

TOPIC CODE v. 3.0
MANUAL

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Developed for the Peer Interaction Task at the Child and Family Center

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MANUAL
The TOPIC CODE for the Peer Interaction Task (PIT)

INTRODUCTION

The TOPIC CODE is a two-category code designed to identify the content in conversation between same sex peers, which is predictive of antisocial behavior. It is a form of discourse analysis that focuses on talk and behavior which contain any symbolic content of "rule breaking" as identified by community standards. The TOPIC CODE is designed to be coded in real time by personal computer.

This code was developed for the Peer Interaction Task (PIT), which is a videotape of two friends freely talking together about different topics. The videotaping was conducted at the Portland Project Alliance research center and each participant was paid for his or her participation. The PIT is composed of eight 5-minute segments, each focusing on a different topic introduced by the interviewer. The topics are discussed in the following order: 1) planning an activity, 2) a current problem nominated by the target child, 3) a current problem nominated by the peer, 4) alcohol and drug use, 5) goals for the next year, 6) dating relationships, 7) friends and peer groups, and 8) planning a party. The examples used in this manual were taken from a sample of 13-year-old boys and a mixed-gender sample of 16-year-old adolescents.

OVERVIEW

The TOPIC CODE is intended to separate dyadic talk into two main categories based on content. Talk can be classified as **FOLLOWING THE RULES**, talk that fits into the norms for the situation and society; or **BREAKING THE RULES**, talk that is inappropriate to the situation or violates societal rules and expectations. **ASSENT** is coded when a participant issues a "yeah," "uh-huh," or other one-word agreement to a statement issued by the other participant. **NO SPEAK** is coded when a participant stops speaking for 5 or more seconds.

CATEGORY I: FOLLOWING THE RULES

This category includes talk and nonverbal behavior that is appropriate to the setting and task. This includes normative behavior and on-task behavior. All talk referencing "positive" principles, values and actions is also coded **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. It also includes off-task behavior or that does not specifically fall into the **BREAKING THE RULES** category.

FOLLOWING THE RULES TOPICS:

1. Family Issues: Topics related to household/parental rules and family relationships. Examples include chores and responsibilities; conflict with siblings; telephone use; coming home on time; making too much noise; taking care of possessions and pets; talking back and arguing; talk about grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, or step-relatives.

"Dad leaves stuff out and the kids pick up after him. We have no chores except to pick up after ourselves."

"Mom is always after me. Wanting me to do more around the house."

"My Mom won't let me use the phone."

"Does your Mom talk a lot on the phone?"

"Constantly. She's just like a big teenager."

"My parents never make my brother do anything."

"I make a lot of weird noises around the house, and I get yelled at for that."

"You could make this sort of mousetrap, if your brother puts his finger in it, it goes whap! But it don't hurt."

Note: Sibling conflict that falls within the boundaries of roughhousing belongs in this topic.

2. Religious Beliefs: Topics involving personal religious beliefs and ideas. Examples include expressions of religious beliefs surrounding personal choices or behavior, and religious influences in values and beliefs.

"It is important to me to follow God's plan."

3. Money: Topics related to how to get money, what to spend it on, and what things cost. Examples include allowance; jobs; how much video games cost; how much they are getting paid for the session; their checks; where to cash their checks; and what to spend them on.

"We need to get jobs."

"How much money do you have for the concert?"

"Does our Mom have to co-sign our checks?"

"It's \$2.75 to get in or something like that and you can play for..."

"You should never have lost that job."

4. What to Do For Fun: Topics related to spending free time. This includes what they have done in the past or what they would like to do. Examples are going to movies; playing video games; eating out; going to the mall.

"You could come over to my house and play video games."

"Let's go down to Valley River and look for chicks."

"We went to Sunriver. My brothers and their friends and we split the cost. We had our parents rent it for us."

"The history channel is tight."

5. What Things they Like: Topics include specifically named things or activities. Examples are the name of a particular movie or video game; a brand name such as NIKE; named places.

"We could play Battle Tech."

"Have you seen COLORS?"

