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Aggressive Behavior: Learned or Instinct

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Poster Presentation P37

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR: LEARNED OR INSTINCT

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For many years people have argued about whether violent individuals are violent by nature or have been taught to be violent through environments that rewarded such behavior. This study attempted to help determine the role instinct and environmental stimuli each play in causing aggressive behavior between rats competing for food. This was determined by observing whether or not an omission procedure, which ensured that certain rats would never be reinforced for aggressive behavior, had an effect on the amount of aggressive behavior the rats engaged in. There was not a significant difference between the rats in the omission procedure and the rats in the control group in the amount of aggressive behavior they elicited. This would suggest that it was not operant conditioning, but instead possibly instinct or some other innate mechanism, which was the cause of the behavior, if it were not for the fact that the rats in the omission procedure group appeared to be receiving reinforcement for their aggressive behavior through secondary reinforcers.