MARITAL OBSERVATIONAL CODING

Cox, M., Heilbron, N., Pressel, A. & Schudlich, T.

This coding system is adapted from the Couples' Interaction Global Coding System presented by Julica, Markman, Johnson, and Van Widenfelt, July 1986, University of Denver.
GENERAL CODING RULES AND GUIDELINES

Coding Unit

1. Ratings are made on a global 9 point scale. Ratings in the low range include 1-3; ratings in the moderate range include 4-6, and ratings in the high range include 7-9.

2. The system is made-up of 10 individual codes, coded for both husband and wife, for a total of 20 individual ratings. These include 1) Problem Solving, 2) Communication Skills, 3) Support Validation, 4) Conflict, 5) Withdrawal, 6) Contempt, 7) Defensiveness, 8) Positive Affect, 9) Negative Affect, and 10) Animation.

3. In addition, there is one dyadic or “couple level” code that is rated once, (11) Negative Reciprocity.

General coding procedure: Take extensive notes on both verbal and nonverbal cues while viewing the interaction. Rather than writing global impressions (e.g., the husband seems angry), record dialogue verbatim, record affect, and keep tallies of behavior cues.

In general, watch the interaction a minimum of 4 times: 1) watch the entire segment once to get a general “feel” for the interaction, 2) view the entire segment focusing on one of the spouse’s behavior, 3) watch the entire segment focusing on the other spouse’s behavior, and 4) view the segment focusing on the couple level codes. Repeat this process until you feel certain of your codes.

Factors to consider in determining ratings:

In making a rating for any individual/couple code several factors need to be taken into account including:

1. The number of different behaviors observed- Individuals who display many of the behavior cues under a given dimension are likely to receive a high rating for that code. However, while you need to take into consideration the specific behavior cues associated with each dimension, making a rating involves more than just tabulating the number of behavior cues you observe. That is, there is both a general definition and specific behavior cues for each dimension, and make sure that you look to the general definition more to guide your coding decision than the specific cues themselves.

2. The frequency, intensity and duration of behaviors are important as well. For example, a person may display only a few behaviors listed for a particular code, but still receive a high score if the behaviors occur repeatedly, seem especially strong or intense, or last a long time.
3. How the individual/couple compares to others in the study- When making coding decisions, you should use the rest of the couples in the study as the group for relative comparison. That is, you are to make your ratings based on how each person or couple compares to the rest of the sample for each code. For example, if you code conflict, you would want to make sure that your rating reflects how conflictual that individual appears to be relative to how conflictual the average individual is in the study. Relatedly, if you have trouble determining a code, you should question whether the person is low (1-3), medium (4-6), or high (7-9) on the coding dimension compared to other people in the study? In this regard, you should find interactions that represent the low and high ends on each coding dimension to use as coding “anchors.”

5. Affect Versus Content Cues:

Some codes are based exclusively on content cues, some on affect cues, and some are a combination of the two. When a code is based only on one “type” of cue (i.e. affect or content), the rating process is somewhat more straightforward than if a mixture of affect and content cues is to be considered. While some people may display many of the affect and content cues, and others may display very few of either of the content or affect cues, some will display mostly one or the other. This last scenario tends to be the most difficult to code. In general, if an individual displays only the affect cues or displays only the content cues associated with the codes, then a ‘6’ is the highest rating possible. The rule is technically a little different for the Support-Validation code, although the principle is the same. This code is divided into speaker and listener codes (because a person can express support either as a listener or as a speaker). Here, if an individual is only supportive while listening or only while speaking, the general rule is that a ‘6’ is the highest possible rating.

6. Remember that an interaction can be both positive and negative.

For example, a couple may be high on conflict, but also display high positive affect. Do not assume that because a individual/couple receives a high rating on a negative dimension, they will receive a low rating on a positive dimension. Although a high score on a negative dimension (e.g., contempt) may increase the likelihood that the couple will receive a low score on a positive dimension (e.g., support/validation), make sure to code each dimension independently.
THE INDIVIDUAL CODES:

Summary of Codes

Individual Codes (Code for Husband and Wife)

1. Problem Solving
2. Communication Skills
3. Support Validation
4. Conflict
5. Withdrawal
6. Contempt
7. Defensiveness (Protective or Entrenched)
8. Positive Affect
9. Negative Affect
10. Animation

Dyadic Code (Couple Code)

1. Negative Reciprocity
DEFINITIONS AND BEHAVIORAL CUES

CONFLICT

General definition: This dimension is globally defined as the level of tension, hostility, dissension, antagonism or negative affect an individual displays. Recall that the conflict code is designed to capture behavior and affect that provoke conflict or encourage argument.

Conflict is described by both affect and content cues.