"Go to Putt and Video."

"Let's see, going to McDonald's, no, that's boring..."

6. Sex Talk: Topics related to the opposite gender, potential partners, or sex. Examples include dating; what girls or boys they like; friends who are girls/boys; factual talk about sex; birth control.

"When we go to the hot tubs, I think we should wear protection."

"Who are you going to the dance with?"

"She's a babe. She's really hot."

"I've got to get rid of Cary. Other girls are too nice looking."

Note: This does not include any talk that is degrading to women; sexually explicit talk that is not appropriate to the setting; or obscene language.

7. Friends: All talk related to friends and same-sex peers. Examples include non-hurtful gossip about other kids; popularity; who to like or do things with.

"If you confront him, he just gets mad"

"I choose friends by how they act and what they do."

8. Positive Values Involving Helping/Protecting Others: Topics including beliefs and values in helping or protecting others without obvious personal benefit. Examples include discussion of helping benefits surrounding a profession or activity, and personal beliefs about helping or protecting others.

"I want to be somebody that can take someone out of the 'hood and do something with them. They go to jail I'm their lawyer."

9. School: Topics include anything that occurs at school or is related to school. Examples include classes; tests and grades; teachers; homework; school sports; any activities that happen while at school.

"I get bad grades because I don't do my homework and I screw around. This is a bad attitude."

"We can't miss Friday. I have a math test."

"Mom got mad at my brother because he got a C in Language Arts."

"I hate homework."

Note: This also includes talk about getting in trouble at school if the context of the talk is that this is a problem.

10. Work: Talk about jobs and work related activities.

"I want to work someplace tight."

"I would work there just to get those Philly-cheese steaks."

11. Positive Values Involving School/Work: Topics involving values toward and desires for positive outcomes in school and work. Examples include desires or values expressed surrounding improvement in school or work performance, advancement in work, and obtainment of further educational opportunities.

"I want to stay on the honor role the whole year so I can graduate on time."

"I want to take the SATs, get a good grade in Chemistry... ..and get into a good college."

12. Drugs: Topics related to alcohol, smoking or tobacco use or any other drugs.

"Alcohol's not as good anyways. Because always the side effects of getting sick, and it tastes bad."

"What do you do if your friends want to go get beer and get bombed?"

"That's a tough one. I wouldn't go. They would probably do something stupid."

"I wish I could stop smoking. I don't want to be like my Mom. She smokes all the time."

Note: The context must be one of information sharing and indicate that this is a problem that needs attention.

13. Positive Values Involving Health: Topics relating to positive physical and mental health goals and values. Examples include gaining fitness, avoiding substances or activities due to verbalized health risks, and avoiding or dealing with stress.

"I believe chewing tobacco is bad. Its bad for your health and you get mouth cancer"

"With drugs, you are just killing all your brain cells."

14. Praising Positive Morality in Others: This does not include praising the dyadic partner. Any praising or discussing in a positive light the positive traits or morality of others fitting into school/work, health/safety, and helping/protecting others categories.

"I want to date someone with is caring and with good morals."

15. Strategy/Problem Solving Talk: Talking oneself or helping the other person talk about ideas on what to do about issues; encouraging the other person to talk; showing support for talking about issues.

"Did you try to talk to him calmly?"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I hope I can get counseling and take care of it before I get out of hand and do it to my kids."

"That's a good idea."

"If I try to stop smoking pot, you've got to stop, too."

16. Prosocial Activities: This includes any discussion of actual activities or actions taken or that will be taken to help or protect others without obvious personal benefit.

Examples include helping family members through work/chores, protecting siblings or classmates from harm, and charity or community service work.

17. Rationale: Expressing values and beliefs; explaining why people do what they do or why things are the way they are; self-revealing talk.

"I broke up with Christina, because we weren't meant for each other."

"You can't just do everything they want. It would be too much of a victory for parents."

"Girls like me as friends but don't want to go out with me."

18. Talk about the Session: Topics include factual talk about the session and encouraging the other person to follow the rules of the session or to behave appropriately. Examples include talk about the questionnaires; the interviewers; how much time is left in the session; the physical setting; the issues they chose.

