

GLOBAL CODING SCHEME

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Global Coding Scheme

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Introduction

The Global Coding Scheme is an instrument for the macroanalysis of family interaction. The scale was developed from the Beavers-Timberlawn Family Evaluation Scale (Beavers & Hampson, 1990) and the Family Behavioral Snapshot: A Tool For Teaching Family Assessment by Israela Meyerstein (1979). The Beavers-Timberlawn Scale provided items for looking at the family's structure, mythology, autonomy, and affect. Meyerstein's scale provided items focusing on particular problem solving skills and family interaction and communication patterns. The concepts of united front, conflictual, and overadequate-underadequate marital styles were taken from Kramer et al. (1969).

The coding scheme went through five revisions before becoming the present Global Coding Scheme. Each time the Scheme was used by several coders on a sample of families, and those items that were unclear or open to various interpretations were either omitted or revised. This process continued until the coders reached a consensus regarding the meaning of each item. A total of eleven advanced family therapy students helped in the formulation of the Global Coding Scheme.

The Global Coding Scheme consists of six sections--Couple Interaction, Family Interaction, Family and Task, Family Affect, Paper Sculpture, and Summation. The Summation includes a final written description of the family based on all available information. In general, each item is coded on a five or six point scale with the extreme points representing opposite poles; i.e., very clear to very vague, or almost never to almost always, etc.

The Context

The Global Coding Scheme has been developed for analysis of family interactions in a particular context. Although the items in the coding scheme may be applied by other researchers to other types of interaction, we will describe the context in which we have applied these items.

We have used the coding scheme to describe couples and families who were participating in various interaction tasks during a home interview. In this interview, family members initially completed a shortened version of the Moos Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974), which focuses on issues such as family cohesiveness, conflict, organization, and expression of feelings. Typical items are:

Family members really help and support one another
We fight a lot in our family.
Family members are rarely ordered around.
We say anything we want to around home.

The questionnaire provided the basis for two revealed difference exercises--one for the parents and one for the whole family. In this exercise, people were asked to consider items on the questionnaire on which they had disagreed, and to try to reach a consensus. The discussants (mates or family) were given 6-10 slips of paper in an envelope. Each piece of paper listed an item from the questionnaire on which there was disagreement and the answers of each person. They were asked to discuss the items one at a time and try to reach an agreement, then mark whether the agreement was true or false--or that they still did not agree. Interactions were audiotaped; twenty minutes were available for each exercise.

The family then constructed a Paper Sculpture, a semi-projective exercise developed by L. Bell to describe the structure of the family. The Paper Sculpture exercise consisted of asking the family to arrange colored circles (representing people), red and black strips (for similarity and dissimilarity between people) and blue yarn circles (boundary markers) on a white board in a way which represented their family (Bell, 1986; Bell et al., 2004; Bell, Ericksen, Cornwell, & Bell, 1991; Wedemeyer & Grotevant, 1982).

Interaction during the revealed differences and Paper Sculpture exercises was audiotaped (1970s) or videotaped (1990s) and the Paper Sculpture made by the family was photographed.

Coders first listened to the marital revealed difference, then coded the section on the couples interaction. They then listened to the family revealed difference and coded the three sections having "Family" in the title. They then listened to the Paper Sculpture exercise and coded the remainder of the scales.

The relation between the section of the Global Coding Scheme and the family and couple exercise is given below:

<u>Coding Scheme Section</u>	<u>Resource</u>
Couple Interaction	Tape of couple revealed differences
Family Interaction	Tape of family revealed difference
Family and Task	Tape of family revealed difference
Family Affect	Tape of family revealed difference
Paper Sculpture	Tape of Paper Sculpture
Summation	Whole Tape

Reliability

The reliability of the Global Coding Scheme cannot be evaluated independently of the particular family interaction coded, or independently of the level of sophistication of the coders. Our tasks were the revealed difference and Paper Sculpture exercises recorded on audiotape during home interviews. The coders were advanced students in a Masters level training program in family therapy. They had all completed most of their coursework as well as a practicum in family therapy.