Behavioral cues:

Examples of Common Affect Cues:

- Face displays tension, nervousness (includes eye contact)
- Body is tense, tight
- Speaks with a negative voice (e.g. impatient, angry, whining, cold, smugness, indifference)
- Escalates negative affect, i.e. reacts with negative affect to own or partner’s negative affect

Examples of Common Content Cues:

- Makes critical comments directed at partner or at partner’s relatives or friends
- Puts down, blames
- Uses sarcasm
- Disagrees more often than agrees with partner
- Negative mindreading (attributes negative feelings, attitudes, beliefs, or motives to partner) - “You always” or “You never” phrases
- Rejects partner’s mindreading
- Comments negatively on partner’s negative behavior
- Complains in response to partner’s complaint (back and forth cross-complaining)

Additional Coding Guidelines (08/04):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little evidence of either the affect or content cues. Also, the low range is characterized by generally agreeable behaviors (e.g., agrees more than disagrees), calm tone of voice, absence of sarcasm, criticism, blaming, and complaining.

- For a 1, there is a complete absence of any such behaviors.
- For a 2, there is one example of either an affect or content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless.
• For a 3, there may be several mild examples of affect or content cues; however, there is no escalation of the conflict and the negative affect is not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, you might see poor eye contact and a tense body, but negativity of voice or escalation of conflict do not characterize the interaction.

**Mid Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as one or two more intense examples.

• For a 4, there are several examples of conflict behaviors that may be present or a particular negative behavior or affect that pervades the interaction.
• For a 5, look for multiple examples of conflict behaviors, but little evidence of escalation (perhaps one or two such exchanges).
• For a 6, tend to see consistent low-level negative comments and some escalation of negative affect, but the individual’s overall tone is not especially angry.

**High Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of both affect and content cues. The high range is differentiated from the midrange by the presence of several examples of intense hostility, dissension, antagonism, tension or negative affect. The behavior and affect of the individual serves to provoke conflict or encourage argument. These behaviors are becoming characteristic of the interaction in the high range.

• For a 7, many of the content cues are present and the individual’s behavior clearly encourages conflict and argument. The difference between 7 and 8 is really a matter of the degree to which the behavior is hostile and characterized by negative affect.
• For an 8 or 9, look for interactions that have a cold, angry affective quality, as well as the majority of the content cues. The code of 9 is reserved for the most hostile and angry affective presentation.
DEFENSIVENESS

General Definition: Defensiveness is an attempt to ward off or protect one’s self from perceived attack. There may be denial of responsibility for the problem, counterblame, or a whine. A typical defensive statement is self-protective and avoidant of blame and responsibility.

In our coding we have found that individual either tend to adopt an “entrenched” (more of an attacking approach) or “protective” style of defensiveness. As a result, in addition to a numerical code, we label the defensive styles a “E” for entrenched or “P” for protective.

Behavioral cues:

Examples of Common Affect Cues.
• Speaks with a negative voice (e.g. whining, impatient)

Examples of Common Content Cues:
• Negative mindreading: negative attribution of motives, feelings, or behaviors to the partner (e.g. “You don’t care about how we live”)
• Denies responsibility for the problem
• Makes a counterblame
• Takes a “guarded” approach to the interaction
• Seems entrenched in his or her own position and thus is unwilling or unable to consider problem solving suggestions from partner
• Speaker is not willing to listen to partner’s statements or suggestions without defending own stance

Additional Coding Guidelines (08/04):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little evidence of either the affect or content cues. Also, the low range is characterized by generally non-defensive behaviors (e.g., accepting, non-blaming tone).
• For a 1, there is a complete absence of any such behaviors.
• For a 2, there is one example of either an affect or content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless.
• For a 3, there may be several mild examples of affect or content cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, you might have a negative of voice or someone expressing a rather entrenched position, but other defensive behaviors do not characterize the interaction.

Mid Range: To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as one or two more intense
examples. Also, individuals who present with defensive behaviors that are not self-protective and are instead predominantly entrenched are likely to be in this range. The high range requires that there is evidence of self-protective defensive behaviors.

- For a 4, there are several examples of defensive behaviors that may be present or a mild defensive tone affect that pervades the interaction. This defensive tone may be presented with humor such that it lacks the negativity seen in higher levels of defensiveness (but it is defensive nonetheless). The person may seem entrenched, not listening to partner, and not taking responsibility for the problem.

- For a 5, look for multiple examples of defensive behaviors, but no evidence of the intense negativity seen at higher levels. Thus the tone is not especially impatient or whining, but the number of defensive comments or defensive tone is notable.

- For a 6, tend to see more consistent defensive comments but the individual’s overall tone is not especially angry or negative.

**High Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of both affect and content cues.

- For a 7, many of the content cues are present and the individual is obviously characterized as defensive. The difference between 7 and 8 is really a matter of the degree to which the behavior is affectively very negative.

- For an 8 or 9, look for interactions that have a negative affective quality, as well as the majority of the content cues. The code of 9 is reserved for the most hostile and angry affective presentation. The code of 9 reflects a person who does not take any responsibility whatsoever. If an individual takes some responsibility, then he or she does not receive a code of 9.
CONTEMPT

General Definition: Contempt is often (but not always) easy to identify in speech and involves any insult, mockery, or sarcasm or derision, of the other person. There is often a definite sense of distance, coldness, and detachment in this category of behavior. Contempt conveys a general lack of respect for the thoughts or feelings of the listener.

Contempt is described by both affect and content cues.