"I didn't know what to put down (referring to the issues chose). It's kind of stupid because we usually sit down and talk about our problems like this."

"Now, don't be cursing."

"We need to get serious. There's just one minute left."

"I can see the time clock sitting right here."

19. Talk about clothes, shoes, or personal objects worn during the session. This also includes talk about their body.

"What's that on your coat, man?" "Uh, just an AA pin for alcohol, uh, I mean...."

"I'm getting too big for these." (picking a hole in his pants)

"That's a rad haircut."

CATEGORY II: BREAKING THE RULES

This category includes all verbal and nonverbal behavior that is not appropriate to the setting or task. Some of the topics in this category are mutually exclusive with topics in FOLLOWING THE RULES, because they are by definition inappropriate in any setting. Examples are all illegal activities, which includes using drugs and alcohol or doing physical harm to someone else. Other topics are not illegal but inappropriate to this particular setting. Examples are obscene gestures or songs and talking about or doing gross activities.

Other topics may be in either category depending upon the context of the talk. For examples, talk about drugs or getting into trouble at school can be in the category FOLLOWING THE RULES if the talk is factual and if the talk indicates that it is a problem that needs to be corrected. The category BREAKING THE RULES is qualified by the rationale or attitude that these activities are fun; they are not a problem; or they do not want to change them.

BREAKING THE RULES may be coded for any behavior or talk done in the session; for telling stories about what oneself or someone else has done or will do. The stories told about these activities do not need to be factually accurate or intended seriously. For example, it may include what fictional characters say or do in movies, books, or music. It may also include talk that is intended to be a joke.

BREAKING THE RULES TOPICS

1. Gross Activities: Engaging in or talking about activities involving bodily gases, fluids, or parts. Examples include spitting, farting, peeing, giving the raspberry, picking the nose.

 "Did you let a reeker? You did, didn't you?"
 "That's the hole in the floor we peed down."
2. Using Drugs or Alcohol, or Tobacco: Examples include talk about being in trouble because of drugs or engaging in drug use; all factual talk about drugs if it is in the context of drug use. Pulling out a pack of cigarettes even though he or she doesn't smoke one.

 "Then there's the marijuana. That's always good times."
 "My parents don't like me doing it."
 "Why do you keep on doing it, then?" "Because I want to."
 "How much beer can you get?" "At least a case with the money I make here."
 "Let's light up a cigarette."
 "Every test I took when I smoked some weed, I got an 'A'."
3. Illegal Activities: All activities except those in drug use and victimizing topics. Examples include stealing; vandalizing; making a bomb.

"We can tip cars over."

"Find a good rig. Hot wire it."

"We could steal everything in here.....the cameras, this table."

4. Obscene Language, Gestures, or Songs: Topic includes sexually explicit talk that is not appropriate to the setting.

"This is a boring subject. We won't be able to talk about this. So why don't we just whip out our wongs."

"Give her a moon for her money."

Giving finger to the camera.

Showing his nipple to the camera.

5. Inciting the Other Person to Break the Rules of the Session: Or to engage in anything that would stop or interfere with the session.

"Take a piss on the microphone." (This is also a gross activity.)

"Let's sing. Get the microphone."

"Let's turn off the camera."

"Go ahead. Spit it on the floor. I'll give you \$5.00." (This is also a gross activity.)

6. Songs or Activities That are Inappropriate to the Session: That are not in other BREAKING THE RULES topics. Examples include singing; rap; writing on the blackboard; messing with the chairs; waving to the camera; making faces to the camera; making weird noises; purposely lying or exaggerating about issues. This includes code talk that is clearly not understandable by the coder. It also includes speaking in another language.

"Old McDonald had a farm....." (singing)

"I'm going to go play on the chalkboard."

Talking like Donald Duck.

7. Getting in Trouble at School: Any talk about trouble at school that is within the context of not being concerned that it is problem. This includes skipping classes, cheating on exams or assignments, getting a referral or detention, and fighting.

