SO
BC

Science
Of
Behavior
Change

RMICS2

Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System, 2nd Generation

Ver. 2.0.4 September 2015

Richard E. Heyman
Alexandra K. Wojda
Jill F. Hopfield
Gabriel M. Salas

Richard E. Heyman, Ph.D.
Family Translational Research Group
Faculty of Health
New York University
137 East 25th Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10010
212-998-9984
Email: Richard.Heyman@NYU.edu
Homepage www.ftrgroup.org

History (to be updated)

The Marital Interaction Coding System (MICS) was developed in the late 1960s by researchers at the University of Oregon. Gerald Patterson (1982) described how the original Family Interaction Coding System (FICS) was developed: researchers wore gas—mask—looking facemask microphones to narrate the behaviors of families in the home.

During the late 1960s, Patterson and his colleagues Robert L. Weiss and Robert C. Ziller were awarded Contract No. N00014—67—A—0446—003 from the Office of Naval Research to study small group conflict. Graduate students Hyman Hops, Thomas Wills, and Marion Forgatch were instrumental to the development of the first MICS. The original version of the MICS (Hops, Wills, Weiss, & Patterson) was deposited with the National Auxiliary Publication Service in 1972.

The Oregon research group was responsible for much of the early research on Behavioral Marital Therapy, observation of marriages and families, and assessment development. By the mid—1970s, however, the original group split up. Robert L. Weiss stayed at the University of Oregon and has continued refining the MICS. Hyman Hops is now at the Oregon Research Institute in Eugene, OR, where he has developed a derivation of the MICS, the Living in Family Environments (LIFE) coding system. Patterson and Forgatch continue to do observational work at the Oregon Social Learning Center in Eugene, OR, some of which uses modern derivations of the FICS.

The MICS has undergone several revisions. MICS—II (1979) reflected the collaboration of Gayla Margolin and Gary Weider and included some changes in code definitions and usage. MICS—III (1983) reflected the collaboration of Darien Fenn and Kendra Summers. The changes included splitting several codes, refining the way the MICS defined sequences, declaring the primacy of behavior codes in multiple—code situations. The changes are described in detail in Weiss & Summers (1983).

MICS—IV (1989) reflected the collaboration of Richard E. Heyman and J. Mark Eddy. Among other changes, withdrawal and dysphoric attitude were added, and a hierarchy was established to deal with multiple—code situations. The changes are described in detail in Heyman, Weiss & Eddy (1995).

RMICS marks a new chapter in the MICS history. The purpose of the RMICS was two—fold. First, since the 40 MICS codes were analyzed at the category level anyway, we thought it more parsimonious to code at more macro "category" level than to code at the ultra—micro level. Second, we wanted to use a more empirically—sound method for developing our categories. We (Heyman, Eddy, Weiss & Vivian, 1995) initially started with the categories suggested by a factor analysis of all 1,088 couples coded with the MICS over a 5 year period (i.e., while Richard E. Heyman was at the University of Oregon). Dina Vivian had used a somewhat similar marital coding system, the Kategoriensystem fur partnerschaftliche interaction (KPI; Hahlweg, Reisner, Kohli, Vollmer, Schindler, & Revenstorf, 1984). Several ideas were incorporated from the KPI.

We thank Robert L. Weiss for giving us permission to adapt material from the MICS—IV manual. We also thank our coders for helping us make the system clearer.

Richard E. Heyman, Ph.D.
New York University, NY
January, 2015

Hahlweg, K., Reisner, L., Kohli, G., Vollmer, M., Schindler,L., & Revenstorf, D.(1984). Development and validity of a new system to analyze interpersonal: Kategoriensystem fur partnerschaftliche interaction. In K. Hahlweg & N. S. Jacobson (Eds.) Marital interaction: Analysis and modification (pp. 182—198). New York: Guilford Press.

Heyman, R. E., Eddy, J. M., Weiss, R. L., & Vivian, D. (1995). Factor analysis of the Marital Interaction Coding System. *Journal of Family Psychology, 9*, 209-215.

Heyman, R. E., Weiss, R. L., & Eddy, J. M. (1995). Marital Interaction Coding System: Revision and empirical evaluation. *Behavioural Research and Therapy, 33*, 737-746.
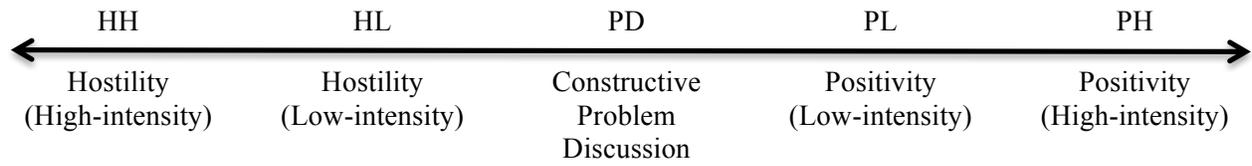
Patterson, G.R. (1982). *Coercive Family Process*. Eugene, OR: Castilia.

Weiss, R. L., & Summers, K. J. (1983). Marital Interaction Coding System—III. In E. E. Filsinger (Ed.) *A sourcebook of marriage and family assessment* (pp. 85—115). Beverly Hills: Sage.

Glossary

Baseline	Normative behavior for a particular couple. The typical "interactional style" of a couple.
Continuum	Scope of RMICS codes, ranging from hostility to positivity; in other words, the range of verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal behaviors that respectively reduce or promote opportunities for problem resolution, support, and bonding within the couple.
Floor	The person who is speaking is said to be "holding the floor."
Floor switch	Change in speaker; speaker gives up the floor to the partner.
Hierarchy	Order of importance of codes. Used to choose most important code when several codeable behaviors are emitted in one interval.
Interval	Basic coding unit. Ends when speaker talks for over 5 seconds.
Listener	Person not holding the floor.
Listener Backchannel	Verbal and nonverbal behaviors that merely indicate the listener is attending to the speaker. These behaviors are not coded directly (since the default listener code is "attention").
Metacommunication	Communication about the communication process.
MICS	Marital Interaction Coding System.
RMICS	Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System
Speaker	Person who has the floor.
Successful Interrupt	The listener breaks into the speaker's conversation and successfully takes the floor.
Types of Content	• Verbal: Meaning of utterances. • Nonverbal: Body and/or facial messages communicated by partners. • Paraverbal: Messages conveyed via voice tone, pitch, and pacing of speech.
Unsuccessful Interrupt	The listener breaks into the speaker's conversation but does not successfully take the floor. Any codeable behavior by the listener is coded, but is recorded as listener behavior.

RMICS2 Codes

HH	HL	PD	PL	PH
Hostility (High-intensity)	Hostility (Low-intensity)	Constructive Problem Discussion	Positivity (Low-intensity)	Positivity (High-intensity)

DY   Dysphoric Affect
OT   Other

RMICS2 vs. RMICS vs. MICS Codes

RMICS 2	RMICS	MICS
HH Hostility (High-intensity)	PA Psychological Abuse HO Hostility DA Distress-Maintaining Attributions WI Withdrawal	Put Down Accept Responsibility Deny Responsibility Mind read Negative Turn Off Negative Voice Tone Criticize Disapprove Disagree w/ Negative Affect Withdrawal
HL Hostility (Low-intensity)	HO Hostility DA Distress-Maintaining Attributions WI Withdrawal	Accept Responsibility Deny Responsibility Mind read Negative Turn Off Negative Voice Tone Criticize Disapprove Disagree w/ Negative Affect Withdrawal
PD Constructive problem discussion	PD Constructive problem discussion RA Relationship-enhancing attributions	Problem Description (Internal) Problem Description (External) Agree Compromise Disagree Positive Solution Negative Solution Accept Responsibility Deny Responsibility
PL Positivity (Low-intensity)	SD Self-Disclosure AC Acceptance RA Relationship-enhancing attributions HM Humor	Paraphrase/Reflection Positive Physical Contact Approve Agree Accept Responsibility Deny Responsibility Mind read Positive Humor Smile Laugh
PH Positivity (High-intensity)	SD Self-Disclosure AC Acceptance RA Relationship-enhancing attributions HM Humor	Paraphrase/Reflection Positive Physical Contact Approve Agree Accept Responsibility Deny Responsibility Mind read Positive Humor Smile Laugh
DY Dysphoric Affect	DY Dysphoric Affect	Dysphoric Affect

OT Other	OT Other	Talk

Hostility (High-Intensity) — HH

Hostility (High-intensity) comprises all intense negative affect as well as statements with profound negative content.

The RMICS2 HH code includes the following:

Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse is "a communication intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent" (Vissing et al., 1991, p. 225).

Context is especially important when coding psychological abuse. The cultural context is one such element: individualistic psychological abuse involves a personal attack on the partner (e.g., belittling, mocking), whereas collectivist psychological abuse involves attacking a cultural group with which the victim closely identifies (e.g., "Your family is a bunch of morons" "I hate Jehovah's Witnesses" [when the partner is a Jehovah's Witness]).