Our purpose has been to use the Coding Scheme to operationalize theoretical variables for research purposes. We do not use the scales diagnostically.

Reliability has been assessed by having nine of our families coded by two coders each. This is not as extensive an assessment as we would have liked, but reflects the limits of our (time and personnel) budget.

We have developed a number of scales which we have found useful in the analysis of family interaction. These scales have been used to study the way family climate variables mediate the effects of parent ego development and self esteem on adolescent ego development and self esteem (Bell & Bell, 1983), to look at connections between family relationship and peer relationship patterns (Bell, Cornwell, & Bell, 1988), and to study family processes associated with experienced closeness and distance among family members (Bell et al., 1991). Scales we have used include the following (intercoder reliability was measured by Pearson correlations among two sets of coders):

Interpersonal Boundary. (intercoder reliability, $r = .63$).

In general, family members take responsibility for their own actions, feelings, and thoughts, and do not take responsibility for the actions, feelings or thoughts of others (#34); they are not overly close, stuck, overconcerned with each other (#50).

Comfort with Differences. ($r = .45$)

Family members seem to avoid differences and disagreements among them (#23); the family seems comfortable with differences and disagreements among them (#24); the revealed difference task seems scary and they seem to pull back from it (#33); the quality of laughter during the revealed difference task is anxious, defensive (#42).

Ability to Resolve Differences. ($r = .81$)

Family is efficient at problem solving (#25); the family's approach to the issue is organized (#11); family members are open and receptive to statements made by other family members (#36); disclosure of thoughts and feelings is clear (#35); overall the family does not have an atmosphere of being underorganized, chaotic and leaderless (#52).

Covert Conflict. ($r = .44$)

Covert conflict in the family is severe and impairs groups functioning (#47); disclosure of feelings and thoughts is vague and unclear (#35); feelings are expressed indirectly or covertly (#45); the family does not have an atmosphere of openness, comfortableness, optimism and warmth (#54).

Warmth and support. ($r = .75$)

The family's mood is very warm (#37); the family's mood is very supportive (#38); the quality of laughter is warm and responsive (#43); family members are open and receptive to statements made by other family members (#36).

Depression. ($r = .73$)

The family has an atmosphere of depression, sadness, hopelessness (#53); not an atmosphere of openness, comfortableness, optimism and warmth (#54); family members are sad (#39).

Influence of Children. ($r = .80$)

Children are powerful (#15-17) and involved (#28-30).

While some of the intercoder reliabilities are fairly low for these scales, they have proven reliable enough to identify significant differences in research populations.

While we generally combine items to measure variables of theoretical interest, it should be noted that some items can reliably stand on their own. In our study, these items have been:

COUPLE: Engage each other (#3)	r = .68
Responsible (#6)	r = .56
FAMILY: Involvement of children (#28-30)	r = .81
Power of children (#15-17)	r = .90
Tired (#32)	r = .64
Receptive (#36)	r = .88
Cheerful (#39)	r = .78
Joking (#40)	r = .70
Overt conflict (#46)	r = .77
Overly close (#50)	r = .63
Isolated (#51)	r = .76
Avoid disagreement (#23)	r = .51
Problem Solving Efficiency (#25)	r = .52
Support (#38)	r = .51
Optimism (#54)	r = .57

Global Coding Scheme Factors

Thirty-one items from the GCS measuring family climate and interaction were reduced by theory, factor analysis, and reliability considerations to nine scales. The goal was to end up with theoretically meaningful scales with statistically related items and satisfactory reliabilities. The construction of scales was done in two steps. The first step was an exploratory principle components analysis. Seven components were identified with greater than unit eigen values. Some components contained items which we wished to distinguish for theoretical reasons (depression vs. warmth and support; overt conflict vs. covert conflict). Guided both by theory and the component analysis, nine scales were then created taking the mean score of the component items (Table 1). These scales were then tested for both internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and inter-coder reliability (Pearson correlations). Alpha reliabilities ranged from .68 (clear interpersonal boundaries) to .92 (warmth and support), while intercoder reliabilities ranged from .44 (depression) to .75 (overt conflict).