"I have an excuse signed to miss Friday. It's an old one. My Mom will never know that I'm using it."

"We could go to the lake. Let's skip school on Friday."

"I always cheat." "I do that, too."

"I have a special tutor because the teachers are afraid of me."

"I like what you did.....your teacher handed back your book report and you (ripping gesture) in front of him."

8. Victimizing Others: Includes any talk or stories about doing physical harm to, degrading, coercing, or humiliating parents, teachers, peers, minorities, animals,

people in general. Referring to women as "Bitches." Includes family members.

"Put a collar and leash on her like the dog that she is."

"I've got a solution. Kill my sister."

"Find some cats and stick firecrackers up their butts."

"That's why you've got to tie your parents up and take control. Tie them up, handcuff them, tape their face."

"The coach comes to practice drunk everyday."

"I would have dumped both of them - beat the shit out of him."

"We would tie him to the bed."

Note: This should be differentiated from roughhousing and conflict with siblings (no intent to physically harm the other person).

9. Hurtful Discussion of Peers: Includes all discussion that is obviously and deliberately hurtful or damaging toward peers or intended to damage peers' relationships or social standing. Includes such items as hurtful gossip and deliberate plans of exclusion or isolation of peers.
10. Being Victimized: Includes anything that is more serious than roughhousing; anything that is physically harmful, humiliating or degrading.

"I understand being slapped in the face for being a smart ass or getting spanked or grounded. But a fist, grabbing your hair and smashing your head into the wall saying 'I'm going to kill you'."

STRUCTURE CODES

NO SPEAK: This will be coded for a member of the dyad whenever that member does not speak for five or more seconds. They may laugh during periods of NO SPEAK, but they do not make any statement or other verbalization that is intended to communicate.

ASSENT: ASSENTs are coded for any verbalized single word utterance of agreement or understanding that occurs during listening. This includes statements like "yeah," "uh-huh," "oh," or "hmm." ASSENTs do not make an overt statement of meaning on their own, but are intended only as a statement of agreement. ASSENTs are coded **only** when they follow and precede periods of NO SPEAK. Therefore, every ASSENT will have at least five seconds of silence both before and after the statement of ASSENT. ASSENTs are thus only captured during listening and are not connected to either end of another statement by a speaker. In the case of multiple ASSENTs issued consecutively, code the duration of the spoken ASSENTs using the same ASSENT code, as long as it is both preceded and followed by NO SPEAKs.

DECISION RULES

1. BREAKING THE RULES takes precedence over FOLLOWING THE RULES (if talk is FOLLOWING THE RULES, but the boy pulls out a pocket knife or pack of cigarettes, code it as BREAKING THE RULES.)
2. Victimizing includes rigid stereotyping or name calling for minorities and women.

"I yelled at those Oriental kids, 'Nerd herd!'" "I called her a fat cow."
3. Roughhousing is not considered victimizing or BREAKING THE RULES. Roughhousing is not physically harmful or humiliating.
4. All verbal responses to BREAKING THE RULES are also coded BREAKING THE RULES unless the intent is to stop the rule breaking, to get back on task, or to indicate that the respondent does not like the BREAKING THE RULES comment.
5. All responses to FOLLOWING THE RULES are coded as FOLLOWING THE RULES unless the content clearly falls into a BREAKING THE RULES topic.
6. NO SPEAKs are coded when there is no verbal talk for 5 or more seconds.
7. Laughter, crying, humming, whistling, sighing, loud breathing and other nonverbal vocalizations will not be coded.
8. If it is not possible to tell whether talk is FOLLOWING THE RULES or BREAKING THE RULES, then code it in the same code as the previous speaker.
9. Talking to the camera: If the purpose of talking to the camera is to give information about an issue or problem as if talking to an interviewer, code it FOLLOWING THE RULES. If the purpose of talking to the camera is to show off to the camera, code it BREAKING THE RULES.
10. Getting out of the chair: If the person moves out of camera range or goes over to the camera, code it BREAKING THE RULES. If the person gets out of the chair to demonstrate something that is part of a FOLLOWING THE RULES topic and it is not showing off, and does not move out of range, code it FOLLOWING THE RULES.
11. Telling a story about a BREAKING THE RULES topic (e.g., fighting): If there is no indication that this is a problem that needs to be solved, then code the whole story as BREAKING THE RULES. Any responses to the story are also BREAKING THE RULES unless they indicate that the fighting is a problem and needs to be changed.
12. Telling a story about a FOLLOWING THE RULES topic that has BREAKING

