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Speaking to and for Animals in a Veterinary Clinic: A Practice for Managing Interpersonal Interaction

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Based on observations of 185 veterinary clinic visits, 10 of which were videotaped, in this study, I extend the empirical investigation of animal-directed talk as a resource for organizing and managing social interaction. In the veterinary setting, personnel balance a variety of tasks: sustaining an expert demeanor, caring for animals, and maintaining good client relations. In this investigation, I reveal how juggling these sometimes competing activities is accomplished through talk directed at pets and occasionally on behalf of pets (in the animal's "voice"). Such animal directed and animal authored utterances may also avert professionally (and socially) risky activities such as foregrounding incorrect caretaking of a pet or derailing client complaints about the pet. More generalized tasks, such as entering into interaction and navigating apologies, are also accomplished through animal directed talk. Although wide ranging in function, the collection of sequences I analyzed in this study reveal how humans deploy an animal's presence as a resource in managing both institutional and everyday dilemmas of interaction.

In the veterinary clinic where staff are engaged in the practical tasks of diagnosing and treating family pets, utterances directed at the animal are sometimes produced when staff are in the midst of handling the pet for ex-

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amination.¹ The following simplified transcripts, excerpted from Stivers (1998), exemplify this routine and familiar practice among veterinarians:

(1) Dachshund (p. 251)

VET: Grab his little elbows here an let's be sure his testicles are both in the proper place, (.) Hold still, Hold still le le le

VET: Yep.

(0.3)

VET: No hernias,

(2) Basset Hound (p. 253)

VET: Hold=on big guy. ((checking dog's ears))
(3.2)

VET: Looks pretty good down in there ...

In Excerpts 1 and 2, the veterinarian addresses the animal as though it were able to engage in purposeful action. These commands to “hold still” or “hold on” indicate that the veterinarian is working to manage the animal in the service of performing particular medical tasks. In addition to these kinds of utterances, animal-directed talk serves other functions as well; from personal experience we know that professionals (and pet owners) also praise, calm, and admonish the animals in their midst. Such utterances display for coparticipants that the speaker is attending to the animal's behavior in some fashion and as such probably say more about the speaker than about the pet. However, what of those instances in which participants (in this study veterinary staff) speak to pets in ways not related to medical or behavioral issues? Also, what about those utterances that give voice to an animal's purported subjective experience (i.e., by speaking *for* the pet)? In this investigation, I suggest that speaking to and for animals is one practice in an as yet unbounded set of practices that participants use to facilitate social interaction, in particular to manage moments of potential interpersonal difficulty.

Mediating messages through a third party or using special registers or vocabularies to avoid direct communication is not unique to animal rich settings (see, e.g., Brody, 1991; Field, 2001; Haviland, 1979, 1986), but animal companions do provide a ready resource² for displacing authorship and avoiding socially risky activities (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Robins, Sanders, & Cahill, 1991; Schottman, 1993). Self-reports indicate that humans are aware that they organize commentary about the scene and about

each other through their animals (Cain, 1985); in this study, I reveal how this operates in naturally occurring interaction, extending the discussion by Robins et al. (1991) of dog directed talk as a means for avoiding social risks in public settings and building on Mitchell (2001) who examined functions of *baby talk* directed at dogs in play activity.

Throughout this article, I describe participants as “speaking to” or “addressing” themselves to animals in the clinic. This is a convenient shorthand to convey that speakers are bodily and vocally oriented to the animal. Vocal orientation is evidenced by use of a *baby talk* register (Ferguson, 1977) also known as *doggerel* or *secondary baby talk* in the animal context (see Mitchell, 2001, for a comprehensive review). The use of this “speaking to” shorthand is intended to convey that participants are visibly and hearably organizing themselves to treat the pet as direct addressee, although potentially the animal has what Goffman (1974/1986) termed “toy status” (p. 224) in the ongoing interaction. Goffman (1974/1986) discussed this type of participant status in terms of “some object, human or not, that is treated as if in frame, an object to address acts to or remarks about, but out of frame (disattendable) in regard to its capacity to hear and talk” (p. 224). Goffman (1974/1986) exemplified this with the category “infant” and also alluded to the case of fully competent persons who are present but are commented about *as though* not there. Although Goffman (1974/1986) did not explicitly mention pets in this context, they do fall into the category of “objects” that are treated as if in frame; persons often address them, yet they are incapable of verbal response. In other words, talk directed at animals is likely in the realm of that which is designed for an overhearing audience (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, pp. 120–126; Goffman, 1981; Heritage, 1985). Moreover, because the animal is treated as direct addressee, the remarks addressed to them can in principle go unheeded by the human companion. It is this latter contingency that seems most productive in the sequences I analyze here. The fascinating duality of pet (or infant or toy) directed talk is that the owner/guardian can either take up such talk on the “recipient's” behalf *because* it is incapable of providing some information (e.g., when a dog “is asked” its name) or the owner can reasonably disattend the animal directed talk because in fact, it is the pet that is being addressed. These same interesting complexities likely hold true for infants or true toys, although it is outside the scope of this study to examine that empirically.

As a brief aside, it may be too early to assume that animal directed utterances are “only” overhearables. Whether people have a subjective expe-

rience of actually interacting with, speaking for, and getting responses from the animal is an open question. Animal-directed utterances or utterances that animate the animal's "voice" may well serve emotional or even cognitive functions for the human, but these aspects of the phenomenon cannot be addressed in this study.