Verbal psychological abuse comprises:
1. Disgust
   o "You make me sick. Why would I want to have sex with you?"
2. Contempt / belittling / mocking
   o "I hate you."
   o "You're a lousy father."
   o Wife: "I'm hurt." Husband: "Aww, you poor thing." (sarcastic)
   o Wife: "I love you and I want to be with you." Husband: [laughs] "You're always like, [mocking voice tone] '*Oh, why can't you be with me? Why can't you be in a relationship with me?*' Well, to hell with that! I don't want to be with you!"
   o Wife: "I've been trying really hard to lose weight." Husband: "No, you haven't. How about I give you a candy bar? Oh, you would *love* that, wouldn't you?"
   o Name-calling: "You're a snake, a thief, and a liar. That's the *truth* about you"; "You're such a bitch."
3. Belligerence: an unequivocal attempt to pick an angry fight with the partner; lets the partner know that they have no way out of the argument.
   o "What are you going do about it? Huh? Huh?"
   o "Anytime you want to have a go at me, I'm ready."
4. Threats
   o "Don't push me. You know what happens when you push my buttons." (said in a threatening manner)
5. Hostile exertion of power: speaker flaunts an unreasonably high level of authority over their partner as well as over the direction of the conversation. S/he domineers the partner's attempts to carry a constructive discussion, appearing both purposefully antagonistic and threatening. In other words, the speaker is on the offensive.
   ▪ "Look, I'm the one who makes the decisions around here. Don't talk back." [HH]
   o Playing "district attorney": any aggressive attempt to apply a high degree of pressure on the partner; usually meant to corner or frighten the partner into resigning to the speaker's persistent accusations.
   ▪ "*Answer* my question, *answer* my question. And don't give me attitude — *answer* my question!"
6. Devaluing / negating partner's opinions or ideas (not simply disagreeing)
   o "That's the stupidest idea ever."
   o "When you tell me your ideas about budgeting, it makes me want to laugh."

8

7. "Gaslighting" partner — Named after the 1944 movie starring Ingrid Bergman, in which her husband tries to make her think she is going crazy. Gaslighting involves statements that the partner's basic instincts or perceptions are wrong, or that the partner couldn't possibly function alone.
   o "What do you mean I beat you up last month? I've never laid a finger on you."
   o "How can you possibly be sad? You have nothing to be sad about."
8. Psychological abuse can also be coded for nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors, such as:
   o glowering
   o physically intimidating (e.g., leaning into partner's physical space, smacking fist into hand)
   o pounding fists
   o talking very quietly or through one's teeth, in a threatening or menacing manner

Blame

1. *Blaming the Other*: High intensity blaming occurs when one individual holds the partner accountable for a negative event, behavior, and/or emotion, without sharing any of the responsibility, and (a) slights the partner's character, or (b) expresses affect in the "anger cluster" (i.e., disgust, contempt, bitterness, high intensity anger).
   a. *Intense indictment of character*: Communicating that there is something fundamentally wrong with the partner; an expression that invalidates the other as a partner and as a person.

   Examples

   1. "Nothing is going to make this relationship better because I'm with someone who is too immature and wants to run around with her friends all the damn time."
      ▪ The speaker attacks his partner's personal qualities (immaturity) and essentially "points the finger" at her tendency to spend time with others. Both act as denunciations of her character.
   2. "People don't want to go out with us. And it's not because the kids were bad — it's because of *you*."
   3. "It was your *betrayal*. Your *betrayal* completely hurt me."
      ▪ The speaker indicts not only the partner's infidelity itself, but colors it with a high-intensity, character-related inference (i.e., betrayal is about the worst form of human dishonesty).
   4. "I don't trust you because [begins to count on fingers] you stole from me, you lied to me, you stole from our child."
      ▪ Each reason for why the speaker does not trust the partner functions as a condemnation of his/her choices, the severity of their actions and by implication, the partner's character. The nonverbal counting-on-fingers amplifies the intensity of the statement.
   5. "We lost getting a house because you went out and bought a fucking motorcycle! *You* lost our chances of getting a house!"
   6. "Maybe I would feel better about myself if you didn't tell me that I'm stupid all the time." (Said with intense bitterness)
   b. *Anger cluster* (i.e., disgust, contempt, bitterness, high intensity anger): paraverbal or nonverbal affective expression that give an usually a high degree of "zip" behind the blaming verbal content.

   Examples

   1. "You never pick up your socks. And you know that it drives me INSANE. Yet, you do it anyway!" [HH]
      o The speaker implies that the partner knowingly does something the speaker finds extremely irritating. Coupled with the strong emphasis placed on the

given negative emotion ("INSANE"), the speaker communicates that the partner is highly blameworthy.
2. "I've never told you this before, but when you don't pick up your socks, it really drives me insane." (spoken in neutral tone) [HL]
    o Here, while a similar sentiment is being expressed as in the preceding example, the speaker calmly reveals for the first time how the partner's inaction negatively affects them. So, this statement becomes a low-level form of blame. What is normally an HH emotion ("drives me INSANE") is tied with a more neutral, problem-discussion (PD) statement ("I've never told you this before"). The sense that the partner knowingly performs a negative action, present in the first example, is absent here, as is explicit anger.
3. "Every time you talk to me that way, it *pisses* me off!" [HH]
4. "Every time you talk to me that way, you know, it pisses me off." (spoken in neutral, calm tone) [HL]

2. *Blaming self (with malicious intent)*: When the speaker ascribes intensely unkind or malicious intent as the reason for his/her prior behavior.

Example

1. H: "I think you made that remark in front of our friends because you'd know I'd be embarrassed." [HL]
   W: "No, I did that to humiliate you." [HH]

Criticism (Intense)

Criticism expresses dislike or disapproval of the partner's behavior. To be coded as HH, the speaker's criticisms must suggest that there is something defective with the partner, often characterized by intensely negative global assessments of the partner's abilities or value as a person. They are often blended with contempt or disgust.

Examples

1. "Of course — you always think about yourself. That's just what you do."
2. "You never do things on your own; you always gotta have somebody up your ass whenever you step outside of the house."
3. "Talking to you is like talking to a little kid. You're always so childish and immature."
4. "You never ever want to do anything to make this relationship better."
5. "You're a deceitful man."

Negative Mindread (High Intensity)

Negative mindreads are negative inferences and assumptions made about the partner's thoughts, beliefs, and intents. HH-level negative mind reads infer extremely harsh judgment by the partner on the self. They often provide a commentary on the speaker's unyielding perception of the partner.

Examples

1. "You think I'm a lousy mother."
2. "Whenever I try to communicate with you, you think it's absolutely ridiculous."
3. "You did that just to spite me."
4. "You could give less than a fuck about me."
5. "You probably wish I were dead."

Global Denigration of Relationship

Global evaluations of the relationship that are highly negative, touch on a fundamental aspect of the relationship, and imply a sense of disdain for the partner, are also coded HH.

Examples

1. "I know what this relationship is about: it's about nothing!"
2. "Why the hell are we still even in this [relationship]?"

Withdrawal (Walling Off/Ignoring)

Withdrawal behaviors deserving of HH include walling off, ignoring, or actively blocking the partner during an interaction. That is, the individual makes an unambiguous effort to deflect the partner's attempts to further the conversation and rejects or ignores engagement.

Generally, withdrawal behaviors involve pulling back from the interaction, walling off the partner, or not listening to the speaker. Withdrawal does not consist of any one behavior, nor is it necessarily signaled by any one, definitive cluster of affective signs or behaviors. Rather, the coder must make a judgment, based on the flow of the conversation and the verbal and nonverbal cues, if someone is withdrawing.

   o Examples:
1. *Using environmental distractors to evade the conversation*: A husband fills out a questionnaire as his wife pleads with him to continue their discussion, or a wife decides to play with her child to purposefully evade answering her husband's questions.
2. *Emphatically expressing a desire to end the conversation*: "I don't want to talk about it anymore!" "Oh God, I'm not going to listen to this." "Sure…you're right…you're right…" (when meant to block further discussion and "shut up" the partner)
3. *Giving the other partner the cold shoulder*: The individual exhibits closed-off body language (e.g., folded arms, moving body away from partner), especially when there is a change from a more open position during a turning point in the conversation.
4. *Extremely defensiveness*: The speaker (a) displays absolute resistance to the partner's line of thought and presents a ceaselessly rigid stance; or (b) tries to force the partner into backing off and to impetuously change the direction of the conversation.
   • H: (regarding topic) "So, if you're saying that I put down [on the questionnaire] that you don't give me enough intimacy, then that must mean you put down that I spend too much money. Oh, okay—" [PD]
   W: (as husband continues to pursue same train of thought) "What are you talking about?! We're done with *that* conversation! I'm not goin' there with you, Dan. NOT goin' there, Dan. NOT goin' there. NOT goin' there." [HH]

Hostility (Low-Intensity) — HL

Hostility (low-intensity) comprises behaviors with mild to medium intensity negative affect and verbal content that is with mild to moderately negative.

