A FAMILY INTERACTION CODING SCHEME: FROM QUANTITATIVE TO QUALITATIVE

Abraham M. Sloan, (Marissa Diener)
Department Family and Consumer Studies, University of Utah

Observational research allows for the study of an almost infinite spectrum of behavior. This liberation of the subjects from the strictures of more conventional research measures (i.e., self-reports, interviews) carries with it a great potential for uncovering more subtle behavior. Ideally, observation allows us to see things as they really are. In practice, however, statistical analysis does not allow for absolute objectivity in observation. All such research is undertaken with a certain perspective. The aim of the present project was thus to develop a coding scheme that would capitalize on the broad expanse of qualitative information extant in observation with as little sacrifice as possible in converting this information to quantitative data.

The present coding scheme was developed in conjunction with the Family Interaction Study (n=100 families), which examines how family interaction relates to children's socioemotional competence. One portion of this study invited parents and their child to discuss their most recent disagreement. This segment was video taped for coding and it is for this purpose that the present research was instigated.

After reviewing the video tapes, the initial work was to develop a list of potential coding categories and variables independent of other established schemes. This was done in the hopes of generating a coding scheme with a top-down fit - working from what we had to what we needed and not curtailing the observational potential by first seeing our subjects through the lens of an existing coding scheme. Next, research into available schemes was done to determine what measures might parallel the observational data at our disposal. Additionally, I designed and wrote a computer program to measure the length of the verbal contributions of each family member to the discussion. The resulting coding scheme is thus a conglomerate of portions of multiple schemes along with our own innovations. From its inception, we have had great success in capturing the richness of the observational data we set out to evaluate. The coding scheme developed has high face validity and we are evaluating reliability