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Overcorrection

Rodger K. Bufford

George Fox University, rbufford@georgefox.edu

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Overcorrection. Like extinction, response cost contingency, and time out, overcorrection is a behavioral procedure used to decrease the frequency of an undesired behavior. Overcorrection involves an exaggerated form of making amends or restoring the damages caused by misbehavior. Schreibman, Charlop, and Kurtz (1992) describe overcorrection as a weak or "mild but effective form of punishment [requiring] effortful behavior contingent on the occurrence of inappropriate behavior" (p. 339). For example, a child who runs in the hall may be required to return to the point of the offense and repeatedly walk from there to the desired destination; one who left the milk out may be required to take out the milk and then replace it in the refrigerator several times. In some applications the person is manually guided in the corrective activity if it is not voluntarily performed. Overcorrection makes be-

havioral requirements of the person, whereas time out and most common forms of punishment do not.

Overcorrection has been most commonly used with institutionalized retarded individuals. Overcorrection may be used instead of electric shock in eliminating self-stimulatory and self-injurious behaviors and for aggressive and antisocial behaviors where timeout procedures are not effective, but it is also suited to a variety of behaviors in normal home and school settings.

Olendick (1986) reports overcorrection is highly effective. As with other punishment procedures, overcorrection is most effective when it is used in conjunction with contingent reinforcement for desired behaviors.

The basic ethical concern is the appropriateness of inflicting pain and causing emotional distress. Some psychologists view overcorrection or punishment as cruel and inhumane. Bufford (1981, 1982) argues that when it is appropriately used, punishment procedures are both effective and consistent with Christian beliefs.

Overcorrection that involves manually guided training in an alternative behavior is coercive. This raises ethical problems. There are also practical problems with this form of overcorrection, since it may produce counteraggression. Offering overcorrection as an alternative that the individual could choose in preference to contingent punishment is one way to minimize these problems. Offering community service as an alternative to fines or jail time for violations such as vandalism and littering is a common practice similar to overcorrection.

Overcorrection is a mild punishment procedure involving an exaggerated form of restitution or restoring of the harm done. It is effective, especially when it is used with contingent reinforcement for desired responses, and it can be implemented in ways consistent with Christian beliefs about punishment.

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R. K. BUFFORD

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