What I do address is the fact that veterinary staff not only attend to and affiliate with animals, but they use them as a resources to smooth the way for ongoing professional (and interpersonally cordial) interaction. Although essentially any interaction contains some risk (i.e., potential "loss of face" for either party), institutional settings are particularly open to risks related to establishing and maintaining expertise and in the case of veterinary medicine, balancing animal advocacy with client relations. In this article, following a brief overview of the data and setting, I examine animal-directed utterances and utterances voiced on the animal's behalf in terms of their functionality in managing these various social tasks. From the more interpersonally consequential (such as topicalizing incorrect pet care, diffusing tension over student ineptitude, and derailing a client's complaint) to the relatively routine (such as maintaining a professional stance, entering into interaction, and navigating apologies), in this investigation, I examined a wide range of potentialities. What ties the instances together is the fact that the interactional moment is achieved and interpersonal risk managed through talk "directed at" or in the "voice of" the copresent pet.

DATA

The data for this analysis derive from a larger study (Heaton, 2000)³ that was carried out at a veterinary teaching clinic in the United States. The project concerned people's attachment to and communication with different animal species. A sequential sample of 185 clients filled out a pet attachment survey (Templar, Salter, Dickey, Baldwin, & Veleber, 1981) and were observed behind a one-way mirror during the clinic visit; running notes were taken during the observations. Concordance of observations was not verified through coding or reliability procedures; however, the observations did provide grounds for examination of noticed phenomena through more detailed analysis of videotaped interactions. Thus, toward the end of the data collection period, 10 clients consented (of the 13 clients sequentially approached) to the videotaping of their visit. These videotapes constitute the data for this study. Although I present single examples of localized functions, this does not undercut their validity as particular in-

stantiations of the larger social phenomenon (managing interpersonal interaction through "noncompetent" third parties) and as such should not bear on the adequacy of the analysis. (See also Benson and Hughes, 1991, and Psathas, 1995, pp. 50–53 on "method of instances.")

All videotapes were transcribed according to conventions originally developed by Jefferson for conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). This transcription approach has been assessed for reliability and found to meet standards of acceptability for social science research (Roberts & Robinson, 2004). Symbols used to capture particular aspects of the speech stream relevant to this study are noted in the text just prior to the transcribed excerpt. Talk transcribed as enclosed by either up or down arrows (e.g., ↑ will step up here ↑) indicates there is no offset of the pitch shift; the raised or lowered pitch persists through the entire utterance.

SETTING

The clinic visits videotaped for this study comprise three distinct phases: First, the pet is examined (and history taken from the owner) by a senior veterinary student. This is someone in the 4th of 4 years of post-undergraduate training who may be supervised by an experienced veterinary technician. During this phase, the client is also instructed about proper physical care and feeding of the animal ("husbandry"). Following the physical exam, history taking, and discussion of husbandry issues, the client waits alone (Phase 2) with the pet in the exam room while the student confers with the attending veterinarian. This waiting (in the exam room) can take 20 to 30 min. Finally, the student returns with the veterinarian to the exam room for follow-up, confirmation, and discussion of treatment recommendations (Phase 3). All three phases were observed and captured on videotape. I present only excerpts from Phases 1 and 3 here, as they offer instances of interaction between veterinary staff, students, and clients with pets.

MANAGING PROFESSIONALLY DELICATE MOMENTS

Topicalizing Incorrect Caretaking

Veterinary staff are obligated to instruct in the proper care of animals, yet they are also careful to maintain good client relations. To notice incor-

rect caretaking practices can thus present an interactional challenge: how to foreground and instruct about the issue without criticizing the client's care of the pet. In Excerpt 3 (following), the veterinary technician (VT) notices that a bird's wings have been improperly clipped, something that can put the bird at risk of injury. She verbalizes this noticing by addressing herself to the bird. Just prior to the transcribed talk, the veterinary student (VS) had been collecting, with some help from the VT, the bird's medical history. The excerpt begins as the VS is writing down some notes and the VT is simply watching the bird in the cage:

(3) Topicalizing Incorrect Caretaking

- 1 (8.0) ((VS is writing; VT is observing bird in its cage))
 2 VT: *They did an opposite wing trim on you.* ((whispering
 3 to bird))
 4 (1.0)
 5 VS: Heh. \$Yeah.\$
 6 VT: They took away [that
 7 VS: [They're suppose ta do that- (.) unh [side
 8 ones
 9 VT: [Right.

The VT's report about the "opposite wing trim" (line 2) is designed grammatically and vocally (as whispered) for the bird. Although certainly available to the client, the utterance is not recipient designed in such a way that would implicate a response from the client. By deploying the pronoun "they" as the agent of the incorrect wing trim, by designing the utterance grammatically as directed at the bird, and by producing this report in a whisper as though for the bird's ears only, the VT foregrounds a problem but does so without directly implicating the copresent client. The client is thus notified of improper caretaking by means of the animal directed utterance.

At line 5, following a brief silence in which the floor is available to any of the three participants (Sacks et al., 1974), it is the VS, not the client, who concurs with the report; she treats it as something interesting/amusing as evidenced in the laugh particle and smile voice. The VS's uptake thus puts a slightly nonserious spin on the issue so that not only is the wing trimming now mutually oriented to as a topic for student and teacher, but it is treated as interesting, not dangerous (although it is a dangerous clip; later the VT explains to the client how taking away the lift feathers has caused birds to drown in toilets, land in frying pans, and so on).

Thus, the wing clip is visible to the client as something done "opposite" of what it should be, but at the same time, it is treated by the staff at this moment as mildly interesting, not terribly serious.

By addressing herself initially to the bird, the VT has managed to topicalize improper wing clipping in such a way that assessment is not relevant from any one person in particular. The fact that the VS steps in to take up the topic constructs this moment as a teaching activity—for the student, not for the client (lines 6–9). Subsequently, in data not shown, VT asks the client directly if she cut the wings, and the client claims she did not but also admits that she does not "know what to do about it" (i.e., wing clipping). The VT assures her that they will review the procedure. So what later is treated head on by the VT is first introduced with some delicacy by addressing the pet itself.

