TITLE: Preschoolers' Strategies Used to Delay Gratification

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Introduction: Delay of gratification is the ability to forego a present reward in order to receive a better future reward. Children's ability to delay gratification is linked to positive outcomes later in life, such as higher academic performance. This project is investigating whether another person's example can help children delay gratification.

Purpose: This poster examines whether seeing a person successfully delay gratification influences the strategies 3- and 4-year-old children use when trying to delay gratification themselves. Our hypothesis is that children who witness a model performing a successful delay strategy will be more likely to generalize and perform new, spontaneous delay strategies.

Method: Children were tasked with waiting to touch a growing pile of stickers. Before waiting, however, children in the experimental group saw an experimenter successfully delay while covering her eyes. In contrast, in control groups, children saw an experimenter delay without covering her eyes or did not see the experimenter delay. Children's use of strategies known to aid in delaying gratification was scored including vocalizations, body movement, and gaze.

Results: In 3-year-old children, the number of stickers earned and the number of strategies used were positively correlated; however, there was no difference in the number of strategies used between the conditions. Data scoring for the 4-year-old children is underway.

Conclusion: The correlation between number of strategies performed and number of stickers earned is in line with previous findings that children are better able to delay gratification if they are instructed to use specific delay strategies. There was no significant difference between the conditions and the performance of strategies. This suggests that the adult's behavior did not lead children to generalize and use novel strategies to help delay on the task. It is possible that 3-year-olds are too young to understand the significance of the adult's behaviors. Data from 4-year-olds will help determine whether older preschoolers can benefit from another's example.