Behavioral cues:

Common Examples of Affect Cues:
- Rolls eyes
- Speaks with a cold voice tone which denotes an extreme lack of respect and regard for other person’s feelings
- Laughs or snorts derisively
- Sighs dramatically to show disapproval or a lack of respect
- Incredulous facial expression

Examples of Common Content Cues:
- Includes disapproval, judgment, derision, disdain, exasperation, mockery, insult or communication that the other person is absurd or incompetent
- Uses sarcasm (makes a statement with a sarcastic tone of voice or makes a statement which appears to be the opposite of their position or intention in the communication)
- Puts partner down in order to make him/her feel inferior
- Character assassination - a global statement of complaint which attributes a negative personality trait to the listener (use words like “always” and “never”)
- Commands partner (“You will do what I say”)

Note: If someone makes contemptuous comments about your partner’s family, your partner is part of the family and it’s contempt. Idea of being contemptuous about person their partner cares about – that’s a pretty masked direct attack.

Additional Coding Guidelines (09/04):

**Low Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see very little evidence of either the affect or content cues. Also, the low range is characterized by generally non-contemptuous behaviors and relatively benign (e.g., “just kidding”, sarcasm) comments, but comments that involve derision, mockery, etc. would fall in Mid or High range. There is no evidence of cold voice.
- For a 1, there is a complete absence of any such behaviors.
- For a 2, there is one example of either an affect or content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless.
• For a 3, there may be several mild examples of content cues; however, these behaviors are not negative. Instead, the behaviors may be characterized by good-natured sarcasm.

**Mid Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see more examples of laughing derisively, sarcastic tone or clearly disdainful, judgmental, or disapproving comments or behaviors (e.g., rolling eyes, laughing with derision at partner’s comments).

• For a 4, there are several examples of contemptuous behaviors that may be present as good-natured kidding or mild criticism of spouse or spouse’s friends or family, but these behaviors are not cold or directly disrespectful. The difference between a 3 and a 4 is the accumulation or pervasiveness of this kind of behavior. Note that these behaviors must be coded even if the partner responds to the comments with laughter.

• For a 5, the presence of any cold or clearly disrespectful comment will put the score at or above the mean. This is true even if the individual only makes one such comment; however, if this comment is a direct personal insult, the code will be in the high range.

• For a 6, tend to see examples of sarcasm that are persistent, as well as the presence of several comments that reflect evidence of disrespect. As such, the difference between a 5 and a 6 is the presence of more than one comment that is made in a clearly disrespectful tone. It may also be the case that a person persists with joking or sarcastic comments that seem to border on clear disrespect, but that do not have the strong negative affect that would put the person in the high range. The difference between a 6 and the codes in the high range is that there is no evidence of clear personal insult and attack, as well as the lack of a particularly negative affective tone.

**High Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of both affect and content cues. The high range captures behaviors that are disrespectful and include direct personal insults or are degrading to the partner (e.g., comments that disparage the person, communicate a lack of respect). With respect to affect cues, we expect to see persistent nonverbal cues, in addition to more direct behaviors.

• For a 7, many of the content cues are present and the individual’s behavior is clearly contemptuous. The difference between 7 and 8 is really a matter of the degree to which the behavior is affectively very negative. This includes nonverbal cues (e.g., rolling eyes repeatedly), laughing derisively, and/or a cold or icy tone of voice.

• For a 8 or 9, look for interactions that have a negative affective quality, as well as the majority of the content cues. The code of 9 is reserved for the most hostile and angry affective presentation.
WITHDRAWAL

General Definition: Withdrawal is defined as an avoidance of the interaction or of the problem discussion in some way. The individual may evade the issue or may seem to “pull him/herself out of” the interaction. They may seem to retreat into a shell, hack off, or try to displace the conversation.

Withdrawal is described by both affect and content cues.

Behavioral cues:

Common Examples of Affect Cues:

- Avoids eye contact while speaking or listening (looks away or down a lot)
- Body turned away from partner
- Increases and maintains physical distance from partner (e.g., changes chair position to create more distance, reclines back chair, tilts chair away)
- Puts a physical barrier between self and partner (e.g., arms akimbo, hands covering part of the face)
- Fidgets with hair, glasses, clothes

Common Examples of Content Cues:

- Gives up the discussion
- “Clams up”
- Displays a low level of communication assertiveness
- Is unresponsive to partner
- Rarely adds new information to discussion
- Displays a low level of self-disclosure

Additional Coding Guidelines (08/04):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little evidence of either the affect or content cues. Also, the low range is characterized by generally behaviors that indicate engagement and responsiveness (e.g., leaning toward the partner, nodding head, good eye contact).

- For a 1, there is a complete absence of any withdrawal behaviors. Consider also that there is likely to be the presence of the opposite behavior (e.g., behaviors that encourage the engagement of the spouse).
- For a 2, there is one example of either an affect or content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless. This code is reserved for mild examples of withdrawal behavior.
- For a 3, there may be several mild examples of affect or content cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, you might
see more than one instance of leaning back or not looking at the partner, or you might see a more persistent form of one of the behaviors.

Mid Range: To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as one or two more intense examples. Also, individuals who present with withdrawal behaviors that do not include giving up the discussion entirely must be coded in the medium range. Overall, the mid range captures behaviors that are not particularly affectively negative (e.g., fidgeting) and the behaviors do not directly communicate a withdrawn stance with the intent to hurt the partner. The high range captures behavior that is evidence of giving up the discussion.