THE RULES elements within it. Code only those elements within the story that are specifically **BREAKING THE RULES** as **BREAKING THE RULES** and the immediate responses to the content of those **BREAKING THE RULES** elements as **BREAKING THE RULES**.

13. Name calling is **FOLLOWING THE RULES**, unless it is obscene (e.g., "Dickhead") or a reference to a minority or the opposite gender, then it is **BREAKING THE RULES**.
14. In defining "**BREAKING THE RULES**," the intent of the speaker is not important. Examples:
 - a. Behavior that is breaking the rules of the session (i.e., whispering, waving to the camera). The reason why they are doing it is not important. They may be sympathetic to the coder (nervous or shy) or obnoxious.
 - b. Talking about fantasies (things they have done or will do or talking about things that they would never do).
 - c. Talking about what has been done to them that was victimizing even though he or she may have been a totally innocent victim and are now talking to their friend in an open and self-revealing manner. The entire story and the responses to it are **BREAKING THE RULES** (not because the participant has broken the rules, but because someone else (the victimizer) has broken the rules and that topic is the focus of their conversation. The other boy's responses to it are also **BREAKING THE RULES**, even if they are supportive or sympathetic, unless he shifts the focus to finding a solution so that the victimization does not continue.
 - d. Talking about something that is in no way connected to the boys personally (i.e., discussing a movie, Rambo - persons in the film are **BREAKING THE RULES** by victimizing or being victimized). Naming the film (Let's go see **TERMINATOR 2**) is **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. Talking about any details of violence in the film is **BREAKING THE RULES**.
15. Fighting with siblings:
 - a. If the only reference is made to the word "fighting," code it 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. If any details are given indicating that physical pain might have occurred, such as hitting, using the terms kill or beating up, throwing around, punching even though it is not clear that pain did occur, code it 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**.
 - b. Talking about "fighting" at school or outside the family is coded as 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**, unless the person indicates that it is a problem that needs to be dealt with, or if it is clear that the fighting was verbal only.
16. Hunting: All references to hunting that are done in a legal manner are 55,

FOLLOWING THE RULES. If the boys begin to give gory details about "blood and guts" type talk (gross activities), or if they talk about enjoying the animal's pain or death (victimizing), code it 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**.

17. Verbal Obscenities: Profanity that is commonly used on television is coded 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. Examples include: damn, hell, God, Jesus Christ, shit, pissed off, and bitch (but this one is only included if it does not refer to other people). Obscenities that are coded as 33, **BREAKING THE RULES** include fuck, motherfucker, cock, dick, dickhead, balls, pussy, cunt, twat, or references to any of these. Any profanity or obscenities directed toward females or minorities, even if it is otherwise 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**, will be coded as 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**. Example: "That Goddamn (girl's name)" or "She is such a dirty bitch."
18. Victimizing in books, records, video games, movies:
 - a. Naming a videogame, movie, etc., that is violent is 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. Describing general characteristics that do not include specific mention of violence is 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. Example, "It has an army of super robots."
 - b. Any talk of details of the movie, book or game that includes violence, any action that might cause physical pain, talk of death, dying, or killing is 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**. This includes talking as if the participant was a character in the game; or acting out what is happening in the game.
19. Inappropriate objects in the session:
 - a. If the object is inappropriate but not illegal, such as a pocketknife or cigarette lighter, code the talk of the boy who has the object as 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**. If the partner's talk is not in response to the object and is otherwise 55, code it as 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**. If the partner is talking on his own track, code his talk as 55, **FOLLOWING THE RULES**.
 - b. If the object is illegal, such as a handgun which they would not have a permit to carry on their person or drugs such as cigarettes, code both participants' talk as 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**, as soon as the object is out in view. If their talk is otherwise 55 in content, code it as 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**, as long as there is anything illegal present and visible in the session.
20. Kicking each other in the session: If the kicking becomes the focus of the interaction, code it 33, **BREAKING THE RULES**. Or if it is done to inflict pain,