The 9 emergent scales were then entered into a second-order principal component analysis for the second step of data reduction. Two components emerged, consisting of family connection (warmth and support, depression [-] overt conflict [-], and humor) and family individuation (clear interpersonal boundaries, comfort with differences and disagreements, problem solving efficiency, and covert conflict [-]). The family health item loaded equally on both components and was kept separate. Alpha reliabilities were .81 for both family connection and family individuation. Intercoder reliabilities were .72 for connection and .69 for individuation. These factors were used as the basis for a study of the relationship between family climate during adolescence and midlife well-being (Bell & Bell, 2004).

Table 1. Global Coding Scheme Scales

FAMILY HEALTH: Very Non-Functional...to...Very Functional

WARMTH AND SUPPORT:

The family has an atmosphere of openness, comfortableness, optimism & warmth.

Family's mood is Very Cold ...to...Very Warm.

Family's mood is Very Rejecting...to...Very Supportive.

Quality of laughter was warm and responsive. (not at all...to...very much).

DEPRESSION:

The family has an atmosphere of depression, sadness, hopelessness.

Family's mood is Very Sad...to...Very Cheerful.

HUMOR:

Family's use of joking and humor (none / almost none...to...very often).

Amount of laughter (none or almost none...to...very often)

CLEAR INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES:

In general members take responsibility for their own actions, feeling, and thoughts, and do not take responsibility for the actions, feelings or thoughts of others.

The family has an atmosphere of overly close, stuck, over-concerned with each other (-).

Is the family's image of itself is congruent with reality? Do they see themselves as they really are? Very Congruent...to...Very Incongruent.

COMFORT WITH DIFFERENCES AND DISAGREEMENT:

Family seems comfortable with differences or disagreements.

Family seems to avoid differences and disagreements (-).

OVERT CONFLICT:

Overt conflict in the family is: Severe; impairs group functioning...to...Little or none.

COVERT CONFLICT:

Covert conflict in the family is: Severe, impairs group functioning...to...Little or none.

How openly were feelings expressed? Very directly or openly...to...very indirectly or covertly.

Rate family as to clarity (not intensity) of disclosure of feelings and thoughts. Very Vague & Unclear ... to ... Very Clear.

PROBLEM-SOLVING EFFICIENCY:

Family's efficiency at problem solving (being able to discuss items and arrive at a mutual decision on the right answers). Very Efficient...to...Very Inefficient.

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Global Coding Scheme

FAMILY CODE _____

FAMILY MEMBERS _____

H _____

W _____

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

CODER:

_____ Date _____

How comfortable do you feel about your coding of this family?

1. _____ comfortable with coding.
2. _____ somewhat comfortable, I think its O.K.
3. _____ more uncomfortable – someone else should check it.
4. _____ Help.

- NOTE:
1. When in doubt – Choose the more extreme score – (assume end points of scale refer to people in top or bottom 15% of the population.)
 2. Score individual family members separately where necessary.

FAMILY CODE _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the statements, and circle the number which best describes the couple's and the family's interaction. If you do not know the answer or it seems not applicable, circle the number '9'. There will be some statements that require written answers. You may use left margin for writing down notes. Or use the reverse side.

I. Couple Interaction

1. Couple can conceptualize and express ideas and feelings clearly, articulately. 9

1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very Vague	Fairly Vague	Somewhat Vague & Unclear	Somewhat Clear	Fairly Clear	Very Clear	

2. The couple seems to listen to each other's thoughts, ideas, or feelings. (Respond to each other) 9

1	2	3	4	5	
Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost Never	

3. The couple seems to engage each other in discussing the task. 9

1	2	3	4	5	
Almost Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost Always	

4. The couple avoids acknowledging their differences and disagreements. 9

1	2	3	4	5	
Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost Never	

5. The couple seems comfortable and tolerant with disagreements. 9

1	2	3	4	5	6	
Very Uncomfortable	Fairly Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Fairly Comfortable	Very Comfortable	

FAMILY CODE _____

6. The spouses take individual responsibility for their own actions, feelings, and thoughts, and do not take responsibility for the actions, feelings, or thoughts of others.