- For a 4, there are several examples of withdrawal behaviors that may be present or an overall mild withdrawn presentation that seems to pervade the interaction. That said, there may also be evidence to the contrary (e.g., leaning in to partner on occasion).
- For a 5, look for multiple examples of withdrawal behaviors or a persistence of one type of withdrawn behavior, but no evidence of the intense negativity seen at higher levels and the person never gives up the discussion. The individual may consistently lack eye contact as a listener for example but yet always stay in the discussion.
- For a 6, tend to see more consistent withdrawal behaviors, and the individual never gives up the discussion. Note that pauses while the individual is clearly thinking are not considered giving up the discussion.

High Range: To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of both affect and content cues. For codes in the high range, we expect to see a lot of pauses (failure to respond to long pauses) and behaviors that encourage engagement are absent. However, note that if pauses are occurring but the person is clearly thinking about the issues, this is not considered withdrawal (i.e., looks pensive with furrowed brow, etc.) and would be considered giving up the discussion.

- For a 7, many of the content cues are present and the individual’s behavior can be characterized as withdrawn. The difference between 7 and 8 is really a matter of the degree to which the behavior is affectively very negative in that the quality of the withdrawn behavior is more hostile In 8 and 9. The person does not give up the discussion entirely, but there is evidence at points during the interaction that there is giving up of the discussion temporarily (e.g., failure to respond to long pauses).
- For a 8 or 9, look for interactions that have a negative affective quality or lack of any affective engagement, as well as the majority of the content cues. The code of 9 is reserved for the most withdrawn presentation and includes individuals who give up the discussion completely.
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

General Definition: Communication Skills is defined by appropriate expressive skills. In rating this dimension, you only attend to the person’s behavior while he/she is speaking.

Communication Skills is described by both affect and content cues.

Behavioral cues:

Common Examples of Affect Cues:

- Has good eye contact while speaking
- Expressive face while speaking (e.g. brow movements)
- Body (head, shoulders, and hips) oriented toward partner while speaking
- Relaxed arms, hand movements accompany statements
- Expressive voice (e.g. variations in rhythm and intonation), regardless of the valence of the emotion

Common Examples of Content Cues:

- Expresses emotions about partner appropriately, regardless of the valence of the emotion
- Expresses emotions about a person other than partner (e.g., relatives, friends) appropriately, regardless of the valence of the emotion
- Displays high self-disclosure appropriately, regardless of the valence of the emotion
- Expresses opinions in a clear and direct manner.
- Is able to exit negative cycle, i.e., reacts positively or neutrally to partner’s negative statement or negative affect
- Summarizes mutual opinion or decision
- Comments about the communication process, i.e., makes statements about the way both partners are interacting
- Asks partner for more information
- Displays appropriate humor, laughs
- Clarification request “Did you mean that we should try to go earlier?”

Additional Coding Guidelines (01/05):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little evidence of either the affect or content cues. Also, the low range may be characterized by either an absence of effective communication skills, or generally ineffective and inappropriate communication skills.
• For a 1, there is a marked absence of most of the affect cues and few if any of the content cues are present when communicating. For instance, there are no examples of self-disclosure and there is a lack of expression of opinion or attempts to clarify another's comment.
• For a 2, there is one example of either an affect or content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless. For instance, the individual may be expressing him or herself but not with the appropriate accompanying affect cues.
• For a 3, there may be several mild examples of affect or content cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, an individual may make clear expressions but without affect cues and little of the content cues. As such, effective and appropriate communication skills do not characterize the interaction.

Mid Range: To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as possibly one or two more obvious, marked examples. This range also captures individuals demonstrate many of the content cues but also some contrary examples. (could range from 4-6).
• For a 4, several examples of effective communication behaviors that may be present and there must be some evidence of the affect cues listed above. That said, the person’s communication is not characterized by the content cues.
• For a 5, look for multiple examples of effective and appropriate communication behaviors and more consistent evidence of the appropriate affect cues.
• For a 6, look for consistent affect cues and the individual’s communication skills may be characterized by the presence of many of the content cues listed. To be above the mean, look for evidence of self-disclosure, good eye contact, and any counter examples of affect or content cues must be minor.

High Range: To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of both affect and content cues. The individual's point of view must be very clear and it is expressed in a genuine way devoid of hidden meanings or 'zingers'. Efforts to summarize mutual decisions are important, and there are no examples of behaviors contrary to the content cues. There should be a consistency in the way the individual responds to his/her partner. The individual takes responsibility for his/her emotions or opinions and expresses them in nonblaming manner (i.e., “I feel sad when...”).
• To receive a 7, an individual has all positive examples of affect and content cues but are fewer and somewhat weaker than would be seen with an 8 or a 9.
• To receive an 8, an individual demonstrates several examples of the content cues.
• To receive a 9, an individual demonstrates many notable examples of several of the content cues.
SUPPORT-VALIDATION

General Definition: Support-validation is defined as appropriate and positive listening skills and speaking skills which convey supportiveness and understanding to the partner. For example, speaking skills which are supportive and validating positively reinforce the partner's preceding statements. Positive reinforcement means that the partner's statements seem to be registered, acknowledged, and encouraged.