Diffusing Tension During Student-Led Examination

In contrast to medical examinations in which the client *is* the patient and "conspires" in his or her own objectification (Heath, 1986), the client in the veterinary clinic is host to the patient, guardian of the patient, and relinquishes it to object status. Despite this handing over of a cherished pet, it is unlikely that clients feel comfortable viewing their pets simply as objects for examination. Indeed, they are paying substantial fees (at the level of or higher than local community practices) to have veterinary staff attend to their pet's health. One can assume, therefore, that they want them handled with care, even if handled they must be. In a teaching setting, handling of the pet during student-led exams can be problematic.

In Phase 1 of these visits, unless the VT has particular expertise with a species (as in Excerpt 3), and the student has none, the VT is often in the position of being an onlooker during the physical examination, intervening and advising when things go seriously wrong but mainly giving the students space to get clinical practice. Because students are relatively unpracticed in coping with both clients and clinical inspection at the same time, it is not only the pace and skill of the exams that may be less than optimal but the student's attention to interpersonal issues as well. Because supervising staff can be on the outside of the examination per se, they are available as advocates for the animal, serving as a counterweight in otherwise tense situations.

In Excerpt 4 (following), a VT juggles these competing activities (doing the work of both supervising expert and compassionate onlooker) by speaking to the pet. The VS has just been trying to take a cat's temperature rectally, but over the course of 3.5 min, the temperature fails to register. The cat is clearly distraught as the various staff (the VT, the VS, and a veterinary technician student [TS]) attempt to both comfort and restrain it. Needless to say, this is uncomfortable for both the cat and the people in the room and presents a particular dilemma for the copresent supervising VT: how to offset possible client (CL) concerns while still allowing the student to continue the exam to gain the practice she needs. The transcription begins as the VT addresses the student, advising her to remove the thermometer:

(4) Diffusing Tension

- 1 VT: *Don't take it.*
 2 (0.5)
 3 VT: *>As upset as she was if she had a fever it woulda
 4 been (there by now).<.*
 5 TS: *Yeah:.*
 6 VT: So:: we don't mean ta stress you ou:t [though.
 7 ((CL looks at VT, smiles))
 8 TS: [*Poor baby.*
 9 VT: ↑We just need to know that before we vaccinate ya.↑

Although the VT has allowed the temperature taking to continue for this extended period while they unsuccessfully wait for it to register, she does finally call an end to the procedure. Her talk in lines 1 and 3 is directed quietly and quickly toward the VS (hearable as somewhat impatient), whereas her talk at line 6, reset to her normal speaking volume and rate, is directed at the cat. The VT's utterance (line 6) contains a claim that their intention is not to cause distress; it is both a denial of any intentional wrongdoing and an acknowledgment that the cat has been stressed by the procedure. This cat-directed utterance elicits a slight lifting of the client's head and she gazes momentarily toward the VT (whose gaze is on the cat). The client smiles briefly in this moment (noted in line 7) and returns her gaze to her pet. The TS produces an exclamation of sympathy (line 8), which extends the caring stance initiated by the VT at line 4.

At line 9, the VT offers an account also directed at the cat as recipient that provides the technical reason for the temperature taking. The VT displays sensitivity to the animal's discomfort while still maintaining her situ-

ated clinical identity; she is both attending to her job as veterinary staff and showing compassion for the animal.

In the immediate continuation of this interaction (Excerpt 5, following), the VT animates (in the sense of Goffman, 1974/1986) the cat's "voice" using the first-person pronoun. The VT authors for the cat a report that serves as ironic commentary on the situation—ironic because the physical examination has actually only just begun and begun badly (with the botched temperature taking):

(5) Diffusing Tension (continued)

- 1 VT: Okay I'm dō:ne. I'm done with the physical exa:m.
 2 TS: *m heh heh*

The VT's talk at line 1 offers the cat's "ironic perspective" on the examination thus far (that any prolongation of it is unwelcome). By animating this complaint, indeed by animating a persona for the cat, the VT embodies an empathetic stance and displays an awareness of the discomfort that has been caused. Such a move can reassure the client that although the VS may be otherwise engaged (with technical issues of the examination itself), the VT is attending to the animal and its comfort (indeed, the VT and TS have been petting and scratching the cat throughout the sequence). As evidenced by the slight laugh from TS, the talk at line 1 may also provide some comic relief or at the least, the TS moves to align with the stance expressed by the VT.

Several minutes later, the VT uses a quotative marker to again animate the cat, this time to focalize the student's slow pacing of the physical examination. After a prolonged eye examination (during which the VT yawns in a possibly forced, although certainly quite noticeable manner), the VT addresses praise to the animal (line 1 following) and then formulates another utterance on its behalf:

(6) Diffusing Tension (continued)

- 1 VT: ↑Good gi:rl.↑
 2 TS: mm ↑hm yeah.
 3 (4.0) ((cat shakes head and body vigorously.))
 4 TS: Hoh hheh hheh hheh
 5 (6.0) ((during this silence, VT and TS petting and scratching
 6 the cat. At 4.0 seconds, the CL glances left toward VS work
 7 area; at 5.0 seconds VT looks over her left shoulder toward

- 8 work area, and looks back to cat. Another 8.0 seconds
 9 elapse.)
 10 VT: ↑*She says* this is not the way I wanted to spend my da:y.↑
 11 CL: heh heh [heh
 12 TS: [Yeah:: heh heh

The quotative (line 10) produced in the high pitch characteristic of baby talk launches another complaint, one that may hark back to the discomfort of the exam so far but that also alludes to the exam taking rather long. Perhaps the CL glance (line 6) toward the work area where the student prepares instruments and writes up her notes—a glance that the VT quickly follows (line 7)—has indicated nonverbally to the VT that the CL is attending to the student's activities and, potentially, to the slow pacing of the exam.

