

## Coding Questions for Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS)

Excessive Reassurance Seeking (ERS) is defined as “the relatively stable tendency to excessively and persistently seek assurances from others that one is lovable and worthy, regardless of whether such assurance has already been provided” (Joiner, Metalsky, Katz, & Beach, 1999, p. 270).

Write down each question that the target participant asks, regardless of whether or not you think it qualifies as a reassurance-seeking question. Also write down any *statement* that implies a question or requires a response from the partner (e.g., “But you don’t think I’m really like that...”).

Once you have written each of the questions down, apply the following criteria to each question, keeping in mind the context in which it was asked (you may have to review the spot in the tape in which the question was asked).

Each criterion is NECESSARY. If an earlier criterion is not met, stop evaluating the question and move on to the next question.

### **1. QUESTION SEEKS FEEDBACK ABOUT INFORMATION RELATED TO THE SELF**

Does the question relate to a personal quality of the target participant (e.g., their performance, their personality, their mood, their appearance, etc)? Note: it can also be information about a group or system in which the individual is involved (e.g., a couple or a relationship).

As a general rule, these questions often will have “me” or “we” somewhere in them.

e.g., “Do you really love **me**?”

e.g., “Do you think **we** are like that?” (‘we’ referring to target and partner)

### **2. QUESTION IS PHRASED IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE FEEDBACK LIKELY TO BE OBTAINED IS POSITIVE**

In coding these behaviors, we need to distinguish between reassurance seeking and “negative feedback seeking” (i.e., the tendency to seek out information that confirms a negative view of the self).

Reassurance seeking will be aimed to garner feedback that is positive and/or reassuring.

e.g., I’m pretty, right? You think I’m pretty, right? Do you think I’m pretty?

Negative feedback seeking is a different construct. Participants who engage in this type of behavior will push their partners to confirm their perceived flaws / short-comings. This is **not** what we are looking for.

e.g., I’m such an idiot, don’t you think?

e.g., All I do is fail. I'm totally useless, don't you agree?

**3. QUESTION IS PHRASED IN A SUCH A WAY THAT POTENTIAL RESPONSE POSSIBILITIES WOULD BE LOGICALLY EXPECTED TO BE LIMITED.**

When it comes to our task, a question that invites discussion would not qualify as a reassurance-seeking question. Participants are instructed to discuss a personality profile for the target participant, so they are FORCED into getting feedback that is personal in some ways.

However, there is a way to go about this that would not qualify as reassurance-seeking.

e.g., What do you think about my score for pride? (NOT reassurance seeking)

e.g., What's your opinion on my rating for honesty? (NOT reassurance seeking)

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e.g., Do you really think that I'm that prideful? (reassurance seeking)

e.g., I'm more honest than that, don't you think? (reassurance-seeking)

The first two example questions above are open-ended questions with a multitude of ways of responding. Each of the questions also has an element of personal distance, even though they obviously still pertain to the target.

Reassurance-seeking limits the response set possibilities for the responder, sometimes down to a "yes/no" answer (as in question 3 and 4 above). Often, the question is asked in such a way so that the individual will get the reassurance that they desire, or the exact opposite.

**If all 3 bolded criteria are met, code the question as "1", indicating that it is a reassurance-seeking question. If any of the above 3 criteria are not met, code the question as a "0".**

For each question that is coded a "1", code whether the partner provides the reassurance sought in a reasonable manner.

This involves any statement from the partner that provides the positive outcome that the participant was searching for.

e.g., yes, I think you are pretty

e.g., of course, you know our relationship is going well.

e.g., You know I think you are a really honest person.

e.g., I don't know what that personality test was about, you are much less moody than that

**Code these responses a “1” if there is evidence for verbal reassurance from the partner in response to a reassurance-seeking question. Code the partner response a “0” if there is no evidence for verbal reassurance from the partner.**

For each question that is coded a “1” for reassurance-seeking and “1” for reassurance provided by partner, examine the verbal responses made by the participant in response to the reassurance that they received. Evaluate the responses for indications of “doubting the sincerity” of the reassurance provided by the partner.

These include any statements that discount the reassurance, or assert the opposite. They also include statements that minimize the reassurance given, or pass it off as not being important.

e.g., Oh, you’re just saying that because you have to.

e.g., You aren’t a good judge of how pretty I am.

e.g., You are biased because we’re dating.

Code these response a “1” if there is evidence that the participant doubted the sincerity or discounted their partner’s efforts to provide the reassurance sought. Code the response a “0” if there is no evidence for this verbal behavior.