1	2	3	4	5	9
Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost Never	

7. Couple's efficiency at problem solving (being able to discuss item and arrive at mutual decision on the right answer):

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Efficient	Good	Somewhat Efficient	Somewhat Inefficient	Poor	Very Inefficient	

Describe marital dynamics in your own words: _____

	Almost Not At All	Little	Some	Much	Very Much
8. United Front	1	2	3	4	5
9. Overadequate/underadequate	1	2	3	4	5
10. Conflictual	1	2	3	4	5

FAMILY CODE _____

II. Family Interaction

11. Family's approach to the task is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Unorgan- ized	Fairly Unorgan- ized	Somewhat Unorgan- ized	Somewhat Organized	Fairly Organized	Very Organized	

12. The family's leadership structure appears to be:

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Flexible	Fairly Flexible	Somewhat Flexible	Somewhat Rigid	Fairly Rigid	Very Rigid	

Describe the family in terms of overt power by placing family members along the line below to show their power or influence. Put the person highest who appears to have the most influence over what happens in this family, then the next most, etc., to the least powerful). Family members may not share the same point along the line - force yourself to make a distinction. (Use H - husband, W - Wife, 1 - 1st child, 2 - 2nd child, and 3 - 3rd child)

Very Powerful 15 -
 14 -
 13 -
 12 -
 11 -
 10 -
 09 -
 08 -
 07 -
 06 -
 05 -
 04 -
 03 -
 02 -
Very Powerless 01 -

13. Husband's Score _____

14. Wife's Score _____

15. 1st Child's Score _____

16. 2nd Child's Score _____

17. 3rd Child's Score _____

FAMILY CODE _____

Family spokesperson:

18. Father speaks for:

19. Mother speaks for:

20. Child 1 speaks for:

21. Child 2 speaks for:

22. Child 3 speaks for:

	Self	Father	Mother	C-1	C-2	C-3
18. Father speaks for:	4	X	6	1	2	3
19. Mother speaks for:	4	5	X	1	2	3
20. Child 1 speaks for:	4	5	6	X	2	3
21. Child 2 speaks for:	4	5	6	1	X	3
22. Child 3 speaks for:	4	5	6	1	2	X

III. Family and the Task

23. The family seems to avoid differences and disagreements among them.

1	2	3	4	5	9
Almost Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost Never	

24. The family seems comfortable with differences or disagreements among them.

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Uncom- fortable	Fairly Uncomfor- table	Somewhat Uncomfor- table	Somewhat Comfor- table	Fairly Comfor- table	Very Comfor- table	

25. Family's efficiency at problem solving (being able to discuss item and arrive at mutual decision on the right answer.):

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Efficient	Good	Somewhat Efficient	Somewhat Inefficient	Poor	Very Inefficient	

FAMILY CODE _____

Rate the family members' involvement in the task. Involvement refers to their interest level, attentiveness or enthusiasm about the task.

Family Member:	No or almost no involvement	A little involvement	Medium level of involvement	Fairly high level of involvement	Very high level of involvement
26. Husband	1	2	3	4	5
27. Wife	1	2	3	4	5
28. Child 1	1	2	3	4	5
29. Child 2	1	2	3	4	5
30. Child 3	1	2	3	4	5

To the extent that all or some people were not very involved in the task, this was because

	Not at All	A Little	Some	Much	Very Much
31. People were excluded.	1	2	3	4	5
32. People seemed tired or concern with other things.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Task seemed scary and they seemed to pull back from it.	1	2	3	4	5

Other (also note specific individuals): _____

FAMILY CODE _____

34. In general members take responsibility for their own actions, feelings, and thoughts, and do not take responsibility for the actions, feelings or thoughts of others.