Support-Validation is described by affect and content cues.

Behavioral cues:

Examples of Common Listener Affect Cues:

- Is attentive to partner while partner is speaking (e.g. high level of eye-contact)
- Face is responsive to what partner is saying (e.g. head-nod, smile, eyebrow movements)
- Ascent while partner is speaking
- Body relaxed, open (without arms akimbo or fidgeting)
- Body (head, shoulders and hips) oriented toward partner
- Torso leaning toward partner

Examples of Common Speaker Affect Cues: (Note--These are the same as those for Communication Skills)

- Has good eye contact while speaking
- Expressive face while speaking (e.g. brow movements)
- Body (head, shoulder, and hips) oriented toward partner while speaking
- Relaxed arms, hand movements accompany statements
- Expressive voice (e.g. variations in rhythm and intonation)

Examples of Common Speaker Content Cues:

- Expresses warmth, concern, sympathy toward partner
- Positive or neutral mindreading (i.e. attributes thoughts, feelings, or motives that facilitate partner's clarification)
- Accepts partner's mindreading
- Summarizes, paraphrases partner's statements
- Agrees with what partner is saying
- Acknowledges what partner is saying
- Encourages partner
- Flatters, compliments partner
• Minimizes partner's self-deprecating statements

Additional Coding Guidelines (01/05):

**Low Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see very little evidence of either the affect or content cues in both the speaker and listener roles. The low range may be characterized by either an absence of supportive and validating behaviors, as well as by the presence of unsupportive and invalidating behaviors.

- For a 1, there is a marked absence of most of the affect cues and few if any of the content cues are present during the interaction. For instance, there are no examples of head nods or eye contact.
- For a 2, there is one example of either an affect or content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless. For instance, the individual may be oriented toward the partner, but not actively providing support in the form of frequent head nods or supportive comments.
- For a 3, there may be several mild examples of affect or content cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, an individual may make some supportive gestures (e.g., head nodding) but without affect cues and little of the content cues. As such, support and validation do not characterize the interaction.

**Mid Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as possibly one or two more obvious, marked examples. If there are counter examples of the content cues, i.e. clearly invalidating statements, the person cannot be scored above the mean. Counter examples include instances of invalidation or instances where the partner could have been more supportive and validating but fails to do so.

- For a 4, several examples of support and validation that may be present and there may be some evidence of the affect cues listed above such nodding or assenting to show listening. That said, the person's behavior is not characterized by the content cues for this code.
- For a 5, look for multiple examples of supportive and validating behaviors and more consistent evidence of the appropriate affect cues.
- For a 6, look for consistent affect cues and the individual's behavior may be characterized by the presence of several of the content cues listed. To be above the mean, look for evidence of active support behaviors (e.g., encouraging partner, minimizing self-deprecatory statements), and any counter examples of affect or content cues must be minor. For a score above the mean, an individual must demonstrate the affect cues.

**High Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of both affect and strong examples of the content cues. The individual must be clearly supportive of his or her partner. Efforts to validate the partner's experience are present and there are no examples of behaviors contrary to the content cues. Note that the context can be considered in
assigning scores in this range meaning that even when a complaint is being lodged against an individual, he or she acknowledges and validates the complaint rather than responding in anger or frustration.

- To receive a 7, an individual has all positive examples of affect and content cues but are fewer and somewhat weaker than would be seen with an 8 or a 9.
- To receive an 8, an individual demonstrates several examples of the content cues.
- To receive a 9, an individual demonstrates many notable examples of several of the content cues.
PROBLEM SOLVING

General Definition: Problem-Solving is defined as the ability to define a problem (in the relationship) and work toward a mutually satisfactory solution for the problem. This needs to be done in a constructive manner.

Problem-Solving is described only by content cues.

Behavioral cues:

Examples of Common Content Cues:

- Recognizes that a problem exists within the dyad
- Describes the problem positively or neutrally
- Clearly expresses wishes and desired outcome to be reached
- Proposed positive plans or a solution specifically designed to solve the problem (e.g. to acquire a new behavior or increase the frequency of a behavior rather than decrease the frequency of a behavior, such as reducing sport activities)
- Negotiates, compromises
- Keeps the conversation directed toward a solution to the problem
- Makes a commitment to take action to solve the problem
- Makes a generalized or hypothetical plan to solve the problem

Additional Coding Guidelines (01/05):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little recognition that the problem exists or limited ability to articulate an agreed upon problem. Individuals in the low range make little to no constructive progress in problem solving with their partner. Individuals who consistently use their words to actively block their partner's efforts to engage in problem solving would also fall in this range. Individuals who go through a process of problem solving but do so in a very negative manner would also be in the low range.

