

Behavioral Affective Rating Scale

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The Behavioral Affective Rating Scale (BARS) was developed as an alternative to SPAFF that uses rating scales instead of coding to assess affect observed in dyadic interactions. The validity and reliability of the BARS were described by Johnson (2002) and translated into Dutch by Lesley Verhofstadt at the University of Ghent.

Definitions and Examples

The BARS allows one to rate the affect in couples' interactions on a scale from 0 to 4 solely on the basis of the couples' body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. The actual content of couples' interactions is not taken into consideration at all. A 0 is the absence of the affect, a 1 is mild, a 2 is medium, a 3 is strong, and a 4 is extreme. The following list includes examples for each of the ratings for all the affects.

It should be noted that during some periods of the interactions, none of the affects will be displayed. It is expected that the absence of these affects will be the rating most often used. The majority of the couples' affect will fall in the range of 0 to 2. It is also important to recognize that some of the behavioral affects need to occur only briefly during the 30-s interval to receive high ratings. This is because some behavioral affects are primarily mercurial in nature. An asterisk (*) identifies these affects. The remaining affects need to occur in longer duration to receive higher values.

**Affection*: genuine care, support, warmth, and tenderness.

Scores: 0 = absence
1 = genuine smiles
2 = warm laughter
3 = flirting, little love taps
4 = holding hands, hugging, kissing.

**Humor*: genuine, honest smile or laughter in a positive and agreeable situation, with no ill intention shared by the couple.

Scores: 0 = absence
1 = laughing smile
2 = genuine laughter
3 = goofiness
4 = uncontrollable laughter.

Anxiety: nervousness, tenseness, and discomfort.

- Scores: 0 = absence
1 = anxious tone of voice, shifting
2 = nervous giggle, extended fidgeting
3 = stuttering
4 = sweating, panicky, skittish.

Engaging: showing positive involvement and focusing on the conversation.

- Scores: 0 = absence
1 = steady, active eye contact, nodding
2 = steady, active eye contact, nodding, affirmative vocal cues
3 = steady, active eye contact, leaning, verbal cues, nodding
4 = steady, active eye contact, body contact, leaning, verbal cues.

Disengaging: displaying a total disinterest in the conversation and not listening.

- Scores: 0 = absence
1 = extended break of eye contact
2 = over-talk
3 = closed body position, no eye contact
4 = totally unresponsive.

Defensive: self-justification.

- Scores: 0 = absence
1 = shaking head, inward, defensive hand motions
2 = more adamant head shaking and inward hand motions
3 = aroused body posture, interrupting in spurts
4 = very animated, prolonged defensive motions.

Aggressive: attacking, accusing, forcefully communicating.

- Scores: 0 = absence
1 = forceful tone of voice, pointing
2 = more aggressive tone of voice, outward hand motions
3 = prolonged forcefulness in the tone of voice and body movements
4 = in face, yelling.

Scorn: insulting, condescending, contemptuous, and sarcastic.

- Scores: 0 = absence
1 = rolling eyes, light sarcastic tone of voice
2 = contemptuous voice, more sarcasm
3 = very condescending voice, withering looks
4 = dismissive body posture, extremely sarcastic.

Frustration: flustered, upset, loss of patience and tense.

Scores: 0 = absence
1 = sighing, tense body posture
2 = more sighing, holding head at an angle
3 = clenching teeth, slight stuttering
4 = so flustered unable to talk, red in face.

**Hurt*: genuine emotional pain, sadness, and wounded.

Scores: 0 = absence
1 = hurt look, passively looking down
2 = more expressions of sadness
3 = shaky voice, watery eyes
4 = crying.

BARS Procedure

First, raters watch the entire ten min. interaction continuously to obtain an overview of the interaction. This initial viewing of the interaction also makes tuning out the content of the conversation easier during the actual rating.

Second, raters view the interaction again, concentrating only on either the wife or husband. During this second viewing, the rater will stop the tape after each 30-sec. to rate the interval for the ten behavioral affects based solely on tone of voice, facial expression, and body movement.

Third, raters repeat the second step, this time rating behavioral affects of the other partner.

References

Johnson, M. D. (2002). The observation of specific affect in marital interactions: Psychometric properties of a coding system and a rating system. *Psychological Assessment, 14*, 423-438.

Note

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