The VT could also well be speaking for herself when she animates this report of the “cat's feelings,” but at the very least, it displays for the client that this attending staff person sees the encounter as prolonged and stressful—not just for cats but possibly also for humans. Indeed, this complaint animated on behalf of the cat elicits some chuckling from the CL and TS (lines 11–12). By designing the utterance as emanating from the cat's “thoughts” and by implying that the cat has an agenda (a way to spend the day), the VT can diffuse some tension by garnering alignment through this joking move.⁴ As an onlooker, she is available to do this work, which may be in the service of palliating potential client concerns in the face of a problematic student performance.

Throughout this extended sequence (Excerpts 4–6), the VT presents herself as an advocate by speaking to, speaking for, and speaking on behalf of the cat. The VT animates a somewhat wry persona for the cat, which embodies not only an empathetic stance but also works to diffuse any tension caused by the initially inept and then just simply long examination of the cat.

Maintaining an Expert Stance

A common tension in the veterinary visit is handling the client's pet in a way that will be acceptable and nonthreatening. This may be made explicit, as it is in Excerpt 7 (following) in which a VS who has admitted to never examining a rat before asks the CL how to handle the animal. Con-

comitantly, this displays concern for using an approach that would be appropriate to this particular pet and owner:

(7) Rat

- 1 VS: ↑Hi little Mary.↑
 2 (0.2)
 3 VS: What way do you normally pick her up by her tai:l or by her
 4 hea:d?=
 5 CL: =I just pick her up by- you just- middle a the body usually.

To ask a client's advice displays a desire to align with the client's usual practices, but it risks reducing the “expert distance” between staff and client; to embody a fully competent professional stance would be to display ease in handling any sort of animal in a way that would be acceptable to any owner. On the other hand, and in contrast to Excerpt 7, for a client to *propose* how to handle an animal without being asked (Excerpt 8, following), marks a moment in which professional expertise is potentially called into question. Taking up unsolicited advice might be a good idea from an interpersonal standpoint but perhaps not so good if one is trying to maintain an expert stance.

In Excerpt 8, a bird is examined by the senior veterinarian (V) who is following up on the student's work. As he prepares to examine the bird, he tries coaxing it onto his finger. After three times addressing the bird, first with a full “request” (to “step up”) and then with tokens (“yeah” and “okay”) that are hearable as praise/encouragement, the bird still hasn't perched on the V's finger. At that point, the CL offers advice on how to get it to step up. This is a moment when if the veterinarian takes the client's advice (by using the method the client proposes), he undermines his credibility by tacitly admitting that he has failed to corral the bird in an appropriate and expeditious manner. Furthermore, following client advice could be particularly delicate in front of the student under his supervision. Here, the veterinarian manages to sustain an expert stance by maintaining his “frame of engagement” (Goodwin, 1981) with the pet.⁵ In effect, although the bird-directed talk may not have been designed at the outset to avoid the client's advice, it serves as a ready resource to accomplish just that:

(8) Maintaining expert stance

- 1 V: Uh:m (0.6) well while I go ahead an take a look at her, uhm I
 2 don know (.) Laura if you wanna touch on anything couple

- 3 different foods there .h ↑will you:: step up here,↑ ((Vet is
 4 extending finger toward bird))
 5 (0.2) ((bird fluttering and stepping around on the cage))
 6 V: ↑*Yeah.*↑
 7 V: ↑Okay?↑ ((bird continues to flutter and step around))
 8 CL: () touch her stomach she'll (do it).
 9 V: ↑Good.↑((bird gets onto his finger without being touched))

The veterinarian produces both his question to the bird (line 3: “↑will you:: step up here ↑”) and his cooing encouragement (lines 6–7) in a pitch that is distinctly higher than his normal speaking voice. He moves into the pitch without any break in phonation and simply starts interacting with the bird to get it perched on his finger. This is not unlike the kinds of utterances in Excerpts 1 and 2 (previously) in which the pet-directed talk is in the context of advancing the medical activity. However, the client’s report (line 8) that implies advice on how to handle the bird displays her perception that her familiarity with the bird is relevant in helping the veterinarian do his work.

Despite the probably well-meaning advice, the veterinarian’s frame of engagement is sustained with the bird, bounded by his voice, body, and gaze throughout the owner’s contribution (line 8); he does not act on the suggestion to touch the bird’s stomach to get it to hop up. By maintaining his locus of interaction (both vocally and bodily) with the bird, thus persisting in treating the pet as the interactional partner, the veterinarian can disattend the client’s suggestion, embodying a professional and competent stance toward managing the bird; it is the client who is being treated as out of frame.

It could be argued that the veterinarian is simply otherwise engaged (in the examination of the bird) and that the client’s unsolicited advice is “ignorable” on those grounds alone, that is, the veterinarian was *never* attending to the client in this sequence, and she is thus at no point a ratified participant. However, it is evident that the bird-directed talk from the outset sets up exactly such an environment. Addressing the pet is thus a ready and valuable resource, deployable in the moment to visibly account for side-stepping the client’s advice.

Deflating Client’s (Illegitimate) Complaint

As noted previously, how and when to educate clients who are not caring properly for their pets is an interactional dilemma to be managed by

veterinary staff. Because informing an ill-informed client raises the possibility of insulting the client in some way and therefore undermining interpersonal relations with the client, indications of poor husbandry practices (as noted in Excerpt 3) or client ignorance of animal behavior (as exemplified following) present moments of potential interactional trouble. One way that veterinary staff handle such moments is to direct themselves to the pets.

In Excerpt 9, the CL reports that her bird bites people because it is grouchy. From the technician’s perspective, however, this “biting complaint” is irrelevant because birds explore their environment with their beaks.⁶ In this excerpt, the VT interrupts the client’s (illegitimate) complaint about biting by addressing the bird directly. Italicized transcript indicates a baby talk register (high pitch combined with a soft, cooing tone). The pound signs (#) indicate the entire utterance is produced in a creaky voice.