- To receive a 1, few if any of the content cues are present during the interaction. For instance, individuals may fail to recognize the problem or may not be able to agree on what problem to address in their discussion. No constructive progress is seen.
- To receive a 2, there is one example of a content cue that seems to be an aberration from the rest of the interaction but is present nonetheless. Individuals may be able to identify a problem but do so negatively.
- To receive a 3, there may be several mild examples of content cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. Individuals may be able to identify a problem in a constructive fashion but then cannot move forward to try and solve it. For example, individuals who identify a problem but then become distracted discussing other matters would receive a 3.
Mid Range: To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as possibly one or two more obvious, marked examples. Individuals in the midrange are able to identify problems and begin to address ways to solve them and may generate possible solutions. This range also captures individuals demonstrate many of the content cues but also some contrary examples. Individuals who never propose possible plans or solutions cannot be above the mean. Individuals who come to a mutually satisfactory solution but do not do so in a constructive manner cannot be in the high range.

- To receive a 4, several examples of problem-solving behaviors are present. The individual may be able to identify the problem neutrally or positively and may make a few general or vague statements as to how to solve it. Individuals may be able to respond appropriately to their partner’s problem-solving suggestions but generate few of their own ideas. Individuals may also demonstrate some difficulty in clearly expressing their wishes or desired outcome.

- To receive a 5, look for multiple examples of problem-solving behaviors. Individuals with this score are able to identify the problem positively or neutrally and engage in some degree of problem-focused discussion. The wishes of the individual are known and clearly expressed. There may also be some counter examples of discussion that turns the focus away from problem-solving or is counterproductive for reaching an agreed-upon solution.

- To receive a 6, the individual’s behavior may be characterized by the presence of several of the content cues listed. To be above the mean, look for evidence of active problem-solving statements (e.g., identifying the problem explicitly, suggesting possible solutions) and any counter examples of content cues that appear to derail the move toward a solution must be minor.

High Range: To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of strong examples of the content cues. The individual must be clearly engaging in problem-solving statements and keeping the conversation focused toward a mutual solution. In this range, there are no counter examples of attempts to derail the move toward a solution. The difference between a 7, 8 and 9 is based on the degree to which individuals are able clearly identify the problem, discuss alternatives with their needs and their partners’ needs in mind, and create a workable plan for addressing the problem.

- To receive a 7, the individual actively engages in problem-solving dialogue and keeps the conversation directed toward problem-solving. The individual demonstrates understanding of his or her own position relative to that of the partner in addressing the problem.

- To receive an 8, individuals demonstrate willingness to try proposed solutions. Negotiation and compromise are utilized as tools to reach an agreed upon resolution.

- To receive a 9, an individual demonstrates a range of problem-solving behaviors and articulates concrete solutions for addressing the identified problem. A clear
commitment and plan to work toward a mutually satisfying solution is explicitly stated.
POSITIVE AFFECT

General Definition: Positive affect refers to the emotional tone or quality of the voice, the facial expression, and the position of the body during the interaction. Positive affect codes the degree to which an individual is positive on each of these dimensions.

Positive affect is described only by affect cues.

Positive voice.
- Single or multiple variations in volume, pitch, inflection, rate, and rhythm may combine in different patterns to communicate different emotions. Some descriptors of positive affect expressed with the voice are: affectionate, warm, soft, tender, caring, loving, cheerful, excited, buoyant, bubbly, happy, joyous, satisfied, relieved, empathic, concerned. Chuckling and laughter are also usually coded as positive, unless the context suggests a negative tone (e.g. a sarcastic laugh).

Positive face.
- Different regions of the face such as the forehead, the eyebrows and the eyes, the cheeks and cheekbones, and the lower face and mouth combine to produce different facial expressions. Some of these combinations may express the same positive emotions described in the positive voice section. For example, smiling can be a manifestation of happiness or amusement, and moving the eyebrows while speaking may be a sign of excitement. Also positive is the presence of eye contact, which may be inferred from the orientation of the face toward the partner. The maintenance of good eye contact is a key component of positive face.

Positive body.
- Positive posture means that one's body is relaxed (check for relaxation of the neck and the shoulder, for the wrist suppleness when the arms are moving, and for asymmetrical placement of the limbs). The whole body (head, torso, hips) is oriented toward the partner, and when it moves, it reduces the facial distance between partners. Touching with the hands, knees, feet, etc. is positive, unless it does not appear to be playful.

Additional Coding Guidelines (09/04):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little to no evidence of any of the positive affect cues, either in voice, face, or body. In this range, you might see any number of facial expressions (e.g., impassive face, anger, boredom), an emotional tone or quality of voice that is either neutral or negative, and/or body posture that is tense and not oriented toward the partner.
- For a 1, there is a complete absence of any of the positive affect cues. This does not mean that there is a presence of negative affect cues, in that there may be no evidence of either positive or negative cues. The person does not maintain eye
contact with or remain oriented toward the partner. The emotional tone or quality of the voice is either neutral or negative.

- For a 2, there must be some evidence of eye contact and the body oriented toward the partner at least some of the time.
- For a 3, there may be several mild examples of positive affect cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, you might see more than one instance of sharing a joke, or you might see a more persistent form of one of the behaviors (e.g., relaxed body throughout the interaction). A couple of mild instances of positive voice or positive face combined with orientation or eye contact toward the partner (e.g., laughing, some warmth in the voice) but very infrequent and mild.

**Mid Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as one or two more intense examples. Overall, the mid range captures behaviors that are generally affectively positive (e.g., smiling).

