

Social enrichment strategies to improve the rates of non-vocal interaction within a cat and cat owner relationship.

Name: Adrian Smith

Student Number: 20151881

Introduction

Research on social enrichment strategies for non-vocal interaction in the human-cat relationship has significant implications for feline behaviour and human-animal interaction (Fine, 2019). Playtime, grooming, and training are among the strategies that enhance the bond between humans and cats, improving their emotional and cognitive well-being (Fine, 2019). The social nature of domestic cats and their reliance on non-vocal communication highlights the relevance of studying social enrichment strategies in feline behaviour research (Bradshaw, 2016; Turner *et al.*, 2009). Understanding cats' communication during social enrichment activities informs our knowledge of their social needs and interactions with humans, emphasising the importance of socialisation for their well-being (Bradshaw, 2016).

Aims and Objectives

Aim:

- To identify what social enrichment strategies have an impact on the non-vocal interaction methods used by cats within their relationship with their owner; utilising existing research of how cats communicate and engage with their surroundings, in addition to their perception and reaction to human interaction.

Objectives:

- Critically analyse existing research and theories that discuss enrichment in relation to the human-cat bond and interactions.
- Compare data that has been produced in existing research and literature.
- Construct a critical evaluation based on the research, theories and data.

The Evolution of Feline Traits

The evolution of feline traits has shaped the characteristics and behaviours of cats (Turner *et al.*, 2017). Cats have developed unique features through adaptation, including keen senses, retractable claws, agile bodies, and specialized dental structures (Henderson, 2006). Their evolution as solitary hunters has influenced their communication methods, combining vocalizations and non-vocal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tactile signals (Bradshaw, 2016). Understanding the evolutionary background of feline traits provides insights into their behaviour, communication, and social interactions (Bradshaw, 2016).

The Human-Feline Bond

The human-feline bond is a special relationship influenced by shared experiences, understanding cats' needs and non-verbal cues, socialization, and the environment (Turner *et al.*, 2019; Bradshaw, 2016). Activities like playtime and grooming foster trust and emotional connection (Turner *et al.*, 2019).

Recognizing and responding to cats' emotions and body language strengthens the bond (Hart, 2018). The early socialization of cats is important, as is the availability of resources and positive social interactions in the environment (Haupt, 2010). The owner's behaviour also impacts the bond (Turner *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, factors like the cat's personality, breed, and individual history contribute to the unique dynamics of the human-feline bond (Turner *et al.*, 2019; McCune, 2017).

Non-Vocal Interactions

Feline non-vocal interactions, such as body language, facial expressions, and tactile signals, are crucial for communication and behaviour (Bradshaw, 2016; Hart, 2018). These cues express cats' emotions and intentions and understanding them is vital for a strong human-feline bond and effective communication (Bradshaw, 2016; Hart, 2018). Common non-vocal interactions include kneading, head-bunting, and tail movements, each conveying different messages. Recognizing and responding appropriately to these cues allows humans to better understand cats' needs, emotions, and behaviours, fostering a harmonious relationship.

Social Enrichment and Its Influence

Social enrichment improves feline non-vocal interaction rates in the human-cat relationship (Ellis *et al.*, 2013). Through activities like play, grooming, and training, cats have more opportunities to communicate non-verbally, strengthening the bond (Fine, 2019). This enhances understanding of each other's needs and emotions, fostering a satisfying relationship (Fine, 2019). Social enrichment positively impacts feline behaviour and welfare (Ellis *et al.*, 2013), emphasizing its importance for meaningful human-cat interactions.



(Humphrey *et al.*, 2020)

Cats perform a slow blink sequence as a sign of relaxation, trust, and contentment. This behaviour is believed to be a form of communication that signals a friendly and non-threatening intent towards humans (Bradshaw, 2016).