

Coding Manual for “Meanings in Nature/Built Stories”

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Note: “Positive” generally means “pleasant”, and the word “negative” generally means “unpleasant”.

1. Positive Sensory Experience: This theme involves pleasures of the senses:

Aesthetics, beauty, pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations.

Ask yourself: Are any pleasant sights mentioned? Any pleasant sounds? Any pleasant smells?

Any pleasant tastes? Any pleasant tactile sensations?

This theme could be indicated by terms such as “beautiful,” “pretty,” “fragrant”, or “the breeze caressed my skin” and any of these would be coded at least a 2. Merely descriptive passages or words like “big” or “bright” do not necessarily indicate positive sensory experience unless the participant indicates that he or she likes it.

If no sensory experiences are clearly indicated, but instead the writer reports, “I liked the pond”, or “I liked the lights”, a visual experience is implied, but it is not really clear. Code this a 1. (This applies even if the writer merely writes “the pond” in response to the “**Like:**” question.) When “liking” is present, adjective modifiers suggestive of sensory experience, e.g., “I liked the *bright* lights”, should bring this rating up to 2.

If any of the positive sensory experiences are even once explicitly mentioned -- e.g., “beautiful”, “I like the way it looks”, or “I enjoy the sun” (this means either the way the sun looks or the way it feels, but either way it is sensory), then it is at least a 2.

sensory pleasure(s).

2. Negative Sensory Experience: This theme involves unpleasant sensory experiences.

Unpleasant sensory experiences: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile, pain, physical hurt.

Ask yourself: Are any unpleasant sights mentioned? Any unpleasant sounds? Any unpleasant smells?

Any unpleasant tastes? Any unpleasant tactile sensations/ pain?

If no sensory experiences are clearly indicated, but instead writer reports, “I didn’t like the flowers”, a visual experience is implied, but it is not really clear. In such situations code this a 1. (This applies even if the writer merely writes “the pond” in response to the “**Dislike:**” question.) Adjective modifiers suggestive of sensory experience, e.g., “I disliked the *smelly* flowers”, should bring this rating up to 2.

Also, if dangers, threats, or events are mentioned that imply physical hurt, but the hurt is not explicitly mentioned (e.g., “there are rapists there”), code this as a 1.

Words such as “cold” or “hot” are not clear enough on their own (some people really like cold or hot weather); for such words there would need to be indication that the temperature is unpleasant.

If any of the unpleasant sensory experiences are explicitly mentioned (e.g., “smog”, “I don’t like the way it looks”), then this is at least a 2. (Example: “I don’t like the dark” would be a 2.)

Do NOT, however, code “*Dislike: the photo is blurry*”. Such a comment is about photo quality, and should be ignored in coding because we are interested in the *scene* not the photo.

sensory displeasure.

3. Positive Connection: Connection, *Affiliation*, or Intimacy with another human or animal.

This theme involves positive interaction or encounter, affiliation, friendliness, connection, intimacy, caring, or helpfulness with another being, human (or human-like) or animal.

Ask yourself: Is there something positive here, and does it have to do with connection to another person or animal? (Don’t code connection to a place or to God here.)

This might be indicated explicitly or by using a word such as “like,” “love,” “friend” or “wedding”.

Examples: “I was so excited because I saw a bear” speaks of a positive encounter, so should be coded at least a 2; contrast with “I saw a bear” which doesn’t clearly suggest positive, so should be coded a 0.

“Kids having fun together” would be coded at least a 2, while “kids having fun” isn’t clear enough about the connection, so would be coded a 0. However, if it is clear that the kids are playing with each other (e.g., in a snowball fight, etc.), then it would be coded at least a 2.

Terms like “many people are there”, “we”, “mom”, or “family”, are not explicit enough on their own to merit a positive connection score; with these terms you need an additional

indication that there is a feeling of positive connection (such as seeking each other out, or having fun together).

The term “gangs” (in the sense of violent gangs) is generally not coded as positive connection.

Particularly for higher ratings, consider not only the frequency / proportion of positive connection indications but also the intensity of the positive connection.

positive connection with other(s).

4. Negative Connection: Unpleasant interaction, Lack of connection with other, or Danger or threat.

This theme involves either a) a negative interaction/ encounter with another, b) an unpleasant absence of connection with another, or c) threat / danger (physical or emotional) from another.

Ask yourself: Is there something negative here, and does it have to do with connection or lack thereof?

