jumped in and swam to the thing, grabbed it in his mouth, and took a right turn. He swam to the land and walked back to us with the dummy in his mouth—all proud. He was the only one smart enough to walk back. The other dogs all swam out, retrieved the thing, and swam all the way back.

While watching my own dogs play, I was struck by the adjustments they made—behavioral alterations that, were they made by hairless bipeds, clearly would be seen as demonstrating thought. Soon after the introduction of a new puppy into my household, I made the following entry in my autoethnographic notes following a walk in the woods:

Today Isis [my 3 year old Newfoundland] appeared to come to a realization about how she had been attempting to play "chase" and this prompted her to alter the play process somewhat—essentially altering the assumption of roles. On each of the walks so far, Isis has attempted to initiate chase by acting as the chaser. She runs off at a rapid pace, turns back, runs toward Raven [the puppy], bowls her over, runs past, etc. This doesn't work because of the size and strength difference. Raven just cowers, runs to one of us for protection, cries out. So, this time when Raven made a run at her at one point in the walk, Isis ran off a little ways until Raven followed. Isis then ran further and soon Raven was in hot pursuit. Isis led her on a merry chase over fallen trees, through thickets, into gullies. It was particularly interesting to watch because Isis was adjusting the game on the basis of her knowledge of Raven's, as yet, limited abilities. She would run just fast enough so that Raven wouldn't get more than a few feet behind and would occasionally slow down enough that Raven could grab hold of some hair on her side or legs. Isis would also toy with the other player by jumping over larger falls or into gullies with deep, vertical sides—obstacles she knew were beyond Raven's limited abilities.

Owners frequently offered stories in which their dogs acted in ways that were thoughtfully intended to shape the owners' definitions of the situation and to manipulate their subsequent behavior to desirable ends. A number of informants told of dog behavior such as the following:

We have a beanpot that we keep filled with dog cookies. Every time the dogs go out and "do their business" they get a cookie. They have interpreted this as "all we have to do is cross the threshold and come back and we get a cookie." So it will be raining and they won't want to go out and they will just put one foot outside the door and then go over to where the cookies are kept: "Well, technically we went out."

Though rarely successful, this sort of behavior indicated for the owners an attempt by the dog to deceptively manipulate their definition of the situation (dog went out) so as to shape their behavior (give cookie). Caretakers also provided descriptions of situations in which they observed their dogs engaging in deceptive actions while playing with other dogs. For example,

a veterinarian offered the following story when we were discussing the issue or whether or not dogs think:

I believe that dogs think. My dogs play a game called "bone." One of them will get the rawhide bone and take it over to the other one and try to get him to try and get it. Or one will try to get the bone if the other one has it. One day I was watching and the youngest one was trying to get the bone without much luck. So he goes over to the window and begins to bark like someone is coming up the driveway. The other dog drops the bone and runs over to the window and the puppy goes and gets the bone. There wasn't anyone in the driveway—it was just a trick. Maybe it was just coincidence but . . .<sup>6</sup>

#### THE DOG AS AN INDIVIDUAL

Although many caretakers did see certain personality characteristics as breed related, they regularly spoke of their own dogs as unique individuals. Few informants had any trouble responding at some length to my routine request that they describe what their dog "was like." Owners currently living with multiple dogs or those who had had serial experience with dogs often made comparisons in presenting their animals' unique personal attributes. For example, an interviewee with two springer spaniels responded to my question about his dogs' personalities as follows:

It's interesting. A good way to look at this is to compare her with my other dog. I look at my older springer and she is always begging for attention. Sometimes I misinterpret that as wanting something to eat. I'll just be studying and she is happy just to sit there and have her head in my lap while I scratch her behind the ears. On the other hand, Ricky really likes attention and she seeks it. But if you're not willing to give it to her, she'll go find something else to entertain herself. She's bold, she's aggressive. At the same time she is affectionate—willing to take what you will give her.

Owners also were adept at describing their dogs' unique personal tastes. Informants typically took considerable pleasure in talking about individual likes and dislikes in food, activities,

playthings, and people. For example, when asked by the veterinarian whether her dog liked to chew rocks (he had noticed that the dog's teeth were quite worn), a woman described her female Doberman's special passion:

She just loves big rocks—the bigger the better. When she finds a new one she is so happy she howls. She'll lie and chew them all day. She puts them in her water bucket, and sometimes it takes two hands to get them out.

