*SELF-STIMULATION AND LEARNING IN AUTISTIC CHILDREN:
PHYSICAL OR FUNCTIONAL INCOMPATIBILITY?*¹

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This study investigated whether an observed inverse relationship between self-stimulation and learning in autistic children is due to a physical inability of the subject to use the same body part for self-stimulation and task responding, or whether self-stimulation "distracts" the subject from task responding. Four actively self-stimulating autistic children were taught two discrimination tasks; one required a response that physically interfered with their self-stimulation; the other did not. Results were: (a) all subjects responded similarly across both tasks; (b) the three subjects with higher mental age scores learned both tasks without external suppression of self-stimulation; and (c) none of the subjects showed an inverse relationship between self-stimulation and learning. The study demonstrated that elimination of self-stimulation is not a necessary prerequisite for the acquisition of a new behavior in all autistic children.

DESCRIPTORS: self-stimulation, discrimination learning, autistic children

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