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Delay Reduction: How Delay to Reinforcement Affects Choice

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DELAY REDUCTION: HOW DELAY TO REINFORCEMENT AFFECTS CHOICE

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The factors that cause an organism to choose one alternative over another have been an area of extensive research. Choice behavior has been studied on concurrent variable interval schedules. These studies led to the formation of the matching and momentary maximizing hypotheses. These models are limited because they can only account for choices between two simultaneously available alternatives. There are many facets to choice behavior that these hypotheses do not account for. The purpose of the present experiment is to determine how temporal distance to reinforcement affects choice behavior. The delay reduction hypothesis (Fantino & Abarca, 1985) has been proposed to explain choice behavior in a wide variety of situations. According to the delay reduction hypothesis, choice is determined by the length of time until reinforcement. The alternative with the shortest delay until reinforcement is chosen. The present experiment attempts to show the strength of the delay reduction hypothesis. During training rats were exposed to a schedule of reinforcement on which a sequence of lights predicted the relative temporal distance to food. During the experimental phase, rats responded on one bar for delayed food and were given the option to change to another bar which signals more immediate food. Change to the bar that signals immediate reinforcement supports the delay reduction hypothesis.