- For a 4, there are several examples of positive affect cues that may be present or an overall mildly positive tone that seems to pervade the interaction. Note that an overall mildly positive tone suggests that the interaction is not characterized by positive affect, but rather that there is some evidence of such a tone (e.g., relaxed body and some eye contact throughout the interaction but little other evidence of positive affect).
- For a 5, look for multiple examples of positive behaviors. It is possible that for a 5, an individual would demonstrate periods of mildly pleasant affect paired with 2-3 instances of more clearly positive face, voice tone, or body.
- For a 6, tend to see more consistent positive affect cues, but the individual does not show the pervasive positive cues that are required for codes in the higher range.

**High Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of all 3 dimensions of affect cues. There must be maintenance of good eye contact, relaxed body, and orientation toward the partner. Note that we are coding the presence of the positive affect cues and the presence of negative affect does not compromise the score on positive affect because these codes are independent.

- For a 7, warm, caring voice is present for most of the interaction. Some relaxation of body, oriented toward partner, good eye contact, generally pleasant face with some smiles and laughter. For a 7, many of the affect cues are present and the individual’s behavior can be characterized as affectively positive. The difference between 7 and 8 is really a matter of the degree to which the behavior is affectively very positive in that the quality of the affective cues is more generally positive in 8 and 9.
- For an 8 or 9, look for interactions that have an overall positive affective quality. The code of 9 is characterized by more active or intense displays of affection,
caring, warmth, happiness, etc. There may be the presence of physical affection
directed toward the partner at this level.
NEGATIVE AFFECT

General Definition: Negative affect refers to the emotional tone or quality of the voice, the facial expression, and the position of the body during the interaction. Negative affect codes the degree to which an individual is negative on each of these dimensions.

Negative affect is described only by affect cues.

Behavioral Cues:

Negative voice.

- Cue words for negative voice are: cold, tense, impatient, clipped, whining, sarcastic, angry, furious, hurt, depressed, accusing, irritated.

Negative face.

- Cue words for a negative face are: frown, sneer, crying, mocking, smirking, disgust, distress, worry, anger, disinterest, contempt, and/or scorn. Lack of eye contact, especially for a long time, is also negative. However, during conversations, a speaker naturally alternates gazing at the listener with gazing away, so observers must determine whether the speaker looks away from the listener longer than he/she looks at him/her. But when a person is listening, any gazing away is negative.

Negative body.

- A negative body is usually tense. It gives an impression of rigidity. The body or parts of the body (shoulder, hips) are oriented away from the partner, and when it moves, it increases the facial distance between partners. Touching that does not appear to be playful is negative. Fidgeting with an object, hair, glasses, or clothing is negative as well.

Additional Coding Guidelines (09/04):

Low Range: To be in this range, we expect to see very little to no evidence of any of the negative affect cues, either in voice, face, or body. In this range, you might see any number of facial expressions (e.g., impassive face, pleasure, excitement), an emotional tone or quality of voice that is either neutral or positive, and/or body posture that is relaxed and lacking tension.

- For a 1, there is a complete absence of any of the negative affect cues. This does not mean that there is a presence of positive affect cues, in that there may be no evidence of either positive or negative cues. The person maintains eye contact with and remains oriented toward the partner throughout the interaction. The emotional tone or quality of the voice is either neutral or positive.
- For a 2, there must be some evidence of very mild tension or lack of eye contact.
- For a 3, there may be several mild examples of negative affect cues; however, these behaviors are not particularly intense or pervasive. For example, you might see more than one instance of frowning or negative voice, or you might see a more
persistent form of one of the behaviors (e.g., tense body throughout the interaction). A couple of mild instances of negative voice or negative face combined with a lack of orientation or eye contact toward the partner (e.g., whining, some coldness in the voice) may be present but is infrequent and mild.

**Mid Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see more mild examples of the behaviors that tend to persist throughout the interaction, as well as one or two more intense examples. Overall, the mid range captures behaviors that are generally affectively negative (e.g., frowning, scowling).

- For a 4, there are several examples of negative affect cues that may be present or an overall mildly negative tone that seems to pervade the interaction. Note that an overall mildly negative tone suggests that the interaction is not characterized by negative affect, but rather that there is some evidence of such a tone (e.g., tense body and some lack of eye contact throughout the interaction but little other evidence of negative affect).
- For a 5, look for multiple examples of negative behaviors. It is possible that for a 5, an individual would demonstrate periods of mildly negative affect paired with 2-3 instances of more clearly negative face, voice tone, or body.
- For a 6, tend to see more consistent negative affect cues, but the individual does not show the pervasive negative cues that are required for codes in the higher range.

**High Range:** To be in this range, we expect to see the presence of all 3 dimensions of affect cues. There must be a lack of good eye contact and a tense body that is not oriented toward the partner. Note that we are coding the presence of the negative affect cues and the presence of positive affect does not compromise the score on negative affect because these codes are independent.