Owners also attributed individuality to their dogs by embedding them in a readily recountable narrative history. Interviewees took great pleasure in telling stories about their dogs' exploits and how they were acquired. In somewhat more abstract terms than those used by my informants, Shapiro (1990) presented the individuality of his own dog, stressing its embeddedness in their shared historical experience:

History informs the experience of a particular animal whether or not it can tell that history. Events in the life of an animal shape and even constitute him or her. . . . [My dog] is an individual in that he is not constituted through and I do not live toward him as a species-specific behavioral repertoire or developmental sequence. More positively, he is an individual in that he is both subject to and subject of "true historical particulars". . . . I can not replace him, nor, ethically, can I "sacrifice" him for he is a unique individual being. (p. 189)

#### THE DOG AS EMOTIONAL AND RECIPROCATING

As mentioned above, owners typically understood their dogs as having subjective experiences in which some form of reasoning was linked with emotion. The most common theme that emerged from the encounters in the clinic and interviews with owners was that dogs are eminently emotional beings. Dogs were, for example, described as experiencing loneliness, joy, sadness, embarrassment, and anger. Interviewees often focused on this last emotional experience—anger—because it was linked to incidents in which dogs responded in ways which owners saw as indicating vindictiveness. For example, one owner described her Shar Pei puppy's displeasure at

being abandoned and his playfully vengeful response to her absence:

It's funny. Usually after I have been at work all Friday I don't go out unless I am sure that somebody is going to watch him. But one time I left him alone and when I got home HE WAS ANGRY. He just let me know. [How did he let you know?] He'd follow me around and he would look up at me and he would just bark. It was like he was yelling at me. And I would say, "What is it with you?" and when I would stop talking he would look at me and bark—like "You left me. How could you do that?" You could read it in his face. When he was younger and I would go to work and leave him during the day, he would find some way to let me know that he wasn't pleased—like he would shred all his newspapers. Every day was something new. He would move his crate, or he would flip his water dish, or something like that.

In the course of my research, I routinely asked owners whether they thought that their dogs had a "conscience." Although there was some considerable difference of opinion among informants about how effective their animals' consciences were in constraining unwanted behavior, all saw their dogs as possessing a basic sense of the rules imposed by the human members of the household. In turn, they all could offer descriptions of incidents where their animals violated the rules and subsequently responded in ways that indicated the subjective experience of guilt. Typical guilt responses entailed clearly readable body language—bowed head, tucked tail, ears down, sidelong glances. For example:

Some major problems existed with Diz when he was younger and learning the house rules—what's proper and what's not proper. [Do you think Diz has a conscience?] He knows what he should and shouldn't do. If he gets into something. . . . He came up the stairs with a big old flower in his mouth, this silk flower, and his ears go forward. That's his look, "Am I doing something I'm not supposed to be doing?" He'll get something in his mouth and he'll put his head down and his ears go down and his little tail is kind of wagging. It is a body language that says to me, "Am I supposed to be doing this?"

Because caretakers saw their dogs as experiencing a subjective world in which emotion played a central role, they frequently

understood their relationships with the animals as revolving around emotional issues. The chief pleasure they derived from the animal-human relationship was the joy of relating to another being who consistently demonstrated love—a feeling for the other that was honestly felt and displayed and not contingent on the personal attributes or even the actions of the human other. One indication of the intensely positive quality of their relationship with their animals were the owners' perceptions that their dogs were attuned to their own emotions and responded in ways that were appropriate and indicated empathy. A man and his teenage daughter, for example, spoke of their dog's ability to read their emotions and his attempts to comfort them when they felt sad:

Daughter: He's just fun. He keeps us lighthearted. And he certainly senses our moods. If you're sad and crying he will come snuggle next to you.

Father: He just seems to sense it somehow, you can be in a different room and be down. Recently when Mary was in her room he just seemed to know where to go. . . . He sensed that somewhere in this house—his doghouse—there was something that was not quite right. He sought Mary out and was just there. One day I was sitting on the front porch kind of blue about some things and he just snuggled in there—totally noninvasive, just "If you want to pet me, pet me. I'm here if you need me."