code it 33. If the kick occurs during talk that is 55, FOLLOWING THE RULES, and is a playful gesture that is not the focus of attention, code it 55. If the kicker is trying to move the other boy's foot off the table or from obstructing the view of the camera, code it 55, FOLLOWING THE RULES.

21. Parents using physical discipline: If the discipline could cause pain or if a physical object is used such as a paddle or belt, code it 33, BREAKING THE RULES. If the only detail given is the word spank or spanking, code it 55, FOLLOWING THE RULES.
22. Breaking house rules: Code 55, FOLLOWING THE RULES unless it is an action that the community as a whole would consider BREAKING THE RULES. Examples, running away from home or staying out all night is 33, BREAKING THE RULES. Getting home at midnight instead of 10:00 which is the family's rule is 55, FOLLOWING THE RULES. Breaking a community-wide curfew is 33, BREAKING THE RULES. Breaking a family curfew is 55, FOLLOWING THE RULES.
23. Getting in trouble at school: Code this as FOLLOWING THE RULES if there are no specific details given. (I'm always getting into trouble at school.") If any details are given, code it BREAKING THE RULES. ("I got detention for flipping off the teacher." "I fight a lot at school." "I was thrown out of 5th grade. That was rad.")

CODING SYSTEM

Speakers

- 1 = Target Child (girl or boy on left, unless otherwise indicated)
- 4 = Peer (girl or boy on right, unless otherwise indicated)

Structure

- 77 = ASSENT
- 88 = NO SPEAK
- 00 = TIME OUT (This is coded when it is not possible to hear the tapes because of interference, or because the session is interrupted by an outside person or event. For example, sessions videotaped at home may be interrupted by the telephone ringing; or a neighbor may walk into the taping session and talk to the participants. This code should only be used rarely.)

Topics

55 = FOLLOWING THE RULES

33 = BREAKING THE RULES

Each Code: will be comprised of a two digit topic code, following the speaker code.

1, 33 = Speaker is the target boy (1) who is BREAKING THE RULES (33).

4, 55 = Speaker is the peer (4) who is FOLLOWING THE RULES (55).

1, 77 = Speaker is the target girl (1) who is ASSENTING (77).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TOPIC CODE

1. Topic Code abstracts the content of Rule-break (BREAKING THE RULES) and Normative (FOLLOWING THE RULES) talk from the type of behavior of the semantics of the talk. It also abstracts it from affect. The underlying behavior in which Rule-break is manifested could be verbal talk, physical gestures, positive or negative engagement, positive or negative affect, etc.
2. Topic Code also abstracts the content of Rule-break from the speakers. The person engaging in Rule-break may be the speaker; or the speaker may be talking about someone else who is engaging in Rule-break; it may be fantasy, for example, characters in a videogame or movie.
3. Topic Code uses community standards as the criteria for determining the content of Rule-break. Parental standards are not the norm for determining the content of Rule-break. For example, even if parents give approval to the child's smoking, it is considered BREAKING THE RULES. Topic Code considers all smoking by minors as Rule-break. Another norm for determining Rule-break is whether it is appropriate behavior in the classroom. This norm is useful for determining inappropriate activities for the laboratory setting at the Research Center.
4. Topic Code creates smaller units of measurements by creating strings out of the Rule-break and Normative topics. Strings are continuous sequences of all Rule-break topics or continuous sequences of all normative topics regardless of speaker changes. It also focuses on the symbolic content of Rule-break regardless of the type of Rule-break. Less serious behavior such as making a face at the camera is included with drug use and violence.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CODING SYSTEM IS CREATED BY:

1. Coding by computer in real time with a specific start and stop time. This allows exact measurements of duration and frequency counts.
2. Coding the initiator of the talk or nonverbal behavior. This creates turn-taking and allows for sequential analysis of behavior.

