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Supply, Demand, and Competition on Simple Interval Schedules

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SUPPLY, DEMAND, AND COMPETITION ON SIMPLE INTERVAL SCHEDULES

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Recent studies have shown that the law of supply and demand describes behavior on simple Variable Interval (VI) schedules. When the quantity of reinforcement supplied is large, rats will "pay" less for the reinforcer than when the quantity supplied is small. Last year, two studies examined the effects of social context on the economic behavior of rats on VI schedules. Rats responded on a series of VI schedules differing in reinforcement rate. During half of the sessions, a second rat was placed in the chamber behind a plexiglass barrier. Although the third experiment in the series utilizes the same procedures employed in the earlier studies, there was a significant modification to the plexiglass barrier. As predicted by economic theory, there was an inverse relationship between quantity of reinforcer supplied and the obtained behavioral cost of reinforcement. In addition, the presence of a "competitor" rat altered the relationship between supply and cost.