(9) Deflating client’s complaint

- 1 VT: And the per- m eh the aunt who had her before did she buy her
 2 from a pet store::?: or d’ she hand raise her? or:=
 3 CL: =I’m not sure I ‘ont- I think she bought her from a pet store
 4 because she’s kinda grouchy.
 5 VT: M_{kay}.
 6 (0.2)((looks back to bird))
 7 CL: She bites people, weh she bites me, and my boyfriend and my
 8 mom and everybody that she [shouldn’t (have/be).
 9 VT: *↑You bi:te,↑*
 10 (2.6)
 11 VT: ↓#Are you grouchy.#↓

After the client’s characterization of the bird as “kinda grouchy” (line 4), the VT nods while providing an acknowledgment token (“M_{kay}.”) then looks back to the bird (lines 5–6). She has apparently received the information and passes the floor back to the client; “grouchiness” is thus treated by the VT as not requiring further elaboration. However, in lines 7 through 8, the client presses on, producing a report that the bird “bites people.” From the lay perspective, this provides empirical evidence of the bird’s “grouchiness” and seems to serve as an account for her characterization of the bird. Not only does this postpositioned report extend a topic that seemed to have been adequately reported from the VT’s perspective, but the report intensifies the complaint as well. To be grouchy is to exhibit impolite behavior, but to “bite people” is an aggressive behavior beyond simple irritability.

The client's utterance develops into a more detailed accounting of the range of biting that the bird does. At line 7, the client identifies the scope of victims, beginning emphatically with herself ("she bites me"). The fact that the client begins with "she bites me" displays that the grouchiness must indeed be serious—when an animal bites its owner, this is literally biting the hand that feeds it. Having started with the most serious case scenario, the client then adds other examples in a single falling prosodic contour. Beginning with the phrase "and my boyfriend" (line 7), the prosody of the utterance has momentum—there is no phrasal or intonational break between each of the elements. Unlike a listing intonation, a prosodically projectable end is not in sight (although there may be some semantic closure looming as she produces the word "everybody").

To gloss this, the utterance is building out with some vigor when the VT, in the midst of the client's turn constructional unit (Sacks et al., 1974), addresses herself to the bird in terms of voice, gaze, body, and pronominal form (line 9). This is an interruption in the technical sense (Sacks et al., 1974), but one that does not assess the "biting" report; it simply affirms that it has been heard. The talk at line 9 produced in the high, cooing tone characteristic of baby talk is hearable as softly nurturant. Therefore, not only does the VT produce her talk in competition with the client's report, but the very tone of it (as emotionally soft) is in contrast to the client's more vigorous and negative report. Both in tone and in placement, the VT moves to discount the client's complaint but does so by directing herself exclusively to the bird.

By directing the utterance toward the bird, the VT is not only constructing an overhearable report displaying that she has registered the owner's concern, but she also visibly and hearably disrupts the tone and trajectory of the client's complaint. She does not, however, correct the client's misunderstanding of the biting behavior. Instead, she has managed to derail the complaint (possibly displaying impatience), and at the same time, she has acknowledged it. These two accomplishments are realized by the VT through deployment of the animal directed utterance.

COMMON INTERACTIONAL DILEMMAS

In what has preceded, the interactional tasks faced by the participants could likely be found in noninstitutional interactions as well. Although the larger concerns of maintaining positive interpersonal (client) relations or

sustaining expertise are not unique to institutional interactions, they nonetheless do have a particular salience in such settings. In what follows, the concerns may be less institutionally relevant, but again, the presence of animals on the scene provides a mechanism for managing interpersonal interaction. In what follows, the first interactional dilemma described concerns entering a room where one has no particular institutional role to play. The second is about receipting apologies (in this case, when one's professional stalwartness may be at stake).

Entering Into Interaction

Human-human greeting sequences are ubiquitous and routinely managed without much notice. However, there is a tension, particularly when greeting strangers, between civil inattention (Goffman, 1963) and civil interaction. When pets are present in the human scene, people manage this dialectic by talking to the copresent animal as a means for initiating interaction (Robins et al., 1991). In the Robins et al. study of a dog park where newcomers are being incorporated into the local culture, Robins et al. described how pet owners routinely address newcomers' dogs first, people second. This indirection is not simply in the interest of disguising one's interest in another human (if, in fact, there is any interest) but actually manages these moments of tension in which strangers who have no institutional or personal relationship to one another are walking the fine line between inattention and interaction. Each owner's dog becomes a legitimate mechanism for managing human social activity.

In the veterinary clinic, however, staff and clients have jobs to do that in principle should lower barriers to interaction: Staff are in the room to examine, diagnose, and advise; clients are there to receive services and possibly to demonstrate their abilities and worthiness as pet owners. Despite these situated identities and the discourse identities that arise in such institutional settings (Zimmerman, 1998), interactants still work to gain entry (Sacks, 1972) into the activities of the clinic (see Heritage & Sefi, 1992, and Roberts, 1999, for discussions of this phenomenon in other health care situations). Entering an interaction already in progress can be problematic if the newcomer has no explicit preallocated role to play, that is, if they come on the scene "haphazardly" and want to participate in some way.⁷ This is exemplified in Excerpt 10 in which a veterinary TS enters an exam-

ining room but delays saying anything to the people in it; she first speaks to the animal in the room (which is held on a leash by the client).

Whether or not the TS wanted to interact with the people in the room (and it is quite likely she did not, that she was simply interested in the dog), approaching the dog first provides a safe portal for either contingency. Addressing the dog embodies her (apparent) interest in just meeting this dog, but as will become apparent, it also establishes for coparticipants the newcomer's availability for social interaction (whether she's desirous of it or not):

(10) Entering a room

- 1 TS: ↑You are [adorable.↑
 2 VT: [You jess don't see 'em that [much.]
 3 TS: [↑Hi::]
 4 No:: I was like looking going what kind of dog is that.