This could be with humans or non-humans. Examples: “lonely” would indicate a lack of connection with humans and should be scored at least a 2; “afraid of drugs” would also be negative connection --i.e., the fear is probably of the people doing drugs -- and should be scored at least a 2; “the fish bit me” would be scored a 2.

It might also be unspecified: e.g., “it is dangerous here,” or “scared” *implies* threat but is not explicit about what is threatening (could be fear of failure, etc.); if it seems that the threat comes from another human or animal, code this at least a 1.

This theme might be explicitly indicated with terms such as “lonely”, “there are too many people”, “overcrowded” or “I fear what kind of animals are there”. All of these indicate unpleasant connection and should be coded at least a 2. The word “hate” might indicate unpleasant connection to a person or animal.

A statement such as “I don’t like all the traffic” is less clear; the negative aspect is clear, but it is only implied that people are the problem; therefore, code this as a 1.

Words like “alone”, “solitude”, “busy”, or “bustling” are not necessarily negative and should be scored a 0 here unless its unpleasantness is clear.

Particularly for higher ratings, consider not only the frequency / proportion of negative connection indications but also the intensity of the negative connection.

unpleasant connection(s).

5. (Positive) Peacefulness, Quiet, Calm, Serenity, Tranquility,

Relaxation, or Solitude: Are any of these concepts present?

For this theme, fun activities or playing are not, on their own, enough to merit a rating here. Instead, would need to mention “relaxed” or “calm”, for example.

peace or relaxation.

6. Play, Positive Engagement, Fun, in activities undertaken primarily for enjoyment.

Ask yourself: Are the characters doing anything for fun/ pleasure? If so, will get a higher rating.

Could include games, actively visiting a place, adventure, even watching things go on (if it’s clear that the watching is pleasant – e.g., sightseeing). Doing entertaining things. In general, good or fun things keeping one pleasantly occupied.

May be explicitly indicated by words such as “fun,” “adventure”, “enjoying (a particular activity)” or “vacation”. Note that the Engagement rating is stronger if there is a *verb* signifying that action is going on, even if, e.g., it’s only “sightseeing”. Also, this category requires that the activity is clearly positive.

Example: “I like that there are restaurants” or “I like that there is night life” implies a fun activity but should be coded a 1 because it does not have an action explicitly mentioned; it is less explicit than “we went out to eat at a restaurant” which should be coded at least a 2.

“Night life”, on its own, is not specific enough and would get a rating of 0 unless it is clear that it is being engaged in positively, while “party” or “celebration” are clearly positive and should be rated a 2.

Terms like “wedding” or “I love my job” are clearly positive, but their main purpose is something other than fun/play; therefore, these would be rated a 0 here.

Mere descriptions of beautiful scenes are not enough to merit a Play/ Positive Engagement rating; instead, the entry would need explicitly to have the *activity* of watching the beautiful scene.

For example, "I sat and watched the beautiful sunset" would be rated a 2 here, while "The sunset was so beautiful with streaks of blue and yellow..." would be rated a 0.
enjoyable activity/ playing.

7. Cognitive stimulation: Intellectual stimulation, creativity, realizing something, finding things interesting or enlightening, curiosity, awe, amazement, mystery, figuring something out, wanting to know something, active reminiscing, pleasant mental stimulation, wonder, contemplation, or reflection.

Ask yourself: Are there a) verbs indicative of mental activity, such as "I imagined", "brings back memories", "I realized", "I reflected on that thought" or "I sat there thinking", b) words like "interesting", "curious", "awe", or "wonder", or c) an overall storyline indicative of cognitive stimulation, for example, a mystery to be solved? If so, code any of these at least a 2. Entries that would not, on their own, merit a score above 0 include: "I've never seen such a thing" (this is more sensory than cognitive); "worry" (this would instead be viewed as a negative feeling that will be taken into account in the final Overall Feeling rating), "exciting" (it is not clear that this is cognitive enough), "forgetting" (this is not cognitive *stimulation*), or "reading a book" (this would be coded as Play/Positive Engagement).
mental stimulation/ mental activity.

8. Achievement: accomplishment (or near-accomplishment) of what one might think of as a positive achievement; succeeding at a significant goal. Having a goal of some sort and expending effort striving for it. This is not about everyday, mundane activities such as "I finished my dinner", "I finished work for the day", or "I found a taxi" (these should be scored a 0 in this category).