3. Coding NOSPEAK as a five second break in talk. (We originally thought this might be a contingency, but analysis clearly indicates that it is not.) It is, however, a significant part of the structure of the coding system that helps to define the string of Rule-break or normative talk, the basic unit of measurement.
4. Coding ASSENT as a contingency. This also helps to define the Rule-break or Normative string and is, therefore, a significant part of the structure of the coding system. It allows for sequential analysis of behavioral reinforcement for either Rule-break or Normative talk.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TOPIC CODING

1. Topic coding focuses on categories of symbolic content that are embedded within a behavioral structure created by the coding system. For the Peer Interaction Task, the focus is on the category of Rule-break. The focus could be on any category of symbolic content depending on one's research focus.
2. Topic coding includes the assent as a behavioral reinforcer. Any reinforcing response could be included as a code category.

****The following section is included only for your interest. It is not necessary to read any of the following to be reliable on the Topic Code; it may, in fact, serve to confuse you. Please only explore cautiously.****

HISTORY OF THE TOPIC CODE FOR THE PEER INTERACTION TASK (PIT)

This code was developed as a supplement to the Peer Process Code (PPC) which was designed specifically for coding the Peer Interaction Task (PIT) in middle school age boys. The PPC focused primarily on the process of the boys' interaction and indicated the content of the talk only if the talk was antisocial. After using the PPC to code the PIT, it became apparent that PPC was leaving much of the verbal interaction undifferentiated. About 75% of the talk was coded with one code, verbal talk. The antisocial qualifier also seemed to miss some of the differences between the antisocial and non-antisocial boys. The definition of antisocial talk was restricted to talk about activities that were illegal. This left unanswered the question of whether there were other ways in which the antisocial and non-antisocial boys could be distinguished by their talk.

The purpose of the Topic code was to categorize the content of the boys' talk so what they talked about could be examined in terms of significant differences and to complement the structure of the interaction revealed by the PPC as well as how they talked or interacted. This would then differentiate the 75% verbal talk coded with the PPC and discover if there were any content differences besides the talk about illegal activities.

DEVELOPING THE TOPIC CODE

The procedure for developing the Topic code was to first preview the PIT videotapes for ten dyads of antisocial (both boys) and ten dyads of non-antisocial boys. Extensive notes were taken on the content of their talk which also included gestures. Gestures were included as they seemed to occur frequently for the antisocial boys and their meaning was as clear as their verbal talk. After previewing the tapes, the procedure was to then look for apparent differences between the two groups which could provide categories of topics.

The first apparent major difference between the two sets of boys was categorized as breaking the rules. There was clearly a major difference between boys who followed the rules and directions of the task and those who did not. Very little of the breaking rules behavior, however, would be captured antisocial by the PPC because very little of the talk was related to illegal activity. It was more a matter of violating acceptable standards of behavior, given the context in which it occurred. This format and context is considered to be approximately equivalent to that of a school classroom.

The category of "breaking the rules" was then subdivided into:

Gross Activities: Telling stories about (or actually doing in the session) activities involving bodily fluids or gases; for example, picking the nose, snot, farting, spitting, peeing, poop, wet dreams.

Using Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, or Smoking: All talk about drugs or using them during the session unless it is described as a problem that needs to be dealt with.

Illegal Activities: Stealing, vandalizing, making a bomb, etc. (any activity that is not included in the drugs or victimizing others category).

Obscene Gestures of Songs, Sexually Explicit Talk, Obscene Language: Giving the finger to the camera, cursing, etc.

Inciting the Other Person (or Doing Oneself) to Break the Rules of the Session or to Engage in Gross or Obscene Activities: Messing with the microphones or camera, getting up out of the chair, writing on the blackboard, or singing obscene songs.