Once inside the room, the TS addresses an assessment (line 1) to the dog ("You are adorable."), which implicitly accounts for entry into a space otherwise unavailable to her (i.e., she is not scheduled as part of the examining team for this dog). Her assessment is followed by a hearably enthusiastic report from the supervising VT concerning the rarity of the breed (line 2). In response, the student first "greet" the dog (line 3) and then provides a somewhat fuller account for why she has entered the room (line 4). Thus far, the student has addressed her initial remarks to the dog; this provides a physical and topical focus for the interaction with the supervising VT as well as accounts for her bid to enter the space.

Following this exchange, the CL produces a friendly "warning" (Excerpt 11, line 1 following), which fits with the now ongoing focus on the dog. The student responds to this report by again addressing herself to the dog:

(11) Entering a room (continued)

- 1 CL: \$Warning. He's teething.\$.h heh [h e h h e h]
 2 VS: [Oh you are so:]
 3 cute [thou::gh. What's your]na:me.
 4 CL: [\$He's chewing on everything\$ heh heh]
 5 CL: Tristan.
 6 VS: ↑Hi: Tristan:: ↑Hi Tristan.

The client's report in line 1 implicates biting but does not do so in any strong fashion; it is designed as an invitation to laugh or to make light of the situation (Jefferson, 1979). Thus, the client invites the TS to take the warning as nonserious, allowing for continued interaction with the dog. Indeed, the utterance (line 2) is responsive to the warning element but only in that the TS treats it as overlookable. Through deployment of the turn-initial "oh" and the turn-final adverbial "though," the TS treats the prior warning as unnecessary, superfluous, or disregardable—"inapposite" in the sense of irrelevant or out of place. (See also Heritage, 1998, on *oh-prefaced* responses to inquiries wherein the *oh* marks a previous question as inapposite.)

By assessing the dog's cuteness in this way, the content of the talk is responsive to the client's warning (acknowledging it by disposing of it), but the utterance itself is produced with the exaggerated lip rounding and with a pronominal form that characterizes this as talk to the animal. The student thus fulfills an interactional exigency to respond to the warning in some way but does so by dismissing it under the guise of addressing a compliment to the dog.

Following disposal of the warning, the TS "asks the dog" his name (line 3). Whereas the CL has displayed an openness to interacting with the newly arrived TS, the student sidesteps the potential overture and maintains her focus on the dog. (Note that in speaking for the animal [line 5], the handler displays an understanding that it is incumbent on her to respond, similar to sequences in Robins et al., 1991, pp. 8 and 12). Unlike with small children or less than fully competent adults when there might be a slight lag as one waits in case the person *can* respond, this triangle of interaction with the animal is seamless. The TS greets the dog (now using his name) and this "introduction" culminated, the senior technician reports that the owner/client will be entering the veterinary school in the upcoming term (Excerpt 12 following):

(12) Entering a room (continued)

- 1 VT: He's gonna be with us for the next four years. She got into
 2 the vet school this fall.
 3 TS: Excellent. Congratulations.

Note that the report comes in two parts: the first concerning the dog (as he has been the focus of the greeting) and the second concerning the client

(as this provides the account for the dog's presence over the next 4 years.) The TS could perhaps less accountably ignore the second of these reports and thus direct her congratulations to the client. The dog's presence or more precisely, the TS's and client's mutual focus on the dog has ultimately provided the opening for the student to acknowledge the client directly. The newcomer is now fully incorporated into the scene (whether or not she had intended this at the outset.) Generally, animals are thought to facilitate social interaction and entry into spaces in which one is a newcomer; and this is certainly the case in the example shown here. However, it is also shown that even when the newcomer may not intend to get incorporated into the scene, the presence of the animal almost forces such an outcome.

Effacing the Need for Apology

In any setting, people can find themselves apologizing for their own or others' behaviors. Akin to disagreement with self-deprecations (Pomerantz, 1984), denying the need for apology (by treating it as a "no problem" event) is a turn-constructionally (and perhaps socially) preferred activity (Robinson, 2004). In the veterinary clinic where pets can act in an unruly/untrained, antisocial, or even aggressive manner, staff are used to anything from insult (being urinated on) to injury (being bitten). To maintain professionalism and display their clinical toughness, staff generally demonstrate that they are impervious to these happenings.

In Excerpt 13, there are two centers of activity in the exam room: the CL is standing with the supervising VT at the exam table in the center of the room and discussing a discount pet food program; on the floor about 4 ft away, a veterinary TS is restraining a large dog as a senior VS performs an exam of the dog's eyes and ears. At one point, in retracting forcefully from the VS's grasp, the dog accidentally strikes the tech student's face (near her eye) with the hard bone of his skull. Initially, the TS moves to minimize the possible hurt from the dog in terms of her experience of being hit by horses:

(13) Effacing Apology

- 1 TS: Ooh:
 2 VS:
 Oh yalright?
 3 CL: Oh yeah. Sorry:=
 4 TS: =I've been hit by horses.

- 5 CL: Throws his head around a [lot.
 6 TS: [Dogs no problem.

Drawing on her experience with much larger animals, the TS assures the CL that being hit by a dog is a "no problem" situation (line 6). The TS and VS continue examining the dog, and the TS very quietly addresses herself to it, telling the dog that "it's okay." Talk transcribed in italics is in a baby talk register, here predominantly along the dimension of attenuated lip rounding:

(14) Effacing Apology (continued)

- 1 TS: *It's oka:y.* ((to dog))
 2 (0.5)
 3 TS: *Yer just a sma:ll horse.*
 4 VS: (** ***)
 5 TS: *An he hit the bo:ne so,* ((directed at VS who is on the
 6 floor with her and dog.))
 7 VT: I'm gonna take this out [so you can have it. ((addressing CL
 8 at exam table))
 9 CL: [Yeah:: I I'm sorry. Forgot t(h)a
 10 w(h)(h)arn y(h)a ab(h)out that. He likes ta jus [flai:l.
 11 TS: [Oh:: it's:
 12 CL: When he's being held like that.=
 13 TS: =No problem ta me:.
 14 (1.0)
 15 TS: *Is it.*
 16 (2.0) ((petting and holding the dog))
 17 TS: *Nho. Iss no proh:blem.* ((breathy/whispery))
 18 CL: He's good boy.