Paraverbal and Non-Verbal Behavior

- Voice tone belying anger, irritation, frustration, exasperation
- Sour look
- Rolling eyes
- Sighing deeply (intended as criticism, not depressed affect)
- Wagging finger at partner (but in non-belligerent way)
- Flailing/throwing hands up in the air as a sign of exasperation

Blame

1. *Blaming the Other*: HL-level blame does not carry the same weight, or possess the same likely impact, as that of HH.
    - The speaker's assignment of blame *does not* solely focuses on global and/or stable aspects of the partner's personality and way of being, nor is it coupled with intense negative affect.
    - Instead, the blame centers on the connection between a negative outcome (event/behavior/emotion) and the partner's *behaviors*, typically presented in a factual light. It may also take credit away from the partner for positive outcomes by attributing the partner's behavior to circumstantial/external causes instead of intentional/internally-based ones.
        - Examples:
            1. "When you yelled at me the other day, it hurt my feelings." (spoken in neutral voice tone)
            2. "You've spoiled our children."
            3. "I'm bothered by you not fixing anything around the house."
            4. "You cheating on me completely devastated me." (spoken in neutral voice tone)
            5. "You don't want to go to school because you're chickening out."
            6. "You were being mean on purpose."
            7. "I never have any time to do anything else because I'm always cleaning up after you."
            8. "That's what makes me so upset. It's not the fact that you ask me questions; it's how you ask them that sets me off."
            9. "I get like that because you bring it out of me."
            10. "You ruined your own day."
            11. "It's frustrating that you always get drunk at each and every party we attend."
            12. "You only went to the doctor last week because I forced you to."
            13. W: "I've lost weight."
                H: "That was because of the diabetes."

Note: Often, couples use the term "frustration" to assign blame (see example #11). However, frustration is an emotion that can stem from one of two contrasting perspectives: (1) the anger cluster (negative) or (2) feelings of powerlessness (positive). Thus, HL will not be assigned each time the speaker voices frustration in relation to their partner. Instead, coders need to determine its meaning within context.

When the speaker voices frustration caused by the partner's actions, HL will be coded if the frustration stems from the anger cluster. Such cases are intended to communicate irritation and aggression on the part of the speaker, and fall on the hostile end of the RMICS continuum. On the other hand, if the

frustration is rooted in feelings of powerlessness, PL will be coded. In these moments, the intent is to express a desire to support and help the partner in lieu of offering a criticism. Consider the following:

- "It *irritates* me that you are always so hard on yourself!" [HL]
- "I find it frustrating, at times, that you can be so hard on yourself." [PL]

2. *Blaming self (without implying malicious intent)*
   - When taking responsibility for an event, HL is coded when the speaker admits to negative, but not malicious, intent.
   - HL-level blaming self can include the following (although this list is not exhaustive):
     o Attributing own negative behavior to hostile, but not malicious, intent.
     o Attributing own negative behavior to not considering partner's desires, needs, or feelings.
     o Couple-oriented explanations that denigrate both partners (in a non-facetious or dysphoric manner).
   - In contrast, partner- or couple-focused explanations that are expressed in a non-blameworthy manner, and do not involve hostile intent, will be coded as PD (even the behaviors resulted in negative outcomes).
     o Examples:
       1. "I didn't clean up when you asked me to because I wanted to give you a taste of your own medicine." [HL]
       2. "I didn't clean up when you asked me to because I you to feel the humiliation I do when you bring a guest home to a pigsty." [HH]
       3. "I didn't take out the trash because I didn't feel like it." [PD]
       4. "I know you asked me to take out the trash, but I didn't feel like it." [HL]
       5. "We're broke because we never stick to our budget." [PD]
       6. "We can't afford for Jimmy to play soccer this year because we can't ever seem to get our lives in order." [DY]
       7. "We didn't go anywhere yesterday because we're both idiots! Haha!" [PL]
       8. "We drive each other crazy because we're both assholes." [HL]
       9. "We didn't start cleaning up the house until the dog starting destroying everything." [PD]

Criticism (Mild-to-moderate)

- Disapproval of the partner's behavior without passing extreme judgment on the partner's character or value as a person.
  o Examples:
    1. "The problem is your drinking."
    2. "You're messy."
    3. "You're careless about the money."
    4. "You never listen to me."
    5. "You spoil the kids."
    6. "You complain all the time about everything."
    7. "You have such little patience with me and with the kids."
    8. "You always say, [mocks partner's voice] 'Oh, I was *so happy* until I saw you!'"
- "Kitchen-sinking" — Listing the partner's negative behaviors
  o Examples
    1. "You complain, you never clean up after yourself, you eat like a slob, you never wake up on time…"
    2. "There are always piles of your stuff everywhere in the house — bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, living room."

3. "You complain about everything: your job, your clothes, your food, your boss. Everything."

Commands

Commands create a parent-child environment inconsistent with a relationship of equals.
- o Examples
  1. "Stop it!"
  2. "Don't do that!"
  3. "Shut up."
  4. "Don't look at me that way."

Negative Mindread (Mild-to-moderate)

Such statements fit under the HL realm of the RMICS continuum when they are merely negative, incorrect inferences about the other partner's thoughts and feelings; just as HL-level criticism does not pass judgment on the partner's essence, so do HL-negative mind reads.
- o Examples:
  1. "You don't seem to care."
  2. W: "I know you don't like to do laundry." [HL]
     H: "Not exactly. I like laundry." [PD]
  3. This example is an HL-negative mind-read due to the fact that the wife is incorrectly assuming a preference of her husband's.
  4. "You get off on making me angry."
  5. "I know that you enjoy arguing."
  6. "Don't assume that I don't take responsibility for my actions."

Global Negative Evaluation of Relationship

Unlike HH statements that cast a highly negative light on the relationship, HL will be coded when mundane couple-oriented criticisms go beyond pure problem discussion and function as complaints. These will usually be coupled with affective and/or paraverbal cues that are typically indicative of HL (e.g., irritation, negative voice tone).
- o Examples:
  1. "See? We NEVER communicate with each other!"
     - o If spoken in a neutral voice tone, as in, "We never communicate with one another," without the assumed exasperation of this example, we code PD (Problem Discussion).
  2. "We never do anything to solve our problems. Nothing at all!"
  3. "I really can't believe that we allowed ourselves to get to this point. It's truly ridiculous."
  4. "Whenever we talk, it always turns into an argument."

Unelaborated Disagreement

Disagreements said with negative affect or that do not further the discussion will be coded HL.
- o Examples:
  1. W: "I think we should go to the movies tonight." [PD]
     H: "I don't think we should." [PD]
     W: "Well, I do." [HL]
     H: "Well, I don't." [HL]
  2. H: "We last argued two weeks ago." [PD]
     W: "No, it was months ago." [PD]

14

H: "Two weeks ago." [HL]
W: "Months ago!" [HL]

Withdrawal (Omission-Type)

Withdrawal behaviors coded as HL are qualitatively different than those that are categorized as HH. Although both involve retreating from the conversation, HL-level withdrawal is distinct in that it is more passive and less completely walling off. HL-level withdrawal often involves an individual trying to regulate their emotion (either by seemingly decreasing input from the partner or by decreasing their own affective expression). Thus, HL-level withdrawal looks semi-permeable, with the appearance of some processing of the partner's behavior and some (albeit reduced) behavioral/affective outputs, whereas HH-level withdrawal looks like impermeably shutting out the partner.

- o Examples:
    1. Failure to respond (verbally or nonverbally) to partner's question
        - o W: "So, I think we should really try and figure this out. Things can't continue this way." [PD]
        H: [silent, staring off into space] [HL]
        W: "You're not going to say anything?" [PD]
        H: [continues to stare without saying a word] [HL]
    2. Muscular tenseness and/or rigidity
    3. Facial and verbal indications of holding back emotions
    4. Nonverbal expressions that indicate the listener is not listening: No eye contact, direct but glazed eye contact, looking away from the partner.
    5. A sudden decrease in listener backchannel behaviors

Note: When withdrawal is observed, the individual's behavior typically spans several consecutive intervals. In some instances, the withdrawn person may fleetingly glance at the partner during a single interval and then proceed to return to the withdrawal behavior during the next interval. More often than not, these glances will continue to be coded as HL. Despite the argument that the person is making an attempt to re-engage, a fleeting glance if not enough to indicate engagement (and thus end the coding of HL). The person would need to do more to demonstrate re-engagement (i.e., sustaining eye-contact for longer periods of time, re-engaging verbally).

Other Hostile Behavior

1. Reducing or eliminating the possibility for disagreement/further discussion.
    - o Examples:
        1. H: "You're always throwing things out that are mine, without asking." [HL]
        W: "Well, I'm a neat freak — ([PD], offered as an excuse)—and it's not gonna change." ([HL] ultimately, for her establishment that she is completely unwilling to change her behavior, or leave room for discussion.)
        2. "You knew I was like this when we met. So, now, you're just going to have to figure it out."
2. Asking incredulous/rhetorical questions.

