

STUDENT PAPER WINNER:***ABSTRACT******RESPONSE-CONSEQUENCE CONTINGENCY DISCRIMINABILITY WHEN
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT COMPETE IN CONCURRENT
SCHEDULES***

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Three experiments were conducted to test the qualitative prediction of contingency discriminability theory that any difference in type between the consequences of concurrently available discriminated operants will heighten response-consequence contingency discriminability and increase behavioral sensitivity to those consequences. In each experiment, three human subjects working under two-ply concurrent schedules of variable-cycle money reinforcement completed four experimental conditions in each of two phases. The phases differed in terms of whether the two component schedules employed identical or different types of consequences. In Experiment 1, one phase consisted of concurrent schedules of positive versus positive reinforcement and the other consisted of concurrent schedules of positive versus negative reinforcement (avoidance). All subjects demonstrated steeper matching function slopes in the phase that arranged concurrently available different types of consequences. Experiments 2 and 3 were designed to test the necessity and/or sufficiency of two features that distinguished positive from negative reinforcement in Experiment 1: money gain versus money loss as the establishing operation for reinforcement; and the presentation of feedback after subjects met versus failed to meet the reinforcement contingency. Both features were sufficient, but neither was necessary, to produce a slope effect similar to that seen in Experiment 1. Overall, the results supported contingency discriminability theory. These results are discussed in terms of the potential utility of the present methods to advance further research into the effects of choice-controlling variables other than reinforcement frequency, and in terms of some issues that must be resolved prior to doing so.