

Are You My Mother? Cats and Their Relationship to Us, By Stephen Quandt

Copyright © Stephen Quandt, 2021, All Rights Reserved

Email: Stephen@cat-behavior-help.com Web: cat-behavior-help.com Instagram @JennyTheBlindCat

So what is our real relationship with cats and how do they view us? In nature when looking at



cat colonies what we see is that adult cats tend not to meow to each other. They make all sorts of other vocalizations but generally they don't meow, adult to adult. They may caterwaul, chiiter, chirp, yowl, hiss and growl, but meowing seems to be a specific vocalization between kittens and their moms.

Dogs recognize that people aren't dogs and they treat us differently than they treat other dogs. Cats on the other hand seem to think of us as cats, bigger cats, maybe a bit clumsy, but they engage in what are normally cat to cat behaviors with us like raising their tails, rubbing against us (kittens do this to mother cats), grooming us, by purring and by kneading. It's not that cats don't see that we aren't real cats, it's more like they can't adjust their behavior "language" with us. They can't take us out of that box.

As I mentioned earlier, adult cats in nature generally don't meow to each other. But kittens obviously meow to their mothers, and interesting adult cats meow to us. It is for all these reasons that we feel that we are in a mostly maternal relationship with cats. We are all the mothers!



So how does this impact our relationship with cats on a practical level? Not infrequently I get this question, “My cat loves me, but he ignores my boyfriend. What can I do?” My reply is to ask the question I already (generally) know the answer to. “Who feeds the cat, you or the boyfriend?” Invariably, the answer is the girlfriend does all or most of the feeding and this makes sense. Mother cats feed. Cats look to the food provider as another reason why they are the mother. And doesn’t it make sense that we’re going to be more affectionate with the person who feeds us filet mignon every day? Cats often rub against us because they want food. Feed me! And this can also be interpreted as affectionate behavior. So the behavior plan is to put the non-favorite person in charge of meal time, along with scheduled special sessions that incorporate high value treats with petting and some play.

However, cats have 2 primary ways in which they ask us for things, food in particular. Cats who identify more with the kitten-mother relationship ask us for food the way a kitten asks for it, typically meowing, purring, rubbing or crying. But cats who really identify as very confident predators often ask for food *in the way they obtain it, i.e. by hunting for it*. This results in cats who come after us for food, and get food aggressive, either attacking us in extreme cases, or with somewhat milder expressions of behavior like grabbing food off a plate, or opening cabinet doors.



If your cat is acting out with respect to food, please contact me to schedule an appointment so that I can create for you a complete and customized behavior modification.