Songs, Activities that are Inappropriate to the Session, but not in Above Categories: Singing, writing on the blackboard, messing with chairs, not taking an issue seriously, making faces at the camera, waving at the camera, making weird noises.

Getting in Trouble at School: Talking about oneself or others.

Victimizing Women: Talking about doing physical harm to, coercing, humiliating or degrading women, referring to women as "bitch" (exclude arguing or roughhousing with mother or female sibling conflicts unless they are severe or degrading).

Victimizing Others: Male parents, teachers, peers, people in general, minorities, or animals.

Being Victimized: By teachers, peers, parents, police, siblings, and peers.

It should be noted that some of these topics also appear in the next major category of "not breaking the rules." For example, talk about getting in trouble at school, drugs,

and some talk about family members could be in either category. "**Breaking the rules**" topics are differentiated from "not breaking the rules" topics by the boys' use of rationale that these activities are fun, they like doing them, and that they are not a problem for them.

The category of "not breaking the rules" (or "following the rules") was then subdivided into the topics:

Household/Parental Rules, Family Issues, Talk about Relatives: Chores, responsibilities around the house, conflict with parents or siblings, coming home on time.

Money: How to get it, what to spend it on; allowance, jobs, how much things cost, their checks from the session.

What to Do for Fun: Going to movies, video games, eating out, going to the mall; how to spend free time; what they have done in past activities.

What Things They Like: Records, movies, tapes, clothes, where to eat out; this is distinguished from "what to do for fun" by talking about specific things, e.g., brand names, names of games, particular movies.

Girls: Dating, what girls they like, gossip about, friends who are girls, sex (if discussed in a factual manner and not obscene).

Friends, Other Kids of the Same Sex: Gossip about friends of same sex; popularity.

School: Classes, tests, grades, teachers, sports activities if done at the school or sponsored by school, e.g., track, football; includes getting in trouble if it is discussed as a factual issue or problem for the youth.

Drugs: Alcohol, smoking, drugs, context of information sharing about drugs indicating that drug use is a problem.

Strategy/Problem-Solving Talk: Coming up with ideas about what to do about an issue, encouraging talk about an issue, showing support for the other person talking about an issue.

Rationale: Expressing values and beliefs, explaining why things are the way they are or why people do what they do.

Talk about Clothes, Shoes, their Bodies (hair, skin, etc.): How they are feeling during the session, the clothes that they are actually wearing during the session.

Initial Coding

The Topic Code was tested by paper and pencil loading of the 22 topics for 20 antisocial dyads and 20 non-antisocial dyads (neither youth was antisocial). The presence or absence of each topic was noted for TC and peer boy for each five minute segment. Each session had five segments so the total possible frequency for each topic was ten per dyad.

Reliabilities

TC P TC P TC TC P TC P P P TC TC TC P TC P
13 13 L 4 4 13 14 15 L 14 15 13 L 13 11 11 L

13 = gross activities
 4 = what things they like
 14 = using drug, tobacco
 L = laugh

===== Breaking the Rules String
 _____ = Following the Rules String

Data Analysis

Analysis with the Predictive Validity Correlation Coefficient showed that the Topic Code improved prediction to delinquency over the Antisocial Qualifier of the PPC code.

	Child Delinquency	Arrests	Antisocial	Substance
Antisocial qualifier	.2585	.2052	.2447	.1528
TOPIC CODE				
Rule Break dyad duration	.5240	.4676	.5551	.3985
Rule Break frequency	.4175	.4072	.4828	.3551
Normative dyad duration	-.4675	-.4719	-.4839	-.3631

It also showed that the antisocial boys reinforced each other for antisocial talk, and perhaps even more significantly they did not reinforce each other for normative talk.

	Child Delinquency	Arrests	Antisocial	Substance
Dyad laugh given rule break	.3215	.3897	.4129	.2077
Dyad laugh given normative	-.3519	-.3008	-.4057	-.2923

Comparing the antisocial and prosocial boys revealed no significant differences for laugh following rule break. Both groups reinforced rule breaking talk. The prosocial boys, however, also reinforced laughter for normative talk while the antisocial boys did not.