Owners saw their intimate relationship with their dogs as premised on intersubjectivity and shared emotion. However, caretakers defined the animal-human relationship as unique because it was free from the criticism and contingent feelings that typified relationships with human intimates. This prompted owners to feel intense emotional ties to their dogs. The centrality of emotional connectedness is obvious in this story offered by a client in the veterinary clinic as she responded to my request for her to tell me about how she acquired her dog:

A lady down the street had a litter. I went in and immediately he came right over to me. It was love at first sight—he chose me. I remember it was really snowing that night and we couldn't get to the grocery store. My mother made him chicken soup. To this

day he goes wild when he smells chicken soup. Every time I make it he gets half. Sometimes this annoys my roommate—"Hey, I wanted some of that." But he is more important. He's not a dog to me. He's my best friend. He loves me and I love him. When I come home from work he's happy to see me and I am happy to see him. I try to spend quality time with him every day. . . . He gives me love. He can't live without me and I can't live without him. It's so hard to see him getting old. I just don't know what I would do without him.

#### AFFORDING THE DOG A SOCIAL PLACE

Because their dogs were regarded by owners as displaying these essentially humanlike attributes, they actively included their animals in the routine exchanges and the special ritual practices of the household. The dogs typically were considered as being authentic family members.<sup>7</sup> Shared family routines commonly centered around feeding and food preparation, playing with or exercising the dog, and some more idiosyncratic routines that evolved in the course of the shared relationship. One interviewee, for example, referred to her own childhood experiences while describing the daily breakfast routine she shared with her newly acquired puppies:

I love these dogs. They are people dogs. We do have a set course of activities during the course of the day. We seem to meld very nicely with one another. Anywhere from 5:30 on, the dogs will start to bark which means to me that it is time to get up—the activities of the day have begun. I come downstairs and they are on the back porch waiting to come in for breakfast. I bring them in the house and I talk to them. We talk about what we are going to do today and what do you want for breakfast? Of course, they have no choice—they get the same thing every meal. But it is very important for me to talk to them, and I'm sure they know what I am saying because they will go into the pantry and get a biscuit. So I go in and get the bag of Purina®, and I show it to them and say, "This is what we're having for breakfast." They'll sit down and look, and I will go the refrigerator and get the . . . yogurt out, and I will put a spoonful in each dish, and I will always be sure that I leave a little on the spoon so the kids can lick it. I do that because it reminds me of when I was a kid, and whenever my mother made frosting she would leave a little



on the spoon. That was always the highlight of frosting a cake—licking the spoon. Then I take the dishes out and they eat. I go get my coffee and read the paper and talk to them. They will walk around and poop. They will play for a while. The day has begun.

Informants regularly spoke of key ritual activities they shared with their animals. Most, for example, celebrated their dogs' birthdays. Cakes were baked, presents were bought, parties were organized, favorite foods were prepared, and other special steps were taken by owners to ritually commemorate their animals' births. The other typical ritual in which the dogs were included was that surrounding Christmas or other religious holidays. A young woman, for example, described her puppy's first Christmas:

He just loved Christmas. Somehow he figured out which were his presents under the tree and he happily opened them all himself. He had his own ornaments on the tree—I got some that were unbreakable and put them on the bottom branches. He would take one carefully in his mouth and come running into the other room with it all proud to show it off. He loved the tree. He thought we had brought it in from the outside just for him.

At the same time that owners presented their dogs as thinking, emotional, creative, role-taking individuals they realized that conventional social definitions tended to situate dogs outside the bounds of humanness. Companion canines are customarily regarded as objects, toys, or creatures whose ostensibly human characteristics are "actually" the result of anthropomorphic projection on the part of overinvolved owners. However, intimate experience and the practical recognition that treating their animals as minded and competent coactors *worked* as an effective context in which to understand and accomplish ongoing collective action convinced owners that rigidly placing dogs outside the social category of "person" was unwarranted. The recognition that their views of their dogs violated conventional boundaries between humans and "others" and could potentially be seen as stigmatizing was apparent in the discomfort often expressed by my interviewees when I asked them if they regarded their dogs as "people." For example:

In a sense they are [people]. They have feelings. There is a mutual caring for one another and although they may hurt one another it is done in a playful manner. Yeah, they are people, but I hesitate to say that to too many individuals because they would think I am nuts. Because I don't think many people think of animals as being people. The majority of people think of animals as pets and they are to be kept at a distance. It is very important to me to have these "kids" portrayed as part of my family. Because they are part of my family. I do treat them as people. I care about them and I would never deliberately hurt them. It is very important for me to convey to them that I do care very much for them. I'm sure they understand that.

