*A CLASSIFICATION SCHEME OF SOCIAL
CONDITIONS OF REINFORCEMENT
WITHIN GROUP OPERANT SYSTEMS¹*

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Many different reinforcement contingencies are found in group operant systems, such as token economies and point systems. Some systems use group contingencies in which the reinforcement of any one participant may depend on the behavior of some other group member. Other programs are individual, in that participants earn reinforcers dependent only on their own behavior. The various possible arrangements of people and their response requirements are labelled "social conditions of reinforcement" in this paper. Previous attempts at classification have failed to categorize the variety of social conditions of reinforcement. In addition, some conditions that may produce behaviorally different effects have not been separated. The present paper classifies the social conditions of reinforcement found in applied programs in a three-dimensional scheme. The efficacy of the three major dimensions—reinforcing agent, recipient response requirement, and group response requirement—is supported by clinical and research data. The reinforcing agent dimension refers to the person(s) who dispenses reinforcers to group³ members. This major dimension is further subdivided: one or several agents may be either designated or nondesignated. Recipients are the group members who receive reinforcement. This dimension is also subdivided: one or several recipients in a social condition of reinforcement may obtain reinforcers either contingently or noncontingently. The group response requirement is a criterion that must be satisfied before any group participant is eligible for reinforcement. Some systems have no group requirement, and others have a group requirement that must be met by some designated or nondesignated participant(s). Supportive references and examples are given in the explanation of each dimension and subdimension. The behavioral impact of the various categories is emphasized. For all major dimensions, applied implications and research suggestions are discussed. Concluding remarks center on the utility of the present scheme, the classification of operant procedures other than positive reinforcement, and both theoretical and applied issues requiring further study (*e.g.*, the long-term effects of participation in group contingencies).

DESCRIPTORS: operant contingencies, social conditions of reinforcement, group contingencies, classification schemes, behavioral transfer, response maintenance, response acquisition,⁴ generalization

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³The term "group" in this article refers simply to a collection of individuals.

⁴In this paper, "acquisition" refers to change in a targeted behavior resulting from the introduction of a socio-psychological/education intervention. "Maintenance" pertains to the continuation of an already acquired behavior across settings and times other than the training locations/periods. "Transfer" is the spread of effects of a behavioral program to a behavior(s) which does not receive a programmed consequence (*e.g.*, reinforcer).