In line 3, the TS addresses the dog using baby talk and characterizes it as a "small horse." This formulation, considering her prior talk, could imply that the TS sees the hit in the head from the dog's head as a somewhat horse-like maneuver, therefore *somewhat* problematic (in contrast to being hit by dogs that she said earlier is "no problem"). However, the fact that it is produced as baby talk with characteristic attenuated lip rounding mollifies the tone. The injury is thus made excusable (as one would excuse a small child for an inadvertant injury). Although difficult to analyze with great certainty because it is impossible to hear much of what follows the talk in line 3, it is at least observable that the TS (line 5) moves to reassure the VS on the floor with her as she raises a hand to the bone near her eye, quickly

touches it, and then flutters the hand in a kind of brushing off manner. (This gesture follows the trail-off "so," in line 5.) The coordinated talk and non-verbal activity seem to indicate that the dog hit the bone near the eye as opposed to hitting the eye itself and is therefore good news or at least a nonserious event.

In the midst of CL's ongoing interaction with the VT at the examination table in the center of the room, the CL apparently overhears/peripherally sees the TS and turns to her to apologize again (line 9). The student repeats a "no problem" formulation (lines 11–13) and then addresses herself to the dog with a confirming question (line 15), which the TS answers herself in line 17. This process reiterates the stance (as does her nonverbal treatment of the dog) that the dog is exonerated. She has now not only deflected the client's apology as unnecessary but has embodied a stalwart stance by continuing to address the dog gently and interact with it. The apology sequence comes to a close as the CL praises her pet as "a good boy."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this investigation, I set out to answer several questions concerning the function of utterances directed at or said on behalf of animals in a veterinary setting. These utterances were not in the service of the medical activities of the clinic but facilitated social interaction among humans. The underlying assumption was that because pets are treated as "in frame" (i.e., talked to) but "out of frame in terms of [their] capacity to hear and talk" (Goffman, 1974/1986, p. 224), remarks addressed to them likely serve some function for those ratified participants who can and are attending to the communicative act. The beauty of this practice (the participant status conferred on the pet) is that copresent humans can either attend to or accountably ignore remarks addressed to animals. Because the talk is designedly *not* for the copresent humans (i.e., it is grammatically, prosodically, and bodily addressed to the animal), there is little pressure on coparticipants to take up the talk. Only in the case of an information-seeking question to an animal do coparticipants orient to the "toy" dimension of the pet's status: The animal is suddenly thrust out of the frame (or the human dragged into it) because the pet is incapable of verbal response.

Although animals initiate and respond interactively, sometimes initiating with and sometimes responding to vocalization, they are not verbal creatures. Humans exploit this fact to manage their own interpersonal inter-

actions. In this institutional setting, addressing the animal and speaking for it appeared to be in the service of managing professional relations as well. Utilizing the pet's copresence, staff critique client caretaking of the pet, deflate client complaints, palliate client concerns, and maintain their professional stance. Staff also manage more mundane concerns through the pets such as entering into interaction and managing apologies. Participants can deploy these practices of speaking to or for the animal as they move to avoid direct confrontation or to manage more mundane social risks. As Mitchell (2001) pointed out, "what makes talk to dogs and infants similar has everything to do with maintaining interaction" (p. 204). In this analysis, I showed that talk directed to animals can accomplish a variety of tasks beyond those normally associated with human–animal interaction (such as praising, calming, and commands) to include actions that are also designed to manage human social life.

Early in the study of human–animal interaction, the terms "social lubricant" (Mugford & M'Comisky, 1975) and "bonding catalyst" (Corson & Corson, 1981) have been used to describe the role of animals for increasing and facilitating social interaction among humans. Although quantifiable increases in social interaction have been attested to in empirical studies across several populations (Eddy, Hart, & Boltz, 1988; Fick, 1993; Hunt, Hart, & Gomulkiewicz, 1992; Mader, Hart, & Bergin, 1989; Messent, 1983; Mugford, 1980; Rogers, Hart, & Boltz, 1993; Winkler, Fairnie, Gericevich, & Long, 1989), the qualitative dynamics of this "facilitating" function have not been thoroughly explored. This study contributes to an understanding of just what is being facilitated and how.⁸

In terms of the *how* question, it should be noted that baby talk was a common feature in the animal-directed utterances. Although infantile appearance seems to elicit baby talk (Zebrowitz, Brownlow, & Olson, 1992), it is clear that the presence of pets in social settings does so as well. This is widely attested and seems to serve a variety of interpersonal functions (Mitchell, 2001). However, although pitch raising was a prominent feature of much of the talk directed at animals, it was not universally used. Nor should it be viewed as cross-culturally universal (Bernstein Ratner & Pye, 1984). Nonetheless, it does seem to index activities purportedly designed for the animal or designed on the animal's behalf. Other forms of animal-directed talk, utterances spoken for or through the animal, indicate that humans construct their pet companions and pet clients as beings capable of thoughts, feelings, and opinions. So although Mitchell (2001) was probably correct that there is a qualitative difference in people's attitudes toward

infants' and dogs' abilities as conversants, there is nonetheless a tendency for humans to instantiate their pets *as* conversants, and further research is needed on the emotional and cognitive functions that animal-directed utterances may serve. In addition, further investigation of animal responsiveness to human vocal and nonvocal communication is needed to more clearly delineate *literal* "toy status" (objects that are truly incapable of spontaneous action) from those that have *interactional* "toy status" as described by Goffman (1974/1986). A third possibility is anticipated by the work of Laurier, Maze, and Lundin (in press) who outlined the "mindfully *joint actions* [italics added] of animals and humans" in their discussion of the location of mind in the coordinated activities of humans and their dogs walking in a dog park. That study reveals how such joint action has consequences for human interaction.