Ask yourself: Is there a significant goal and effort expended toward reaching that goal?
Is this a story about achievement?

Examples: "We made it up the mountain" suggests having had a goal and expending effort, as does "We went fishing and caught some fish." These should be scored a 2. "We hiked and finally got there" suggests having had a goal and accomplishing it, so should be scored at least a 2; contrast this with "we hiked" which should be scored a 0 because it is simply Play/ Positive Engagement and is not clear that a goal was accomplished.

Similarly, "I threw a party and it went great" suggests having had a goal and accomplishing it and so should be scored at least a 2; contrast this with "I went to a party" which is simply Play/ Positive Engagement and should be scored a 0 here.

Words such as "pride" or "success" might also be indicative of achievement.

For higher ratings of 3 or 4, consider the extent to which achievement is *an important theme* in the entry. (Simple frequency-of-mentionings probably does not work as well as a criterion for high ratings of achievement because writers might be unlikely to mention achievement repeatedly even if it is an important theme.)

accomplishment.

9. Acquisition of External Rewards such as Money, Possessions, Status, or Recognition; Having/making/ spending money; consumerism, shopping, stores, buying, owning things (when the owning seems to be a big point such as in materialism), having expensive possessions; robbing. Acquisition or selling of things of monetary value. Being famous, being of high status, getting awards or recognition from others.

Examples: "I went shopping" would clearly indicate a rating of at least 2.

"I picked flowers" would be scored a 0 unless there is an indication that this was done for profit.

"I picked the corn to eat" would be scored a 0; the acquisition of the corn was for a purpose other than buying or selling.

"This reminds me of my cabin" does not necessarily merit a rating in this category; ownership is indicated in this statement, but it is not clearly materialistic.

"Working" does not alone get a score of more than 0 here; to get a higher score there would need to be indication that money is an important part of it.

For higher ratings of 3 or 4, consider the extent to which money or buying/owning things is *an important theme* in the entry. (Simple frequency-of-mentionings probably does not work as

well as a criterion for high ratings here because writers might be unlikely to mention it repeatedly even if it is an important theme.)
money, status, or owning things.

10. Busy-ness: Being rushed or hectic; lots of things happening.

Look for terms such as "busy", "bustling", or "there's a lot going on". If any of these terms is present, code it at least a 2. If such words are present two or more times, consider rating it at least a 3. Terms which do not automatically merit a score of more than 0 in this category include "running" (unless it has a "busy" feel to it), "lively" (unless it has a bustling, busy feel to it) or "stressful" (unless it is clear that the stress is coming from being too busy).
busy-ness.

11. Contentment: Is "content," "contented," or "contentment" indicated in the entry?
contentment.

12. Overall Affective Tone: Balance of Negative and Positive Feelings

As you read over the entire entry, does it contain more negative or more positive feelings and events?

What is the overall feeling of the story?

For this rating, take into account both the frequency of words indicating negative or positive things, and the intensity of the negative or positive feelings and events.

***** This category uses a different rating scale, scoring from 0 to 2: *****

- 0 = more negative than positive
- 1 = neutral/ equally negative and positive
- 2 = more positive than negative

continued...

General Rules for Coding Stories:

