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SENSITIVITY OF CAPTIVE CHIMPANZEES TO INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL INFORMATION DURING FORAGING TASKS

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In a variable environment, a behavior which may have been successful on one day might not result in success on the next. As a result, individuals must learn, individually and/or socially, alternative solutions and adapt to the changing environment in which they live. Two groups of captive chimpanzees, housed at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center (N = 15) and Lincoln Park Zoo (N = 7), were presented with a familiar foraging task during which the exact foraging location yielding a reward changed throughout the study's duration. We predicted that chimpanzees would react quickly to these changes, using both individual and social learning strategies to guide their foraging choices. Our results suggest that in contrast to other findings reported in the literature, chimpanzees will modify a previously learned, successful strategy in order to effectively obtain a food reward. However, chimpanzees sometimes continue to practice outdated and unsuccessful strategies, while ignoring information gained both through individual and social learning. The latter finding may be explained in part by the social dynamics occurring within the groups, or by the nature of the captive environment in which these chimpanzees live.

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