    Examples

    1. "Don't you think *you* stress me out all the time?"
    2. "Oh well, how much weight have *you* lost?"

Note: Coders should consider the baseline interactional style of the couple. For example, loud speaking is a discussion style for some couples rather than a sign of hostility. For these couples, loud talking could be coded as PD. For others, loud speaking is a clear break from their typical style and would likely be

indicative of HL/HH. However, couples that are nasty from the beginning of the interaction should be coded with HL/HH throughout — blatant hostility is not an interactional style

Constructive Problem Discussion/Solution — PD

This code comprises all constructive approaches to discussing or solving problems, including the following MICS codes:

- Problem Description (both Problem Description—Internal & Problem Description—External)
- Constructive solutions. All proposals of constructive plans/contracts to solve problems. The MICS originally defined two solution codes:
  - o Positive Solution — Suggestions for problem resolution that entail increases in the target behavior.
  - o Negative Solution — Suggestions for problem resolution that entail decreases in the target behavior.
- Question — Verbal inquiries toward the partner.
- Agreement — Verbal or nonverbal signs of accord.

Examples

1. "I think we should start saving more money."
2. "You should go out more often."
3. "Let's stop eating out so often."
4. "When are the kids going to camp?"
5. "Tony really has a problem with his drinking."
6. "We're having a hard time with the kids."
7. "I think you're right about that."
8. "I would love it if you could help me with the chores more often."

Note: "Solutions" can also be forms of hostility when they are not offered as constructive ways of mutually resolving the problem. Take, for instance, this statement: "Why don't *you* do all of the housework for a change?" [HL]

Absolving Self of Blame/Excuses

Excuses are attempts to shift blame or responsibility to something else other than the speaker. They are statements that justify, or provide a rationale for, the speaker or couple's behavior in an effort to get oneself "off the hook."

- o Examples:
  1. "I came home late because I was held over at work."
  2. "I can't help it, that's just the way I am."
  3. W: "We were yelling last night, and that made the kids cry." [PD]
     H: "Well, how else could we settle our differences?" [PD]
  4. "We can't buy a house at this time. We can't afford it."
  5. H: "We haven't been intimate with one another as of late, and I really would like for that to change." [PD]
     W: "I'm just so busy with the kids all day long, and when we go to bed, I don't have the energy to do anything else." [PD]
  6. H: "It really frustrates me when you are down on yourself." [PL]
     W: "I only get down on myself because I am looking for you to uplift me and make me feel better." [PL] (For explanation, see Point 4d under PL.)
  7. H: "See? It seems like all we do is yell and scream at one another! We have *no* communication!" [HL]
     W: "Well, we have innate differences. We can't help how we are — we were born this way." [PD]

Additional Notes

1. Defensiveness is an attempt to deflect blame, responsibility, or criticism, underscoring a low-level indignation on the behalf of the speaker. At its core, it functions as a counterattack that implies whatever negative thing being discussed is not the speaker's fault (Coan & Gottman, 2007). When a self-focused explanation fits the above definition and can be perceived as defensiveness, it will be coded as HL. Typically, such statements are characterized by paralinguistic cues that communicate hostility (e.g, aggressive assertions).
   - o Examples:
     1. W: "Why didn't you want to drive there, even though you had the time?" [PD]
        H: "'Cause I didn't want to *do* it — it was out of the *way*!" [HL]
     2. H: "Any time I want to be intimate with you, you push me away." [HL]
        W: "*I can't help it, Bobby*! *I'm tired*!" [HL]
     3. H: "You complain that I never do anything around the house." [HL]
        W: "NO, I never do that." [HL]

2. When the speaker attempts to explain either their own or the couple's non-negative behavior, PL will be coded only when s/he makes an effort to describe their good intentions. All excuses are neutral/non-negative statements. When the speaker provides a mundane reason for their behavior, the statement remains neutral and thus does not lie on the positive end of the RMICS2 continuum. However, when their good intentions are mentioned, the explanation becomes a positive non-negative, making PL an appropriate code.
   - o Examples:
     1. H: "Last week, we didn't have the chance to spend much time together as a couple." [PD]
        W: "Well, that's because we went to Jimmy's soccer game. *That was more important to us, to be there for our son*." [PL]
     2. W: "We didn't have the chance to do our laundry last week, and now everything's a mess." [PD]
        H: "Well, that's because we ran out of quarters." [PD]
        - ▪ In this example, the wife's explanation merely functions as an excuse and neutralizes the negative event (having a mess in the house). No positive intentions are mentioned.

18

Positivity (Low-Intensity) — PL

Positivity (Low-intensity) comprises measured positive affect, and statements with positive content that facilitate low-level bonding within the couple.

The RMICS2 PL code includes the following:

- Self-disclosure
- Accepting responsibility
- Absolving other of blame (low-level support)
- Humor (high warmth/affection)

Self-Disclosure

1. Self-disclosures are statements about the speaker's emotions, wishes, or beliefs that are of **more than minimal personal significance**. These statements should reveal something about the person, including the speaker's mental/emotional/internal states, upbringing, as well as their values, wishes or preferences. Although self-disclosures can relate to the discussion topic at hand (e.g., "Since I was little I wished I could live in a modern house full of glass" [SD]) they are more revealing about the speaker's inner life than a simple PD is ("I'd wish you'd clean the glass in our house more often." [PD]).

2. To determine whether a self-disclosure will be coded PL or PH, coders should ask themselves, "What is its degree of intensity? Does it facilitate low-level or high-level bonding within the couple?"

   - PL will be coded for statements that are often factual and are received by the partner as something they might already know. More often than not, they are relatively concise statements that do not illuminate a profound aspect of the speaker's personality or way of being. Simply put, *they provide minimal insight into the speaker's interior life*.

   Topics that are considered areas for PL/PH self-disclosure include:

   - *The speaker's habits, interests, and personal tendencies (including self-appointed labels)*: "I love tennis"; "I hate having to deal with chatty people"; "I am an addict"; "I am an obsessive cleaner"; "I'm the kind of person who likes to stay at home on Sundays"; "I'm not a coffee person."
   - *Description of past experiences, especially events that occurred during the speaker's childhood*: "As a kid, my parents and I always used to go to church on Sundays"; "My parents taught me how to appreciate others."
   - *Preferences (including sexual preferences), wishes, and needs that reveal something about the person's opinions, beliefs, or values*: "Ever since I was little, I've dreamt of going to Paris"; "I truly wish that we could be closer to one another"; "I want to enjoy more freedom"; "I need to be able to trust my partner"; "I would always rather go to the movies than go bowling."
   - *Expression of emotion*: "I feel very uncomfortable whenever we go to your parents' house"; "Cleaning the house stresses me out"; "I am always nervous when you talk to Tyler."
   - *Universal statements that reveal a personal philosophy, including the speaker's endorsement of things they have heard and/or read*: "You know, I read this morning in a magazine that sex is a form of communication"; "Money is a means to an end"; "I believe that mothers should be home with their children"; "Without trust, there is no relationship."
   - *Personal dogma*: "If someone never gets baptized, they'll never go to church or find God."
   - *"That's just me"*: if not expressed in a defensive manner (HL) or used as an excuse (PD).
   - *Acknowledging significant personal change over time*: "I've had a *really hard time* with this issue before, but I think that I've really gotten better. I've improved"; "I overcame my insecurities by telling myself that I truly am good enough."

- *Providing an extreme hypothetical example that is indicative of character and/or personal values*: "Even if I won the lottery, I would still go to work"; "I would never hit my kids."

3. If the speaker offers a PL/PH self-disclosure about him/herself, or about the partner, and the partner endorses the same statement with anything above a backchannel (i.e., "yeah"), the partner also receives a PL/PH.
    - Examples:
        1. H: "I think it's important for parents to set strict boundaries for their children." [PL]
           W: "Totally, I agree." [PL]
        2. H: "I think you're a sensitive person." [PD] (This is not a PL for the husband because the statement is about his wife.)
           W: "I am." [PL]
        3. W: "I was really angry when we were at your mother's house." [PL]
           H: "Yeah, exactly." [PD]
             - In this instance, the husband's response does not receive a PL because he is not endorsing his wife's thought. He is merely concurring that she was angry.