1. Rate each category (e.g. Positive Sensory Experience, Negative Sensory Experience, etc.) independently of the other categories. Do one category at a time, coding all of the participants' entries. Then, move on to another category, and go back through all of the participants' entries. While this may seem repetitive, mistakes are too likely if you try to code more than one category at a time. Vigilance is necessary to make sure that you code accurately, and accurate coding is of paramount importance: if our ratings don't agree, then we can't use our ratings.
2. Use the following scale (duplicated on each rating form) for rating each entry:
To what extent is this entry about this theme?
(Or: to what extent is this theme present anywhere in the statements?)
 - 0 = not at all, it doesn't come up at all
 - 1 = a hint of it, but is not clearly mentioned (or it is not clear what the writer meant)
 - 2 = is clearly present, e.g., it is clearly mentioned at least once
 - 3 = is strongly present, e.g., is mentioned several times or in a substantial proportion of the comments
 - 4 = it is clearly the main theme of the story and is mentioned several times (rare)
3. Make sure to use all of the material given in the entry: "couple words," "feelings," "story," "like," "dislike," "bothers," and "valuable."
4. Code only a category or two at one sitting or exhaustion may cause you to make errors in your coding.
5. Count each clear reference. For example, if the participant uses the word "beautiful" three times, count these as three Positive Sensory Experience entries.
6. Don't count vague references. For example, "It's big" is not codable as a positive or negative sensory experience unless the participant has indicated the valence of it (i.e., that this is viewed as positive or negative, e.g., that he or she finds it beautiful or interesting.)
7. When coding "Connection," or "Sensory Experiences" categories, ask "Is there any adjective or any affect (e.g., liking or disliking something)?" If so, this entry will probably need a coding under one or more of these categories.
8. If a participant uses the word "like" or "dislike" (or "love" or "hate") (e.g., "I like..."), check what is being liked or disliked:
 - if it is an overall place or person, code as Connection (e.g., "I like this place");
 - if it is something sensory, code as Sensory Experience (e.g., "I like the smells here");
 - if it is a thing, probably code as Sensory Experience (e.g., "I don't like the flowers"), assuming it is the appearance of the thing that the participant likes/ dislikes;
 - if it is an action that is liked (e.g., hiking), then code as Engagement.
9. With words like "neat" or "nice," ask "what is nice/neat?"
 - If it's the place as a whole or another person/animal, code as Positive Connection.
 - If it's a thing (e.g., "nice mountains"), code as Positive Sensory Experience.
10. If the participant merely states "lots of lights" or "lots of cars" etc. but does not indicate whether this is good or bad, do not code. However, if participant states, "I liked all the lights," code this as Positive Sensory Experience. (This is repeated on the rating sheet for Positive Sensory Experience.)

Categories considered but not used:

Savoring

Positive Affect: Happiness, good feelings. This theme involves positive or pleasant emotion.

Note that for this theme, *emotion* is the important element; “pretty”, while a positive word, is not an emotion and so would not be coded here, while “having fun” or “exciting” does suggest emotion and would be coded at least a 2.

A score of 0 is appropriate if there is no indication of positive affect (i.e., there does NOT need to be the presence of its opposite: negative affect).

If any positive emotion (e.g., “fun”, “happy”, “relaxed”) is explicitly mentioned, code it is at least a 2.

If it’s not clear to you whether it’s a 2 or 3, consider the *overall feeling* of the story; if it is clearly a story of positive feeling, then consider the higher ranking.

Particularly for higher ratings, consider not only the frequency / proportion of positive affect indications but also the intensity of the positive affect. For example, both “love” and “relaxed” suggest positive feeling; “love” is more intense, however, and might merit a higher rating than “relaxed”, depending on the rest of the entry.

positive feelings.

Negative Affect: This theme involves negative or unpleasant emotion or feelings, for example, sadness, inconvenience, worry, boredom, or unpleasantness (e.g., getting dirty, but only if it’s clear that this is negative).

If seriously bad events are described but negative affect is not explicitly mentioned, negative emotion is probably implied, so consider coding it a 1.

If any negative emotion (e.g., “sad”, “frustrated”, “scared”) is explicitly mentioned, it is at least a 2.

If it’s not clear to you whether it’s a 2 or 3, consider the *overall feeling* of the story; if it is clearly a story of negative feeling, then consider the higher ranking.

Particularly for higher ratings, consider not only the frequency / proportion of negative affect indications but also the intensity of the negative affect.

unpleasant feelings.

(Negative) Excess Activity: Too much activity going on, Too much busy-ness (too much activity of people or of cars, etc.), OR Too much stimulation.

excessive busy-ness.

WAS INCLUDED IN "BUSY-NESS".

(Negative) Too Little Going On, Boredom, Nothing to do, Unable (forgot how) to amuse self.

boredom.

Death/ Lethal injury: Is death or probable death mentioned?

death.

Work-related or “maintenance” activities (e.g., eating – if it’s not clear that it’s fun).

work.

Frustrated or unfruitful activity, Punishment, Thwartedness. Examples: getting lost (if it’s not specified that this is positive), or trying and not succeeding at something.

frustration.

Negative Crowdedness: Lack of solitude/ Lack of privacy/ Too many people/ Too many cars. This theme involves a *negative* experience of lack of solitude, lack of privacy, too many people, too many cars, etc. Generally involves intrusiveness of too many “others”, whether human or not, e.g., “overcrowded”.
being unpleasantly intruded upon.

WAS INCLUDED IN "NEGATIVE CONNECTION".