1	2	3	4	5	9
Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	

Comments (Note examples and any clear differences among family members):

35. Rate family as to clarity of disclosure of feelings and thoughts. This is not a rating of the intensity of feelings, but rather of clarity of expression of individual thoughts and feelings.

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Vague & Unclear	Fairly Vague & Unclear	Somewhat Vague & Unclear	Somewhat Clear	Fairly Clear	Very Clear	

36. Family members are open and receptive to statements made by other family members.

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Receptive	Fairly Receptive	Somewhat Receptive	Somewhat Unreceptive	Fairly Unreceptive	Very Unreceptive	

Comments: Describe and give examples of any clear differences between family members.):

FAMILY CODE _____

IV. Family's Affect

Family's mood – rate the family on each of the following scales:

37.

1	2	3	4	5
Very warm	Somewhat warm	Neutral	Somewhat cold	Very cold

9

38.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Neutral	Somewhat Rejecting	Very Rejecting

9

39.

1	2	3	4	5
Very Cheerful	Somewhat Cheerful	Neutral	Somewhat Sad	Very Sad

9

40. Rate the family's use of joking and humor:

1	2	3	4	5
None or Almost None	Little	Some	Frequent	Very Often

9

41. Amount of laughter was:

1	2	3	4	5
None or Almost None	Little	Some	Frequent	Very Often

9

Describe the quality of laughter:

	Not at all	A little	Some	Much	Very Much
42. anxious, defensive	1	2	3	4	5
43. warm, responsive	1	2	3	4	5

44. Describe the amount of feelings expressed:

1	2	3	4	5
Very Many Feelings Expressed	Many Feelings Expressed	Some Feelings Expressed	Very Few Feelings Expressed	Feelings Not Expressed

9

FAMILY CODE _____

45. How openly were these feelings expressed:

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Directly or Openly	Fairly Directly or Openly	Somewhat Directly or Openly	Fairly Indirectly or covertly	Fairly Indirectly or Covertly	Very Indirectly or Covertly	

46. Overt conflict in the family is:

1	2	3	4	5	9
Severe; impairs groups functioning	Definite; moderate impairment	Definite; slight impairment	Some; without impairment	Little or None	

Comments (Include any particular relationships in the family that seem to be conflictual.): _____

47. Covert conflict in the family is:

1	2	3	4	5	9
Severe; impairs groups functioning	Definite; moderate impairment	Definite; slight impairment	Some; without impairment	Little or None	

Comments _____

FAMILY CODE _____

VI. Summation

--based on all information collected from the Marital, Family, and Paper Sculpture tapes.

49. Is the family's image of itself congruent with reality? I.e., do they see themselves as they really are?

1	2	3	4	5	6	9
Very Congru- ent	Fairly Congru- ent	Somewhat Congruent	Somewhat Incongru- ent	Fairly Incongru- ent	Very Incongru- ent	

Comments: _____

Overall the family has an atmosphere of:	Very little	A little	Somewhat	Fairly much	Very much
50. Overly close, stuck, overconcerned with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Isolated, disconnected apathetic towards each other.	1	2	3	4	5
52. Underorganized, chaotic, leaderless	1	2	3	4	5
53. Depression, sadness, hopelessness.	1	2	3	4	5
54. Openness, comfortableness, optimism, & warmth.	1	2	3	4	5

Coding Conventions

The following are explanations of some of the more difficult questions. These numbered explanations match the number of the question on that particular page of the global Scale.