## CONCLUSION

This discussion has focused on the categories of evidence used by dog owners to include their animals inside the ostensibly rigid but actually rather flexible boundaries that divide minded humans from mindless others. The picture that emerges is of the person experiencing his or her companion dog as an authentic, reciprocating, and empathetic social actor. Canine companions are effectively involved with their caretakers in routine social exchanges premised on the mutual ability of the interactants to take the role of the other, effectively define the physical and social situation, and adjust their behavior in line with these essential determinations. In much the same way as the able-bodied construct identities of intimate human others who have severely limited abilities, caretakers use the evidence at hand to define their dogs as possessing minds, emotional lives, unique personalities, and readily identifiable tastes. These humanlike characteristics qualify dogs to be incorporated into the rituals and routines that symbolize and constitute owners' daily lives and intimate social networks.

This discussion of people and their dogs has touched on only one small segment of human interactions with nonhuman animals. Sociological attention could be directed at a wide variety of related issues and situations—for example, people's interactions with species other than canines; occupational and recre-

ational settings incorporating animals; class, ethnic, and racial variations in human-animal interactions; and intensely interdependent relationships, such as those between people and guide dogs or other assistance animals.

Within the larger context of how animal "humanness" is constructed as a practical accomplishment, this discussion has presented mind as similarly constituted. Much like those who intimately and regularly interact with Alzheimer's patients (Gubrium 1986), the owners on whom I focused regarded their dogs as possessing minds revealed in the knowledge drawn from intimate experience. The import of this view is that it moves away from the Meadian orientation toward mind as an individual internal conversation/object. Instead, mind is reconceived as more fully social, enduring in its social classification by those who are most connected to and knowledgeable of the alingual other. Like Gubrium's (1986) Alzheimer's patient caregivers, dog owners actively engage in "doing mind": They act as agents who identify and give voice to the subjective experience of their animals. Dog caretakers also make claims for the minds of their animals because they, like the intimates of the severely retarded and those with Alzheimer's disease, can "listen with their hearts." Owners foster and value the emotional connections that bind them to their dogs. To a major degree, the intimate relationship and interaction that the owner shares with his or her animal is, as Gubrium put it, an "emotive discourse" (p. 47).

The generative context within which this emotionally focused construction of animal mind takes place involves the accretion of mutual experience of what Collins (1989) referred to as "natural rituals." Caretakers and their dogs ongoingly share activities, moods, and routines. Coordination of these natural rituals requires human and animal participants to assume the perspective of the other and, certainly in the eyes of the owners and ostensibly on the part of the dogs, results in a mutual recognition of being "together."

Most broadly then, this discussion has been about how identities are constructed. Sociogenic identities (Goode 1992) are created and projected in immediate interactional contexts. Perspectives on the other and evaluations of his/her/its capa-

bilities are affected centrally by preexisting expectations and ideologies. Those who routinely interact with alingual companions draw from their ongoing experience information about the other, effectively disconfirming folk beliefs, occupational ideologies, or academic doctrines that present the inability to talk as rendering one mindless and incompetent. Investigations of people's relationships with companion animals, like those focused on affiliations with speechless humans, emphasize the undue emphasis traditionally placed on language as the foundation of intimate interaction, mind and thoughtful behavior, and the generation of social identities.

This, then, is part of the promise of the investigation of people's relationships with companion animals—expansion of sociological perspectives on mind and modes of mental representation ("iconographic mind"), illumination of procedures whereby minded identities are socially generated and the interactional contexts which constrain these procedures, extension of analyses of "the other," and the opportunity to further develop our views of intimate relationships and the emotional elements which are central to these essential social bonds. Seen in this light, systematic attention to animal-human relationships offers symbolic interactionists a challenging and rewarding prospect.

