

This Week's Citation Classic

CC/NUMBER 39
SEPTEMBER 29, 1980

Kazdin A E & Bootzin R R. The token economy: an evaluative review. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* 5:343-72, 1972.
[Penn State Univ., University Park, PA and Northwestern Univ., IL]

The token economy is a technique widely used in treatment, rehabilitation, and educational settings. The paper reviewed applications for a variety of treatment populations. Problems associated with achieving durable therapeutic changes and with conducting research on token economies are discussed. [The *Science Citation Index*® (SCI)® and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)™ indicate that this paper has been cited over 210 times since 1972.]

Alan E. Kazdin
Department of Psychiatry
Western Psychiatric Institute & Clinic
University of Pittsburgh
School of Medicine
Pittsburgh, PA 15261

July 10, 1980

"While a graduate student in the late 1960s, I worked part-time at a facility for emotionally disturbed and mentally retarded children and adults. My task was to develop treatment programs that would direct adults toward community placement. It appeared that an incentive system, referred to as a *token economy*, might be suitable to this end. A token economy is a reward system where some medium of exchange (e.g., stars, points, tickets), referred to as tokens, are delivered for client behaviors. Tokens can be exchanged for a variety of events (e.g., prizes, privileges) in the way that money can be exchanged in national economies.

"Although the use of tokens had been demonstrated in several studies, much of the information was unpublished. I collected this information and prepared an

overly lengthy paper evaluating the current status of token economies. The paper was prepared while I was a graduate student. Richard Bootzin, the coauthor of the paper and one of my mentors, volunteered to edit the manuscript so that it might be fit for public consumption and publication.

"The bases for the frequent citation of the paper are a matter of surmise. Perhaps significance should be attached to the fact that the paper: was the first to review applications of the token economy across a wide range of treatment populations; encompassed several unpublished papers not widely available; was fortunate to appear in a prominent journal; and was made into a separate monograph. Overall, the paper served as a reference for articles applying the technique or addressing the problems that were likely to be encountered.

"After approximately five years elapsed, the field had expanded tremendously so I wrote a book on the same topic.¹ The token economy had been greatly extended to new populations and research questions and problems addressed in the original article had been illuminated greatly. The book, when compared to the earlier article, provided a much more comprehensive evaluation of the area and its problems. Unfortunately, the book was not very successful and did not capture the attention of those who faithfully cited the original paper. Indeed, if *Current Contents*® develops a 'nonclassics section for noncited texts,' I would expect my book to be a leading contender."

1. Kazdin A E. *The token economy: a review and evaluation*. New York: Plenum Press, 1977. 342 p.