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Behavioral Contrast in a Zoo Environment

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Poster Presentation P11

BEHAVIORAL CONTRAST IN A ZOO ENVIRONMENT

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The ethical treatment of zoo animals has become increasingly important over the last thirty years. Although many studies have examined means by which to improve zoo conditions, most have not been closely tied to modern learning theory. In the present study, quantitative analysis (a modern approach to learning) is applied to zoo research to examine behavioral contrast in a zoo environment. Data from a previous study in which foraging tubes (tubes that are capped at the ends and filled with food reinforcers) were presented on concurrent schedules to two Malaysian Sun Bears were reanalyzed. While the tubes in the unchanged group maintained the same level of the reinforcer, the tubes in the changed group contained less reinforcer during the contrast phase than during the two baseline phases. Preliminary results favor the theory of behavioral contrast, as the duration of contact with the unchanged tubes increases as an effect of decreased reinforcement in the changed tubes.