Over the last 20 years, investigation by researchers in a wide variety of fields has brought attention to the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals (see Beck & Katcher, 1996, for a comprehensive review). The most current research suggested that even the simple presence of fish swimming in fishtanks can positively affect social behaviors and health outcomes of Alzheimer's patients (Edwards & Beck, 2002). Equally important is evidence of increased language production and social interaction among autistic children when animal companions are introduced into the therapy setting (Redefer & Goodman, 1989). That finding suggests that animals can powerfully influence interaction, even among those whose cognitive and/or communication skills are severely compromised. By broadening investigations of social interaction to include the pets people live with, one acknowledges their integral role in the organization of human activities. In this article, the intersection of interaction and institution has been explored in light of the incorporation of an animal's presence in the human scene. Pets are constructed as and may in fact be participants in these and myriad other settings; their role in the coordination of human activity is undeniable.

NOTES

- 1 The use of the terms "animal" and "pet" are used roughly interchangeably here, although clearly they engender "different kinds of expectations ... and sorts of things we accordingly try and do jointly with [them]" (Laurier, Maze, & Lundin, in press.)
- 2 In this article, human-animal interaction is narrowly examined in terms of humans organizing their activities through animals, thus the phrase "ready resource." This stance

objectifies the animal rather than promoting it as subject and therefore diminishes the sense of coordination between humans and animals. That is not my personal belief (that animals are simply resources on the scene), but the concept does help for the moment to delimit the scope of the investigation.

- 3 Findings from the attachment study indicate that there was no significant difference in attachment to dogs versus cats, although females were slightly more attached to their pets than males (based on an independent means *t* test, $p < .001$). Nor was there any significant difference in attachment to exotic versus traditional pets. (In the world of veterinary medicine, any animal other than a cat, dog, or horse is labeled exotic). In other words, the bond to living animals transcends species and is related to human psychology and behavior; the relevance for this study is that one can expect to see humans incorporate animals into their interaction frameworks regardless of species.
- 4 In studies of Alzheimer's patients, "speaking for" the afflicted person is a way of normalizing that person as an interactant (Fontana & Smith, 1989). Pollner and McDonald-Wikler (1985) argued that in speaking for a severely retarded child, family members perpetuated (amongst themselves) "the fiction that [the child] was speaking intelligibly (p. 249). In speaking for animals (as in these excerpts), the functionality is quite different. Animation of a "likely mind" (as in the case of persons intimately familiar with the Alzheimer's patient or the family trying to animate the intentions of retarded child) may be more in the service of validating one's opinion or desire or, as suggested here, simply a device for providing a compassionate voice in the midst of otherwise stressful events.
- 5 Although "frame of engagement" tends to imply a *coorientation* to activity, and birds may not have the same routines of engagement as people do, the term is used here in that the veterinarian displays to copresent humans that his current frame of activity is with the pet.
- 6 The information about avian behaviors was provided to me in an informal post hoc interview subsequent to my analysis of the technician's turn as "interrupting" the client's complaint. Although the information does not change the technical aspects of the analysis, it does provide a correct interpretation for why the technician is cutting short the complaint. Initially, I had thought that perhaps the VT saw the client as irresponsible in handling her pet bird and "cut off" the complaint out of impatience with the client's ineptitude. I was so intrigued by this interpretation that I finally asked the VT to view it with me. She told me that many clients misunderstand this aspect of bird behavior (that birds use their beaks to explore their environment and that "biting" is not uncommon.) She said she was not angry with the client, but that she did see her as "uneducated" in avian husbandry. In either case, the VT clearly disrupts the client's report but does so in a way that does not call attention to the client's lack of education.
- 7 From two different videotaped interactions, there is evidence that those wishing to enter rooms to just observe (such as 1st-year students) knock and are then waved/nodded in by whoever is supervising. So although it is perfectly acceptable for students to walk in and observe once examinations have begun, they only do so "with permission." In this case, the student was not "waved in" as such but was noticed by the VT (perhaps through the glass panel next to the door, but this isn't visible on the videotape) who

points to the dog, indicating she understands that student's desire for entering the room to see the dog.

- 8 With the advent of robot dogs as possible companions for children and the elderly (e.g., work in progress through Purdue University's Center for the Human-Animal Bond and the University of Washington), one wonders if these same phenomena present themselves in those interactions. Do interactants treat the robot as an entity to be defended for its own sake or even spoken for in moments of mishandling or mechanical distress? The current debate over whether robots can replace animals as valuable companions is one that could now be investigated from an interactional standpoint. If it is just a matter of humans drawing on elements in their environment to put to their own uses, then interaction with robot dogs should look much the same. If not, then one might conclude that there is something unique offered by animate creatures and that the replacement of nature with technology will not necessarily engender the same sorts of interactional patterns (and any related psychological effects).

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Integrity in the Airline Cockpit: Embodying Claims About Progress for the Conduct of an Approach Briefing

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Toward the end of every airline flight, the pilots must prepare and agree on a plan for how the final stages of the flight—the descent, approach to the runway, and landing—will proceed, for what it is that they will do and know, as a crew, to bring their plane safely and unremarkably (all going well) to the ground. This plan emerges from a specific cockpit task called an *approach briefing*, which the pilots complete. In this article, I used transcriptions from video recordings of pilots at work on an actual scheduled passenger flight to examine in microdetail processes of talk-in-interaction as pilots conduct an *approach briefing*. My main interest is to show how the *approach briefing* emerges as talk and nontalk activities (e.g., writing, touching displays) are precisely coordinated to constitute a series of embodied claims, by the pilot leading the briefing, about his progress in conducting the various parts of the task. I suggest that this coordination is constitutive of work in the airline cockpit and most likely other sociotechnical work settings. In these settings, it is critical to perform and complete tasks and the talk and nontalk activities required for them in strict sequence, and

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