4. *Exceptions*:
    a. If "should" is used, code as PL if it is a general opinion and code as PD if it is in reference to a concrete and particular situation.
        - Examples:
            1. "I feel I should help Billy with his homework each night." [PD]
            2. "I feel children should respect their parents." [PL]
            3. "We should always be open and honest with one another." [PL]
    b. The word "feel" followed by the word "that" is usually NOT a feeling. Typically, it is an alternative way of expressing the phrase, "I think." However, if "I believe" can be adequately substituted in place of "I feel that," it is usually PL.
    c. Self-disclosures regarding the experimental situation will not be coded as PL. They are not revealing of the speaker's character or personality and ultimately, do not facilitate bonding within the couple.
        - Examples:
            1. "I hate doing this. I really hate being in front of the camera, it makes me so self-conscious." [PD]
            2. "I hate doing this. You made me do this without my consent!" [HL]
                - Despite the self-disclosing content ("hate"), this statement functions as a defensive attack toward the partner.
    d. If a self-disclosure is embedded in the speaker's excuse or explanation of their behavior, PL will be coded. Coders should address the self-revelatory comment and not dismiss it as PD.
        - Examples:
            1. W: "You've gotten better at not thinking that everything is your fault." [PL]
               H: "I guess I used to think that way because *I was always taught that everything was my fault*." [PL]
            2. W: "You spend *so* much time at the firehouse." [HL]
               H: "I can't help it. *Being a firefighter is my calling*." [PL]

Accepting Responsibility

When a person explicitly accepts the responsibility for a past or present problem or behavior that has been previously defined within the conversation, PL will also be coded. Simply agreeing that an event took place is not enough for PL; there must be elaboration. A statement in which a person admits

that s/he is responsible for the behavior may be coded as PL as can a statement in which one person suggests that both partners are responsible for the problem. Apologetic statements are also coded as PL, unless the speaker says something to overtly negate the statement or states their deep regret in a way deserving of PH (see "Accepting Responsibility" under PH). However, qualifying a statement of accepting responsibility with "maybe" turns the statement into PD (see ex. #9). Similarly, qualifying an apology with a "but..." statement implies incomplete acceptance of responsibility, and thus turns the statement into PD (see ex. #11).

- o Examples:
    1. "I do have a drinking problem."
    2. "I was wrong to blame you."
    3. "I shouldn't have yelled at you in front of the kids."
    4. "I always start the fights."
    5. "I shouldn't be so violent."
    6. "Perhaps we're both at fault."
    7. "I'm sorry I made you cry."
    8. "Sorry." (must be *sincere*)
    9. "Yeah, maybe I didn't." [PD]
    10. H: "You always hang up on me." [HL]
        W: "I know I do." [PD]
    11. "I'm sorry I made you cry, but you took what I said the wrong way." (said in neutral voice tone) [PD]

Acceptance

Acceptance comprises facilitative active listening, exploration, positive feedback, and positive physical touch that help the partner feel understood and validated.

1. *Facilitative active listening*: The speaker paraphrases the partner's stated content *in their own words* and does not go above and beyond to interpret their emotional experiences. The paraphrase need not be correct, as long as it appears that a good faith attempt at understanding was being made. In addition, the paraphrase must refer to something stated previously in the conversation and must convey an actual understanding of the partner's position, not just repeating back what the partner says.
    - o Examples:
        1. "So, my untidiness is a real problem to you."
        2. W: "You criticize me." [PD]
           H: "Well, criticize means that I'm telling you what not to do. Is that the way you're trying to say it?" [PL]
           H: "So, the problem is that I tell you what I think is right?" [PL]
        3. W: "I am so overwhelmed with work and all of my responsibilities. I feel so guilty that I can't do everything and help everyone, and *it's driving me to be emotionally tired*." [DY]
           H: "Your guilt is making you feel down about yourself." [PL]
        4. "I understand that you are tired when you come home from work, but *I want to go out on a Friday night*." [PD]
        5. W: "It's tough finding time to be together with the kids around." [PD]
           H: "Yeah, it is tough." [PD]

2. *Exploration*: The speaker explores the partner's thoughts or feelings related to *emotion-laden concerns*, especially by asking questions. Excluded are defensive questions about why the partner was angry at the speaker.
    - o Examples:

1. H: "Sometimes, I think I don't quite have what it takes to be a good professor." [PL]
   W: "How come?" [PL]
2. H: "I am always so nervous around your dad." [PL]
   W: "Why do you feel that way?" [PL]
3. W: "It's hopeless. I…I just don't see any way out of this." [DY]
   H: "What makes you think that?" [PL]
4. "Gosh, why do you have to be so angry?" [HL]

3. *Positive Feedback*: The speaker mildly compliments the partner's *behavior*, or in other words, gives the partner a "pat on the back."
   o Examples:
      1. "I was really stressed out the other day, and when you talked to me over the phone, it helped."
      2. "I love your stories."
      3. "I appreciate the fact that you cleaned the house the other day without me asking you to do so."
      4. "You did a good job raking the leaves in the front yard."
      5. "I like how you have been handling the kids lately."
      6. "It was a good thing for you to do."
      7. "You have gotten better at not thinking everything is your fault."

   Note: Positive feedback that is made in response to a prompt can only be coded as PL/PH as long as the speaker gives a full compliment. "Yeah," "Yeah, I do," or a wishy-washy tone would not qualify for a PL/PH.
   o Examples:
      1. W: "You have to admit, I have been doing better lately, right?" [PD]
         H: "Yeah." [PD]
      2. W: "You have to admit, I have been doing better lately, right?" [PD]
         H: "Yes, you've been doing a good job." [PL]
         H: "Yeah, I have noticed how much time you've been spending with them, and I really appreciate it." [PH]
         ▪ Here, the speaker takes his response a step further by first elaborating on the partner's efforts and then acknowledging her hard work, both of which are deserving of PH.

4. Positive Physical Touch: PL will be awarded for positive physical touch that simply lacks the same degree of intimacy as PH-level physical touch. In comparison to PH-level touch, which is often affectionate and soothing (i.e., kissing, hand-holding, rubbing partner's shoulder reassuringly), PL-level touch will be viewed as a *friendly* gesture meant to temporarily uplift the partner or reinforce the partners' camaraderie. Examples may include a husband reaching over to pat his wife's arm for a few seconds or a couple high-fiving one another.

Absolving Other of Blame (Low-level support)

Unlike HH and HL statements that blame the partner for an event, PL is coded for statements that attempt to lift blame. In acknowledging that the partner is not at fault, the speaker is making an effort to put themselves in the partner's shoes and understand their circumstances. However, such PL utterances are usually not coupled with compliments, offer positive feedback on the partner's behavior, or explain the partner's good intentions; statements that do so are coded as PH. PL-level statements, instead, typically center on acknowledging the partner's *non-negative* intentions.

o Examples:
1. H: "I wasn't confident at all when we put on the show." [PL]
   W: "Well, that's because you hadn't really rehearsed with your leading lady." [PL]
2. W: "I'm sorry that I came home so late last night." [PL]
   H: "You couldn't help it, your boss held you over." [PL]
3. W: "I'm sorry I came home so late last night." [PL]
   H: "I understand that you couldn't come home on time. You were at work. You shouldn't be so down about it; *you are a hard worker and are only looking out for our family*." [PH]

Humor

PL is coded for each turn with a laugh or a smile that is *warm* or *humorous*. There should be contextual cues that there is some inside joke or communication going on that is warm or humorous. Nervous, ironic, or bitter laughter are not coded as PL.

Any statement that is clearly intended to be humorous will be coded PL. A PL is usually made in a lighthearted tone and is almost always accompanied by laughter from the person making the statement. Furthermore, PL statements will often (but not always) evoke laughter from the other. PL is also coded for each turn of a *weak* laugh (i.e., chuckle) or a smile (excluding nervous laughter or smiling).

Humor with even slight undertones of sarcasm (directed at the partner) is coded as HL; sarcastic humor that is mean or hurtful would be coded as HH.

PL comprises the following:
1. Outright jokes of the "one liner" variety.
2. Proposals that are clearly facetious solutions to the problem.
3. Statements that emphasize the humorous aspects of a situation or a problem.
4. Statements that present lighthearted criticism of the other in such a manner that it is also lightly received (e.g., "Oh, you silly goose!" or "You're such a nut").

Note: Awkward/nervous laughter typically happens in the beginning of the interaction when the couple is setting up the conversation, or when they are running out of things to say. It also typically happens when coupled with OT statements.

o Examples
1. "I think it's time to buy that Concord jet we've always dreamed of."
2. "I know, I'll bet if we sold the kids and moved to the moon, we'd get some privacy."
3. "We were so drunk that we didn't know if we were lost or if the neighbor repainted the house!"
4. "Don't worry about who'll cook; we'll just eat out every night!" (said in a joking manner)
5. "Let's shave our heads and sell flowers at the airport for extra income."
6. "Yes! Next weekend scheduling conflict: resolved! [couple high fives each other]"

Additional Notes

Other behaviors that will be coded as PL are
1. Sincere promises of future behavior:
   o Examples:
   1. "I've messed up a lot in the past. Like, I've lied to you, I've stolen from you, I've hurt you in many different ways. *I'm trying to get past that, I'm trying to move on, become a different person, and start a new life*."

2. "I'll try and do better. *I really will*."

