

Socialization and Problem Solving in Shelter Cats

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Project title: Socialization and Problem Solving in Shelter Cats

Organization: University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Project lead(s): Mary C. Howard

Project completed: 2/28/18

Grant amount: \$500

Initiative: n/a

Project type: basic research

Project Summary: The University of Tennessee studied the relationship between a cat's socialization toward humans and cats' problem-solving ability. According to the Social Intelligence Hypothesis, which states that intelligence evolved due to complex social environments, an animal's social life should result in higher cognitive abilities. The results of this study provide evidence that domestic cats are not only capable of problem-solving, but that their socialization towards humans influences their abilities.

Objective: To study the relationship between socialization and problem-solving in shelter cats

Methods: Forty-six shelter cats from the McKamey Animal Shelter in Chattanooga, Tennessee were assigned one of four personality types identified in the Felineality assessment (ASPCA). Cats who rated low and cats who rated high on "independent" and "gregarious" and valiance scales were included in the study. The problem-solving task, using a novelty apparatus, was administered to each cat once to compare the similarities and differences in their problem-solving abilities based on their assigned personality type.

Results:

- 28% (24 out of 86) cats solved the problem-solving task.
- There was a significant relationship between the cats' assigned personality type(s) and their problem-solving abilities, delay to solve, and hesitancy to approach the apparatus.

Conclusions: These results provide evidence that domestic cats are not only capable of problem-solving, but that their socialization towards, or comfort with, humans influences their abilities. This relationship between personality, or levels of sociability with humans, and problem-solving skills might influence cognitive enrichment in captive animals, help further explain variation in performances within the same species, and identify which displayed behavioral traits could account for differences in performance.

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Keywords: Cats, Problem-Solving, Socialization, Intelligence, Social intelligence, Personality, Felineality, Cognition

Audience: Shelter/rescue, Executive leadership, Veterinary team