I. Couple Interaction

1. Do not judge on the frequency or amount of talking the couple does, but on whether the couple is articulate.
4. In this question the couple feels that they do not really disagree.
6. The question has to do with the process of how the couple is speaking; i.e., "I" think ... not "you" or "we" think.... Also, does either spouse speak for the other?
7. The couple has made a mutual decision in which each has participated in resolving the issue and agreeing to a final decision. You have an understanding about what each has said, and why the couple has reached the final decision. The couple seems to be truly comfortable with the decision. Note: This is not a matter of just checking the piece of paper.
8. United Front: Strong denial of any real differences or disagreements between the mates. Usually there's a stated closeness without a real sense of warmth - a pseudo closeness. Often couples blame others for any difficulties or focus their attention on a problem outside of the marriage - e.g. a child or social issue.
9. Overadequate/Underadequate: The mates see themselves overadequate and underadequate. The one mate appears less than adequate or weak or dependent on his/her spouse. One person's opinions are clearly given more weight. One person has more power, influence, or control in the interaction (or in the marriage).
10. Conflictual: There is much overt fighting. Blame and felt inadequacy is projected onto the mate. Conflict often centers around who is to blame. Each defends against being seen or labeled as inadequate. Neither takes responsibility for self.

When coding question(8, 9, 10), the norm is a score of '1', and should be your base point.

Definitions of the answers:

- 1) Almost not at all - no evidence of this.
- 2) Little – Some hint of this, e.g. #8 would be very few 'we' statements or rationalizations.
- 3) Some - not primary.
- 4) Much - majority of the time.
- 5) Very much - all the time

II. Family Interaction: While listening to the Family interaction, it is important to distinguish the different voices; there are as many as five voices on some tapes.

11. Organized means that the family is consistently focusing on the task the revealed difference exercise.

18-22. Family spokesperson - when one person speaks or answers for another person(s) regarding what that person(s) thinks or feels.

III. Family and the Task

25. The family has made a mutual decision, and each family member has participated in resolving the issue and agreeing to a final decision. You understand what each said and why. The family has reached a decision they are comfortable with. Note: this is not a matter of checking the piece of paper, but it has to do with the process of doing the task.
- 26-30. Involvement in the task is not just a matter of verbal ability, but whether the responses are on target and show that the family member is tracking the conversation.
35. The family communicates ideas and feelings well and you are clear what these ideas and feelings are. It is not intellectualizing or verbiage; it is not like the politician who uses words very well but still does not communicate what he stands for. This does not include mind reading.

IV. Family's Affect

- 37-39. The neutral point represents the lack of affect.
38. In order to be supportive, one has to make movement towards the other in order to reinforce, encourage, or care for. Rejection involves one moving away from the other in order to disapprove, exclude, criticize, attack, or rebuck.
- 42-43. Only focus on the quality of laughter not on the amount.
44. Feelings may be expressed verbally or nonverbally, i.e., in the tone of voice.
45. Indirect expression of feelings - include:
- feelings aimed at wrong person.
- true feeling denied and some other feeling expressed.
- fuzzy expression, e.g. silence, or one requiring mind reading.
- true feeling expressed but wrong reason given for it.
46. Overt conflict - conflict is open and up front. Fighting is open. You can hear fighting whether on topic or not.
47. Covert conflict - conflict is hidden and fighting is not open, but there seems to be a struggle to keep conflict from surfacing. Also the conflict is indirect such as when husband is mad at wife but gets angry with the son, or a conflict around the wrong topic; i.e., conflict about eating properly, but it is really about the husband not getting his needs met from the wife.

In question 46 and 47 the word 'impairment' has to do with how well the family is able to do the task.

V. Paper Sculpture*

Boundaries and alliances within the family - describe how you see the family. While the Paper Sculpture will be helpful here don't rely on it exclusively as families may want to give a good - rather than an accurate - picture of their structure. Describe the marital and parental system and any coalitions. Are other people included in the picture?

Rigid and flexible family boundary - the boundary around this family is permeable or closed.

- a. Is there sharing, influence, or communication with school, community, church, friends, etc. outside the family, or is the family fairly isolated?
- b. Do particular people have ties with others outside the family, e.g. with relatives, pets, friends? Especially note outside ties for the children in the family.

Be sure to go back and check previously coded items. Now that you have heard the Paper Sculpture, you may have a different opinion about the family. Record any new codes here.

* It was originally intended for coders to see the family's completed picture and use this information. However, in fact, the picture was not used in the global coding, but was evaluated separately.