2. *Low-intensity statements that comment on positive aspects of the couple's relationship*: To receive a PL, the speaker does not expand to present a deep understanding of this aspect or reveal how it shapes the relationship. That is, the speaker's comment is succinct and simply lacks the profundity of PH.
   - o Examples:
     1. "We respect one another." [PL]
     2. "I like the fact that we can laugh together." [PL]
     3. "We work out our problems together — like a team." [PL]
     4. "I like the fact that we work in the same field — you as a medical student and me as a paramedic." [PD]
        - ▪ This is not coded as PL since the comment is in relation to their respective occupations and not the relationship.

3. *Supportive statements and/or questions that serve to lend the partner a "helping hand," or give the partner credit*:
   - o Examples:
     1. "How can I help you let go of your guilt?"
     2. "What can I do to make you feel better?"
     3. "When you make decisions, I know that you take my feelings into consideration — I know you do."
     4. "I completely understand where you are coming from."

Positivity (High-Intensity) — PH

Positivity (High-intensity) comprises all intense positive affect, and statements with positive content that facilitate high-level bonding within the couple.

The RMICS2 PH code includes

- Self-disclosure
- Accepting responsibility
- Acceptance
- Absolving other of blame (high-level support)
- Humor (high warmth/affection)

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosures deserving of PH provide a "window" into the speaker's "soul." Such statements are often deeply profound, and serve to communicate fundamental aspects of the speaker's way of being. These may include, but are not limited to, a discussion of pivotal moments that have greatly influenced the speaker's life.

Moreover, PH-level self-disclosures are received by the partner as new information — as though the speaker were letting the partner know, "I have never said this to anyone before…" That is, the speaker seizes the opportunity to truly open up to the partner, their words essentially bringing the two individuals together in a closer bond.

Also coded as PH are positive statements that are highly revelatory of the speaker's complimentary view of the relationship.

- Examples:
  1. W: "Why are you so hard on yourself?"
     H: "Well, my father used to be in the army, and as a kid, he was relatively tough on me. I guess I have carried his disciplinary ways with me throughout my life. I always think of the standard he set for me, and have allowed it to govern the way I live my life. It even affects the way I interact with people and how driven I am. I just want to be the best and always make him proud." [PH]
  2. "I love the way we back each other up."
  3. "I love the way we complete one another."
  4. "We are meant to be together."
  5. "I love that we both have such a strong attraction for one another. Even when we first met, there was that instant magnetism between us. And then, it was made even stronger when we had our first conversations and realized that we have so much in common, and so much to talk about, and so many ideas to share with one another."
  6. "I feel as though I grew up too soon."
  7. "I am threatened by women who are more attractive than me."

Accepting Responsibility

As highlighted under PL, speakers that express deep remorse while accepting responsibility for an event or behavior will be coded as PH. They do not simply apologize and move on to discuss other matters. Rather, they talk at some length, and with great sincerity, about the regret they feel. Heartfelt promises of future behavior that are indicative of the speaker's profound determination to make things right will also fall under the PH realm of the RMICS2 continuum.

- Examples:
  1. "I can't believe that I hurt you the way I did. I am truly and deeply sorry for the pain that I caused. I should have never done that to you, and should have never

25

left you when you needed me the most. I know I can't take back what I did, but I
want to make it up to you."

2. "Whether it takes one week or ten years, I'm going to be here to earn your trust
back, a little at a time."

Acceptance

To code PH, the speaker should exhibit joining, active listening skills, empathizing, providing the
positive feedback, or offering positive physical touch.

1. *Joining Active Listening/Empathy*: The speaker must make an attempt to put him/herself in the
partner's place so that s/he can comprehend the other's feelings and emotions better. Whereas PL-
acceptance is associated with paraphrasing or summarizing the *content* of the partner's turns, PH-
acceptance involves the speaker's interpretation of the partner's *emotional experience*. S/he reflects
the partner's feelings (voicing what you thought the partner's underlying feelings were), and
expresses caring, concern, or understanding of the partner's experience.

Also included are the partner's attempts to relate to, or identify with, the partner's struggles.
This might be achieved by providing self-revelatory examples that create empathic parallels between
the speaker and the partner's experiences. Clumsy attempts that thwart the speaker's empathic intent
will be coded as PL.

- o Examples:
    1. "I can imagine that you would be sad now."
    2. W: (cries silently) [DY]
    3. H: "I see this conversation is upsetting to you." [PH]
    4. "I totally understand that this is not easy for you."
    5. "I can only imagine what that must be like."
    6. W: "And the kids — they drive me crazy with their yelling, and screaming, and
        asking questions, and it's just…I don't know." [PD]
    7. H: "It's very stressful dealing with them." [PH]
    8. W: "I called your mother yesterday. She said that she still won't be able to make
        it to our Thanksgiving dinner." [PD]
    9. H: "It must have been hard to hear that. I know how much you wanted her to
        come over." [PH]
    10. H: (topic: wife struggles with low self-esteem and has a difficult time accepting
        compliments) "I understand. This is almost apples and oranges, but it's kind of
        the same realm - my [guitar] playing. I feel like, when I play and somebody gives
        me a compliment, I'm like, 'Yeah, right! I'm horrible.' And I'll just make
        excuses - 'Oh, I'm still learning' - never just accept the compliment… It's the
        same thing with you, and [my situation] is not even as deep as what's driving
        [yours]." [PH]
        - ▪ Here, the husband makes an effort to "connect the dots" and relate his
          own experiences to those of his wife. He especially does so by bringing
          the connection full-circle at the end of his floor ("it's the same thing with
          you") without forcing parallels ("This is almost apples and oranges…
          My situation is not even as deep as what's driving yours."). Ultimately, it
          is a successful attempt at communicating, "I understand your inner
          conflict. I know what you're going through."
    11. H: (topic: same as preceding example) "Oh yeah! It's the same thing with me
        and my guitar playing. Someone pays me a compliment, and I'm like, 'Get outta
        here! I'm so bad at this!'" [PL]

- Despite the empathic intent, this attempt is considered untactful because it is purely self-focused and does not possess the same finesse as the former example.

2. *Positive Feedback*: While PL-level compliments focus on less impactful *behaviors*, PH-level compliments comment on the *partner's essence and personal characteristics*. For a behavior-based compliment to be coded as PH, affect and delivery matter. If the speaker ups the impact of the partner's behaviors, states the strong positive impact the partner's behaviors have had on them, or talks in a loving and caring tone, then PH is apt.

    o Examples:
      1. "I think you're hilarious." [PH] vs. "I really like your jokes!" [PL]
      2. "You're just so attractive and so beautiful. I can't take my eyes off of you whenever you walk into the room."
      3. "It really helps when you have married the right person."
      4. "I appreciate that you are so kind and attentive."
      5. "You're a good guy."
      6. "You're the best person I know."
      7. "I mean it — you're such a hard worker."
      8. "You did a *fantastic* job re-painting the outside of the house!"
      9. W: "The love that we have for one another feels good." [PH]
         H: "*Yes!* It *does* feel good. *Thinking* about you feels good. Giving you a *call* feels good. Receiving an *email* from you feels good. Sending you a *letter* feels good. *Everything we do together feels good*." [PH]
      10. "You buying chicken soup for me the other day was simply the sweetest thing!"
      11. "When you did the laundry last night, I just couldn't believe it. *It truly made my day*."
      12. "You went out and bought me flowers the other day. That was nice." [PL]
          - The speaker here simply gives the partner credit for their affectionate gesture without stating any positive impact, thus making this statement one of low-intensity.
      13. "I love how you are opening me up to the idea of spirituality. Not God and religion, but just being in tune with myself and the world. I really like how you contribute that to me." [PH]
      14. "I was so stressed out the other day, and when we talked over the phone, you really and truly *listened deeply* to all of my problems." [PH]
          - The language used in this example is of note. Specifically, the strong positive effect is not overtly expressed, as the speaker omits whether the partner's actions had a direct impact on them (i.e., "You listened deeply and it really made me feel better"). However, because the speaker makes the partner's behavior extremely significant (especially in using the word "deeply"), the strong impact is implied. Thus, PH is appropriate.
      15. W: "I love you." [PH]
          H: "Love you, too." [PH]
          - Both responses will be coded as PH, unless there are paraverbal or nonverbal cues that severely undercut the meaning behind the speaker's statement of affection.

2. *Positive Physical Touch*: This includes behaviors such as holding the partner's hand, kissing, hugging, or rubbing the partner's shoulder reassuringly. PH is given for the initiation of positive physical contact and for the initiation of active reciprocation. To get another PH, the physical contact must be broken for at least 10 seconds before re-initiation.

Absolving Other of Blame (High-level support)

As indicated under PL, statements that attempt to lift blame will be coded as PH when the speaker also: (1) elaborates to explain the partner's *good, positive* intentions, (2) compliments the partner, (3) offers support in a way that is comforting and soothing, or (4) identifies with the partner's struggles in a tactful manner.