## NOTES

1. Despite the significant power difference symbolized by the terms "owner" and "caretaker," I use these designations interchangeably throughout the article.

2. The focus of this discussion on people's relationships with dogs flows, in part, from my own lifelong experience with dogs, my respect for them as a species, and the ready access afforded by my currently living intimately with them. Further, dogs are the nonhuman animals with which humans have the longest history of intimate association (Budiansky 1992; Porter 1989) and for whom people have the most intense attraction (Endenburg 1991). The dog's highly social nature accounts, in part, for this lengthy and emotional relationship with people and also means that human interaction with dogs lends itself ideally to sociological analysis.

3. My informants were not, as one anonymous reviewer skeptically put it, "wacky and lonely people who are over-involved with their pets, dress them in silly outfits, etc." At the veterinary clinic in which I participated, clients with this sort of overinvolved orientation were identified as such, were commonly referred to as "animal nuts," and were frequently the focus of gentle derision. None of the data on which this discussion

is based are drawn from observations of or conversations with this readily identifiable category of client.

4. One reviewer of an earlier version of this article expressed some concern with the apparent implication that dogs are "like" severely disabled human beings. Some discussions (e.g., Regan 1983) emphasize that infants, the mentally retarded, and others with limited or nonexistent verbal and social capacities are regarded as human and afforded a consequently appropriate moral place, whereas animals are typically denied similar considerations (see Frey 1980). I do not intend to imply necessarily that because dog owners consistently define their animal companions as minded and humanlike that, therefore, dogs and their interests are morally equivalent to those of humans. This discussion is about the social construction of the companion animal's identity in the context of intimate relationships. While not irrelevant to the issue of animal rights, this description focuses on a sociological phenomenon. The rights of companion animals and the attendant responsibilities of humans are matters of philosophical and legal debate beyond the scope of this article.

5. Of the owners interviewed by Cain (1985), 72% said that their dog usually or always had "people status" (see also Veevers 1985).

6. For interesting discussions of play interactions between dogs and people, see Mitchell and Thompson (1990, 1991) and Mechling (1989).

7. The most common categories used by caretakers to situate their relationships with their dogs was to regard them as either family members or close friends. General studies of pet owners show that this is extremely common. Somewhere between 70% (Beck and Katcher 1983) and 99% (Voith 1983) of pet caretakers define their animals as members of the family and from 30% (Nieburg and Fischer 1982) to 83% (Bryant 1982) consider the pet a "special" or "close" friend.

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This article reports on one of many small towns that became weekend retreats for urban professionals in the 1980s. The influx of weekenders changed the social structure of the town, and, inevitably, the newcomers represented a status threat to older, high-status elements of the town. The interaction between the "old" and "new" status groups was characterized by status defensiveness on the part of the former and status insecurity on the part of the latter. In contrast to earlier studies of status competitiveness, this study is unique because the new status group was composed of part-time residents.

## NEW YORKERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

### Status Conflict and Social Change

ROBERTA SATOW

STATUS SYSTEMS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY are fluid and constantly changing. New groups move into communities, alter the status arrangements, and engage in status conflict (Baltzell 1966b; Malewski 1966; Vidich and Bensman 1960; Warner 1941). In contrast to earlier studies of "new" and "old" money groups (Pratt 1982; Duncan 1973), this article examines old and new money groups who were *part-time* residents and their impact on the status arrangements of the community and their status conflict. The old money group was composed of upper-class New Yorkers who began summering in a rural northwestern Connecticut town, "Greentown" at the end of the 19th century (the "old" New Yorkers); the second group was composed of upper-middle-class weekenders who began coming to Greentown in relatively large numbers in 1982 (the "new" New Yorkers).

The "old" and "new" New Yorkers had different attitudes toward the town and different impacts on the community. By contrasting these groups, we shall see that each of these outsiders altered the established class and status structures in

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank Richard Wool, Laura Kitch, Peter Adler, Patricia Adler, and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ETHNOGRAPHY, Vol. 22 No. 2, July 1993 227-248  
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