- For a 7, a generally negative voice is present for most of the interaction. Some tension of body, lack of orientation toward partner, poor eye contact, and a generally negative facial expression with some frowning or displeasure may be evident. For a 7, many of the content cues are present and the individual’s behavior can be characterized as affectively negative. The difference between 7 and 8 is really a matter of the degree to which the behavior is affectively very negative in that the quality of the affective cues is more generally negative in 8 and 9.
- For an 8 or 9, look for interactions that have an overall negative affective quality. The code of 9 is characterized by more active or intense displays of negative affect, displeasure, coldness, unhappiness, etc.
ANIMATION

General Definition: This dimension captures how animated and engaged each partner appears to be in the interaction. A lack of animation may reflect boredom, depression, fatigue, detachment, or distraction. Low animation is exhibited by blank, impassive facial expression, flat affect, and lack of variability in voice tone. In contrast, energetic voice tone, variation in speech, and use of hand motions are signs of animation. People can be highly animated in their presentation of either positive or negative affect.

Voice:

Single or multiple variations in volume, pitch, tone, inflection, rate, and rhythm may combine in different patterns and reflect the extent to which the voice has energy versus a flat/m monotone.

Face:

Different regions of the face such as the forehead, the eyebrows and the eyes, the cheeks and cheekbones, and the lower face and mouth combine to produce different facial expressions. Note the extent to which the individual exhibits variations in expressions (either positive or negative) versus a blank, impassive expression. An animated individual has bright eyes (i.e. “fire in her eyes”), has a flexible, alert expression, versus dull eyes and looking blank, impassive.

Body:

The extent to which individual has energy in the body relative to a more inert body. Hand motions, head nods and shakes, movements of the body, particularly moves in or back that accentuate what the person is saying also indicate more animation.

Low Range:

Flatness in voice, face and body. An individual shows low energy in voice, face, and body. There is minimal evidence of animation, i.e. the individual may fidget. This is particularly apparent at times when one may expect more energy. There is no building of energy through the interaction. The rater may get the sense of the person being particularly tired, depressed, or bored. There may the presence of yawning or propping one’s head up or a slouched back posture. Just because an individual yawns, it does not mean they are automatically in the low range for animation but if yawning is part of a set of behaviors that start to typify the interaction then the individual is likely to be in the low range.

- For a 1, the interaction is characterized by a consistent flatness with monotone voice and impassive expression. Consider the extent to which movement is incidental to the interaction. Body movements do not indicate any energy invested in the interaction. There is a sense no real energy is present.
- For a 2, some rare moments of animation in either voice, face or body. These moments are mild examples.
• For a 3, some rare moments of stronger examples of animation or several mild examples of animation in voice, face or body.

Medium Range:

We see some examples of energy in voice, face, and body. This could be someone who demonstrates notable animation in one area (voice, face or body), someone who spends most of the time looking passive but then has bursts of energy, or someone who maintains a moderate level of animation but never shows strong animation. It is not as charged an interaction, either positively or negatively. When they respond, even though there may be times of impassive voice, face or inert body, they also have times when they demonstrate some energy in their response. For example, a person may be yawning but when called upon to respond, they gather more energy as they do. A person may seem tired at points but appears also to be making an effort to keep their energy up. Or for example, a person could show moderate face and voice animation throughout but little movement of the body. To be above the mean, we expect someone to show energy in the body, either through hand movements or shifts in the body for emphasis, i.e. moving forward to accentuate a point as opposed to incidental fidgeting. We also expect individuals above the mean to maintain animation over the course of the interaction or show increasing animation across the interaction.

• For a 4, there may be a mixture of more animated and less animated behavior. For example, the person may have shown some animation at the beginning but seems deflated by the end of the interaction. Or there may be points during which the person shows bouts of moderate animation.

• For a 5, there is more consistent evidence of moderate animation throughout the interaction. There are no examples of strong animation, i.e. strong gestures or body movements, highly variable voice or face. For example, someone who receives a 5 may be very calm in how they speak throughout the interaction and does not appear depressed or tired but also shows no examples of strong animation.

• For a 6, an individual will show some energy in the body, through gesturing and movement of body for accentuation. Individuals who receive a 6 will either maintain a moderate level of animation over the course of the interaction punctuated by rare examples of higher animation or will become increasingly animated as the interaction progresses.

High Range:

To be in the high range, an individual must demonstrate animation in voice, face, and body. The way that the high range differs from the medium range is in the amount of energy in voice, face, and body and in the presence of animation through all three modalities. At the high level we need to see lively, active face, voice, and body by the individual. For example, the individual may show high enthusiasm or urgency in the voice, they may show sparkling eyes or an alert expression in the face. They may show
significant hand gesturing that accentuates points or movements forward or backward that emphasize animation.

- For a 7, an individual will show several examples of high animation in face, voice or body with consistent at least moderate levels of animation in all three.
- For an 8, the individual is showing energy in voice, face, and body. Gestures are apparent but may not be as frequent as individuals who receive a 9. Despite persistent high animation in voice, face and body, the individual may have rare instances of low animation such as an occasional yawn, lack of gesturing or impassive face.
- For a 9, the individual is consistently showing high energy in all three areas for the entire interaction. Statements are frequently accompanied by gestures and animated facial expressions. The voice shows consistent variability. These individuals do not appear to become tired over the course of the interaction.