- o Examples:
    1. H: "I can't believe that I caved and smoked that cigarette last week. I promised that I would no longer smoke. I'm so ashamed of myself." [DY]
       W: "Well, it's understandable, you were really stressed out. But don't let it get you down — you have been doing so well for so long." [PH]
    2. W: "I screamed at Johnny the other day. I couldn't control myself." [PD]
       H: "He can be a handful sometimes, being so hyper and excitable. So, I can see why you would react that way. Regardless, you are always there for him when he needs you, and you are so caring and doting. Yelling at him one time isn't the worst thing in the world." [PH]
    3. H: "I got so upset at myself for not waking up early this morning." [PD]
       W: "It's okay. You came home late last night. You work hard, and therefore, you can sleep late." [PH]
    4. H: "I got so upset at myself for not waking up early this morning." [PL]
       W: "You came home late last night. Don't worry about it." [PL]
        - ▪ In this example, the wife offers a positive, understanding response, effectively removing the guilt the partner expresses.
    5. W: "I didn't make it to work on time this morning." [PD]
       H: "You had no idea that the trains were not running on schedule! Even so, I know how much it kills you not to arrive somewhere on time." [PH]
        - ▪ In this example, the husband starts by "excusing" his wife, citing an external and uncontrollable reason for his wife's tardiness. He offers understanding and support. Unlike example 4, however, he goes further, demonstrating an unprovoked and empathic knowledge of his wife's specific emotions. In doing so, he is not only removing his wife's guilt, but also validating her by emphasizing his consideration of her particular anxieties.

Humor (High Warmth/Affection)

PH-level humor will comprise of warm, affectionate moments shared between the partners. Most often, this is characterized by the couple laughing heartily in unison. There is a sense of unity between partners felt during these PH-humor moments; whether the partners are laughing at something couple-oriented, or external, whether relevant to the topic at hand or "silly," PH-level humor is demonstrative of a couple enjoying a positive and bonding moment together.

However, coders should note that high-intensity laughter need not always be harmonious to award PH. Since both partners are to be coded as independent channels, PH-laughter for one partner can sometimes be paired with any other code along the continuum for the opposite partner.

- o Examples:
    1. W: "You flirt with waitresses and given them extra tips. You *always* do that when we go out; it's annoying!" [HL]
       H: [nearly falls out of his chair, laughing hysterically at his wife's criticisms] [PH]
    2. H: [overcome with laughter while speaking] "I'd really like to have more sex with you!" [PH]

28

W: [laughs loudly in response to husband introducing the topic of the conversation; then –] "EW!" [HH]

Dysphoric Affect — DY

Dysphoric Affect describes sad or depressed expressed emotional states.

Any of the following four conditions should be coded as DY:
- Self-Complaints: Complaints about physical or psychological problems or non-angry, negative emotional states (e.g. anxiety, fear, depression).
  - "My back has been acting up, so we need to find another solution so that the lawn gets mowed." [PD]
  - "My back has been acting up and it has changed the way that I look at everything." [PL]
  - "I'm useless. I can't even mow the lawn anymore." [DY]
  - "I'm always in so much pain that I never leave the house. I can't even remember what it was like to go out and have fun." [DY]
- Degrading/derogatory self-evaluations
  - "I look at myself in the mirror and all I see is an ugly woman staring back at me." [DY]
  - "I don't like my hair color."(spoken in neutral tone) [PD] vs. "I don't like the way I look." [DY]
- Hopelessness and helplessness
  - "I don't even know if it's worth fighting for this relationship anymore." (expressed sadly) [DY]
  - "No matter what I do, I will always feel poorly about myself." [DY]
- Dysphoric (Sad) Affect: communicating sadness, despondency, or depression. Crying and tearfulness are included in DY. Persons who communicate dysphoric affect may show signs of sadness or distress by speaking in a flat and/or slow tone, becoming tearful, or verbally expressing their sadness.

Note: DY can be given even in the absence of sad affect, as long as the statement(s) factually reveals a state of despondency, insecurity, defeat, worthlessness, or helplessness. Take, for instance, the following statement spoken devoid of any sadness: "I just can't help but feel so poorly about myself."

Additional Notes

1. Where does DY fall along with HH-PH spectrum?
   a. DY is not a trump code. Therefore, its place on the RMICS2 continuum depends on the predominant emotion expressed within a single interval. Frequently, speakers blend dysphoric affect with verbal and paraverbal cues indicative of other codes. In these cases, the high-intensity codes (HH and PH) will typically trump DY, as the potent verbal content clearly underscores a non-dysphoric message.
   b. However, for intervals that present a combination of DY and the low-intensity codes (HL /PD/PL), coders need to make a judgment based on the interplay of information communicated by the nonverbal and verbal/paraverbal channels. If the nonverbal DY cues (e.g., crying or sad facial expression) are presented with contrasting verbal/paraverbal cues highlighting the speaker's attempts to regroup, a non-DY code will be given (PD or PL). If the nonverbal DY cues are presented with mild hostile affect/verbal content, HL will be given. Consider the following:
      - Wife is crying while looking at her partner, subtly shaking her head in disapproval. [DY]
      - Wife is crying while looking at her partner, subtly shaking her head in disapproval. She then says, "I *can't believe* you would do something like that to me." [HL]

- Wife wipes away tears, and speaks with a catch in her throat: "…And I see how well you're doing. I can see that you're really trying, and making an effort to do better." [PL]

2. An attribution that is self-derogatory statement is coded as a DY. For example, "We can't afford to send the kids to camp because I am too stupid to get a good job" (said with sad voice tone).

3. Adjectives that describe DY include the following:

dejected | melancholy
depressed | morose
despondent | discouraged
sad | sulky
downhearted | sullen
downtrodden | tearful

4. Vocal cues include the following:
   a. slow pace of speech
   b. low, monotone voice
   c. cracked voice
   d. whiny voice tone

5. Bodily nonverbal cues include the following:
   a. heavy sighing
   b. low activity rate (e.g., sitting on a couch staring, extremely slow but fluid movements while completing an action)
   c. appears to be extremely tired or listless

6. If one partner has stopped crying but has yet to compose themselves, DY floors can be inferred if the contextual cues and flow of the conversation reflect a continuity of sad affect across numerous consecutive intervals. For instance, while the speaker may no longer be in the act of crying, they may sit and stare sadly at nothing as the partner takes the floor. Despite the lack of clear DY-cues (i.e., wiping tears), these moments will also be coded DY.
   - H: (said in a very low, sad voice tone) "You cheating on me…completely hurt me…I just feel like…I've lost you." [DY]
     W: "I know, all right? I know I fucked up. But I have already apologized enough for my actions. I did what I could to fix us, so you need to fucking get over it already!" [HH]
     - Throughout the wife's floors, the husband drops his head despondently, as if he is shutting down, or giving up. Given the context, his listener intervals are coded not as HL or HH withdrawal, but as DY.
   - W: "I just…I just don't know what else I can do. I've tried everything, and nothing has helped me to lose weight or feel good about my body after the baby." [DY]
     H: "Well, what about eating healthy? We tried to do that for a while, but it was really difficult with the kids, we just had no time…[PD]
     - Throughout husband's floors, wife silently wipes away tears, but otherwise says nothing. She will be given DY listener codes for her continued sad affect.

7. When a criticism is coupled in an interval with hopelessness and defeat, the latter changes the focus from a partner-oriented complaint to an expression of sadness, as long as there is no overtly hostile language used. The thought process being that although there is a criticism embedded in the comment, the function of the floor is to convey the speaker's sorrow, not to jab at the partner.
   - W: "I feel like I've severely lowered all of my expectations [about our relationship]." [DY]
     H: "I feel like I've severely lowered all of my fucking expectations, too." [HL]

8. If the speaker continuously meets their partner's optimism with pessimism and/or persistent cynicism, DY will be coded.
   - W: (topic: husband cannot enjoy life due to severe back pain) "Well, hopefully, you'll be

better by September!" [PL]

H: "Yeah, and then I'm going to deal with a new principal at my school and a whole other set of agonies…" [DY]

W: "Well, how about next summer? Next summer will be yours. It'll be the summer of Pete!" [PL]

H: "Yeah, right – I'm going to have to work summer school again, and you know it." [DY]

Examples

1. "I am going to cry myself to sleep for what I did to you."
2. "I'm upset because I feel like I've failed our family."
3. "I'm just down these days."
4. "I feel like everyone thinks I'm an idiot at work."
5. "I think you're better off without me."
6. Discussing insecurities: "I'm afraid that one day you might leave me"; "I don't think I'll ever be able to be good enough to get a job"; "I believe that all men/women are going to treat me horribly."
7. "I am emotionally tired and exhausted, and I can't seem to get over it."
8. "I feel like I've lost my personality. I don't know who I am anymore."
9. "Every time you compliment me, it's not because you mean it. You say it because you feel you have to."

