Introduction
Observational coding is a common task in psychological research. In the field of clinical psychology, it is used to record and measure interactions between therapist and client to evaluate client progress and therapist effectiveness. Traditionally, coding is done using paper-based instruments. However, computer-based instruments have the potential to improve the process (Maclin & Maclin, 2005). The present study will compare paper-based and computer-based approaches, using a representative coding scale of medium complexity: the Validation and Invalidation Behavior Coding Scale (VIBCS) (Fruzzetti, 2001). Validation involves responses that reflect the acceptance and understanding of another’s private experiences (Linehan, 1997).

Hypotheses
The first hypothesis states that subjects using the computer-based approach (V-CODE) will exhibit greater reliability than those using the paper-based version of the VIBCS. The second predicts that ratings in the V-CODE group will be more accurate (i.e., greater concurrent validity with expert ratings). In addition, it is hypothesized that subjects in the VIBCS group will report a greater satisfaction and better overall experience than those in the paper-based group.

Methods
Participants
At least sixty students will be recruited to allow detection of differences between groups, using broad advertising across campus for maximum inclusivity. Exclusion criteria will involve any prior observational coding experience or knowledge of the experiment.

Measures
Measures will include a demographic/pre-test questionnaire and a post-test questionnaire, which will assess overall satisfaction with the respective approach. The main dependent variable in the study will be reliability of participants coding, using the VIBCS to code the videos of mock therapy sessions. The VIBCS is based on a seven-level validating and invalidating response scale. Level one of validation will be omitted because it is considered to be a baseline.

Training Protocol
A short training protocol will be developed, which will be presented to each participant. The training will be videotaped in order to maintain consistency and maximize generalizability.

Expected Results
Reliability
It is expected that participants using the computer-based instrument (V-CODE) will be more reliable, when compared to those using the paper-based instrument. Reliability will be calculated using Intra-Class Correlation Coefficients.

Validation
It is expected that participants will demonstrate greater accuracy when using V-CODE than the participants using the paper-based instrument. Measurements will be based on consensus ratings with experts.

Satisfaction
It is predicted that results from the post-study questionnaire will reveal a greater overall experience and satisfaction with V-CODE than the paper-based tool. This preference may stem from technological familiarity among undergraduates and by V-CODE’s improved accessibility and streamlined process of coding.

Future Research
Implications for future research could involve videos of a higher degree of coding difficulty. Styles and length of training protocols could also be varied. To further enhance generalizability beyond therapist-client settings, the experiment could also be replicated using other scenarios, such as couples interactions, a common area of study in clinical research.

References