Other — OT

OT is most often coded when the experimental situation itself is discussed. OT is coded conservatively; the statement must be clearly out of bounds. *Anything that is related to the communicating process or the communication topic is coded as PD even if the experimental situation is mentioned*. This includes instances when couples are discussing what they rated topics on the importance scale or when they are discussing whether they are on task. *When either one of the partners is talking directly to the camera, use a richer code unless the content is purely OT.*
If the couple strays from the appointed topic, but is talking about anything relevant to their lives or relationship, use a richer code. If it seems the couple is grasping for straws to fill up the time and their statements are fragmentary or trivial, code OT. If the subject is more substantial, code PD or any other code that is appropriate. Sometimes a couple may veer away from the appointed topic and it may initially seem to be OT, but if the conversation is developed and they continue the discussion for a length of time, use a richer code.

Additional Notes

Any coding box/interval which contains complete silence and no codeable non-verbal behaviors should be coded as OT. *If a couple is silent and is not exhibiting any codeable behaviors for 5 seconds or more, and the partner who last held the floor is considered to still be the speaker, the other partner is given a listener OT as well.* **With interval coding, we code as such only when it is clear that the couple truly no longer has anything to discuss, and that the silence does not exist solely because one partner is thinking and/or is gathering their thoughts.**

Examples

1. "Is that the camera?" [OT]
2. "I don't like the painting they have on the wall." [OT]
3. "How long has it been? Has it been 10 minutes yet?" [OT]
4. "I'm hungry. Do you want to go to McDonald's when we're done here?" [OT]
5. (The topic is money) "But I think your mother is a bigger problem. She's always butting into our lives." [PD]
6. "I only rated that [topic] a 2." [PD]
7. "Are we supposed to come up with a solution?" [PD]
8. "I don't know why they picked this topic; we're pretty much on the same page about [the topic]" [PD]
9. (Talking directory to camera) "You guys picked the wrong topic. You must have the wrong couple". [OT]
10. (Talking directly to camera) "We're done now." [OT]
11. (Talking directly to camera) "She says I complain *all* the time." [HL]

Notes Not Pertaining to Specific Codes

1. Notes for coding speaker vs. listener in any given interval:
   a. A speaker code is assigned to whoever is the first to speak within an interval. If both partners speak, the partner who speaks second will receive a listener code.
   b. Often, the speaker's statements will be split among several intervals. When the speaker begins their thought in one interval and completes it in the next (for however brief a moment), the speaker is said to still hold the floor.
      1. W: "I love that we are always there for one anoth-" [PH]/ (new interval) W: "-er." [PH]
      2. W: "Probably ninety-percent of our conversations are me talking, and you sitting there with a smirk on your face." [HL]/ (new interval) W: "You know, it's-" [PD] (same interval) H: "I'm just letting you get it all out." [PD]
         - Even though the husband's statement is more significant in this second interval, the wife will receive a PD speaker code for her fragment of a statement, whereas the husband will receive a PD listener code.
2. If a non-PD sentence (HH, HL, DY, etc.) starts in one interval, and a fragment attached to that same sentence falls into the next interval, both intervals will receive the same code.
   a. Often, the speaker's statements do not fall neatly within a single interval. Rather, most span several consecutive intervals. For instance, the speaker may begin with what appears to be the start of a PD thought in one interval ("Well, sometimes-"), and we, as coders, are not yet entirely certain of the direction this statement might take. Devoid of any other paraverbal or affective cues, we might not know what the speaker is bound to say, and it is not until the second interval that we earn the true essence of the speaker's thought unit ("-you're a jerk." [HL]). Since it is imperative to be as descriptive as possible of the behaviors observed in an interaction, we need to give the speaker the room to first complete their sentence before we code it appropriately. In the example described above, both the "Well, sometimes-" and "-you're a jerk" will be coded as HL, as each fragment communicates a complete hostile thought.
      1. "You never pay the bills on time or fill out the paperwork for-" [HL]/ "-our insurance." [HL]
         - We know the "our insurance" is attached to a criticism. To maintain continuity. We should also code it as such.
      2. "You're such a-" [HH]/ "-bitch." [HH]
      3. "It's frustrating at times that…" [PL]/ "…you know, you can be so hard on yourself." [PL]
      4. "It's frustrating at times that…" [PD]/ "…well, maybe frustrated really isn't the word I'm thinking-" [PD]/ "-of…Maybe bothered is the right one." [PD]/ "Yeah, you know…um…" [PD]/ "…I think sometimes that…" [PD]/ "…you know, I think it bothers me when the trains are late because-" [PL]/ "-because they keep me from spending time with you." [PL]
         - While the speaker has their PL-intention in mind from the outset, it takes them numerous intervals to collect their thoughts and communicate their sentence in a linear fashion. Considering that s/he struggles to express the idea coherently, it would be incorrect to go back and code PL for the intervals that precede the actual PL statement ("It bothers me when the trains are late because they keep me from spending time with you"). In other instances similar to this, we assign a richer code only to sentences that are expressed in a direct fashion, without deviations and tangents. (See example #5.)
      5. "It's truly devastating that-" [HH]/ "-no matter how many times we talk about this-" [HH]/ "-and no matter what I do, no matter what-" [HH]/ "-you never hesitate to show me how much you don't-" [HH]/ "-care about me." [HH]

- Although this statement is expressed over several contiguous intervals, it is spoken in a linear manner. Thus, in each interval, the speaker's message is the same, allowing us to code HH for each fragment.
  b. Backward coding is also allowed in instances of negative mind read, where the partner's answer (delivered immediately) to an inference determines whether or not the original statement an appropriate negative mind read code.
    1. H: "I know you hate washing the dishes." [PD]
       - This statement, expressed neutrally, is coded depending on the partner confirming or negating the statement.
       W: "Ugh, yeah, I hate that our dish soap dries my hands out."
       - This confirmation of the husband's assumption awards both statements PD codes.
    2. H: "I know you hate washing the dishes." [HL]
       W: "No, I find doing dishes relaxing." [PD]
       - The husband's original statement receives an HL only after the wife negates his assumption.

2. We code for the most salient behavior present in any given interval. For instance, if a criticism is completed at the beginning of one interval (HL), and is then followed by a statement communicating high-end positivity (PH), we will code for PH. In these cases, the HL is mitigated, as any high-intensity statement will trump a low-intensity statement.
   o Example:
     1. "You never take care of your-" [HL]/ "-self. I'm sorry I'm saying this; you know I love you." [PH]

3. During a single speaker turn, many individuals may preface their ideas with a general theme and then support this theme with various examples over the span of several consecutive intervals. For instance, one person might begin their turn with a broad criticism ("Let's talk about how you complain ALL THE TIME about EVERYTHING" [HL]) and then move onto specific examples that illustrate the criticism (also HL). Occasionally, when the speaker is in the process of gathering their thoughts and communicating an example, there may be intervals in which the content is inherently PD (e.g., "And then you said that...um, right, that you -"). However, coding these intervals as PD would be incorrect, since the overarching idea has been well-established and the speaker's intent to support the criticism is unambiguous. Therefore, *the code originally assigned to the overarching theme at the start of their speaker turn and to the ensuing examples will also be assigned to these "filler" intervals*.
   o Examples:
     1. W: "Let's talk about how you complain ALL THE TIME about-"[HL]/ "-EVERYTHING. You really do. You complain." [HL]/ "There's nothing you don't complain about. And you have to admit that, though. You have to realize it. Everyday, like-" [HL]/ "-I come home and there's just a STACK of complaints about the most RIDICULOUS things. Like…" [HL]/ "...*Oh, your brother is here today and-*" [HL]
        - Even though the content of the last interval is technically PD, it helps provide the context for a sequence of examples that ultimately support the wife's claim that her husband unnecessarily complains. As such, it, too, will be HL.
     2. H: "You do these things, and it doesn't make any sense… It's like-" [HL] / "-after 6 years, you don't know that's it's gonna piss me off?" [HL] / "...And you go ahead and tell me in your own way; that's gonna piss me off…" [HL] / "...And I think that's what gets me so upset. It's not the fact of what you're telling me, it's --" [HL] / "*It's… the fact that… it's... it's...*" [HL]
        - The intent of the last interval is to explain what the wife does to upset him, thus making it an HL.

35

4. Notes for the first few turns coded in an interaction:
    a. When beginning to code an interaction, usually assume laughing and giggling is nervous laughter, not to be coded as humor (unless it clearly qualifies).
    b. When beginning to code an interaction, for the majority of couples, code the first few turns as PD, unless another code is definitely more appropriate.
    c. If in the very first speaker turn you have no context and only hear a fragmentary thought, code this turn as OT.
        o Examples:
            1. "…talking about is money" [PD]
            2. "…going with it" [OT]
5. If you can tell where the statement is going, or if there is an affective charge, give the appropriate code.
        o Examples:
            1. "That's because you never-" [HL]
            2. "What the HELL are YOU-" [HH]
6. Many times the listener's backchannel will occur during the speakers pause. The only time this backchannel can receive a code is if it occurs after 2 seconds of silence from both partners.