

**The Unresolved/disorganized category of the AAI:  
Related to frightening parental behavior, and to offspring disorganized attachment status**

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- ... Infant disorganized attachment in the Strange Situation procedure, was first recognized by Main and Solomon (1986, 1990).
- ... Of all the infant strange situation categories, this category is the most strongly associated with later difficulties for the offspring, as seen from 6 years to young adulthood.
- ... I will therefore begin by describing infant “D” behavior, and then tie this back to the ways it can be predicted from the AAI.

In 1981, using their low-risk middle-class Berkeley sample, Main and Weston reported that some babies were “unclassifiable” when seen with the parent in the strange situation. They did not fit to Ainsworth’s directions for identifying secure, avoidant, or resistant/ambivalent babies.

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By 1990, Main & Solomon had reviewed:

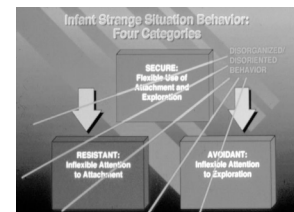
100 “unclassifiable” strange situation videotapes from maltreatment samples, and 100 “unclassifiable” videotapes from low-risk samples, and found disorganized/disoriented behavior occurring in almost all the “unclassifiable” babies.

**MAIN & SOLOMON’S SEVEN THEMATIC “D” HEADINGS:**

- *Simultaneous display of contradictory behavior*
- *Rapidly sequential display of contradictory behavior*
- *Stilling or freezing of all movement*
- *Undirected, misdirected, incomplete, and interrupted movements and expressions*
- *Direct indices of confusion or apprehension*
- *Anomalous movements, anomalous postures*
- *Stereotypies, mis-timed movements*

***BOUTS of “D” BEHAVIOR ARE USUALLY VERY BRIEF***

*And normally occur in conjunction with otherwise well-organized strange situation behavior*



- In examining the AAI transcripts of the parents of babies fitting to this new, disorganized infant attachment category, Main and Hesse found that they had a special characteristic:
- Namely, they showed disorganized speech or reasoning surrounding the discussion of loss or other potential trauma.
- In short, in brief interruptive bouts of speech, the parents themselves were exhibiting disorganization or disorientation, through lapses in the monitoring of speech or reasoning.

### WHAT IS An AAI “REASONING LAPSE”?

- Speaker seems to briefly exhibit ideas inconsonant with our usual ideas of physical causality or space/time relations, and fails to correct or comment on them
  - This suggests a brief alteration in normal state of mind or “consciousness”

- **Examples of “Lapses in Reasoning”**
  - “She died because I forgot to think of her”
  - “Its really better, because now he can get on with being dead and I can get on with my work”

### WHAT IS AN AAI “DISCOURSE LAPSE”?

- **Speaker seems briefly drawn out of the immediate context of the interview, then returns to normal discourse**
  - This also suggests brief alterations in state/consciousness

- **Examples of “Lapses in Discourse”**
  - Change in speech register (e.g. to eulogistic/funereal)
  - Sudden extreme attention to detail

**This AAI classification is especially relevant to clinicians: Consider the worldwide distribution of AAI Categories**

**Low-Risk vs. (blinded) Clinical samples**

U/d texts are indicated in red (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996)

But what kind of parental behavior is associated with the Unresolved/disorganized AAI classification?

**Now, it was already known that in maltreatment samples**

**about 77% of infants are found to be disorganized...**

**This of course makes sense because the parent is overtly frightening**

But what happens when an infant is attached to a non-maltreating parent, who behaves in (other) frightening ways?

**Note: Playful behavior and simple discipline are not considered frightening**

- If the attachment figure is directly frightening
  - or is indirectly frightening through seeming frightened of the baby,
  - or through entering a trancelike state
- The infant is placed in a situation of “FRIGHT WITHOUT SOLUTION”

- This is because the attachment figure – the infant’s haven of safety – has become simultaneously the source of its alarm
- This creates an approach-flight paradox which is irresolvable at the behavioral level
- Therefore we hypothesized long ago (Main & Hesse, 1990; see also Hesse & Main, 2006) that the baby interacting with a frightening parent may become disoriented, or behaviorally disorganized

This hypothesis could account for infant “D” behavior BOTH in

Maltreatment samples

And in

Low-risk samples with AAI  
where the parents alarming  
behavior is not physically  
aggressive

- BUT WHY SHOULD FRIGHTENING BEHAVIOR
- BE EXPECTED IN PARENTS
- WHO LAPSE IN REASONING OR DISCOURSE DURING THE DISCUSSION OF LOSS OR OTHER TRAUMA IN THE AAI?

- We reasoned that IF “lapses” in AAI speech are the product of alterations in consciousness associated with frightening ideation –
- -- THEN speakers who “lapse” in the AAI may also be likely to *experience alterations in consciousness while interacting with their infants -- leading to anomalous fright-associated actions in the infant’s presence.*

So, a parent’s continuing states of “unresolved” fright regarding traumatic experiences could result in (nonmaltreating) forms of frightening behavior. Here, infant “D” could be a second-generation effect of the parent’s own earlier unresolved trauma.

We and others (a pioneering Dutch study was conducted by Schuengel, Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg; see also Abrams et al, Jacobvitz et al, True, and Evans et al) found that parents suffering from unresolved trauma as identified on the AAI did exhibit subtly frightened, threatening of dissociative behavior in the home (“FR” behavior, coding system, Main & Hesse, 1991)


In...

- Austin, Texas
- Berkeley, California
- Leiden, The Netherlands
- London, Ontario
- Mali, West Africa (Dogon ethnic group)

- **Examples of “FR” parental behavior seen in low-risk samples:**
  - Entrance into trancelike states
  - Animal-like stalking of infant
  - Canine exposure
  - Growling, inhuman sounds
  - Inexplicable signs of fear of the infant such as backing away as though the infant is a frightening animal
  - Strange “haunted” sounds on greeting (“Hiiiiiii”)

## Sequelae to Infant D


### **Disorganized in SS – what happens 18 years later on the AAI?**

 "D" with M infancy in the Bay Area low-risk study

**Point 1.** In our middle-class Bay Area sample, we found a very strong majority of former D infants produced insecure AAI transcripts 18 years later, including all those "D" infants whose alternative infant classification was secure.

**Point 2.** Infant D also predicted unresolved or unclassifiable AAI transcripts – or else, interestingly, dismissing transcripts.

### **Disorganized in SS – what happens 18 to 25 years later on the AAI?**

 "D" with M infancy in the Bay Area low-risk study

**Both findings have recently been replicated in the large Minnesota high-risk sample (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).**

**Point 1.** A strong majority of transcripts insecure, even if D/secure in infancy.

**Point 2.** Infant D predicts unresolved/cannot classify status on the AAI and as in Berkeley also predicts dismissing transcripts.

### **Infant D also is related to both disruptive-aggressive disorders, and internalizing disorders**

Lyons-Ruth and her colleagues at Harvard discovered D was related to externalizing disorders, and this has been well replicated.

Recently, D has been found related to some internalizing disorders as well.

These findings hold for both high-risk and low-risk samples.

In keeping with a hypothesis developed by Giovanni Liotti at Rome, infant "D" attachment status in the strange situation, is presently the strongest early predictor of dissociative disorders

**OVERALL:** Infant "D" attachment status in the strange situation ... with its suggestion of a collapse in both attentional and behavioral strategies under stress ... is presently the strongest early predictor of psychopathology in young adulthood (Carlson, 1998)

Goya: "The sleep of reason"

In the Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins Minnesota poverty sample (about 140 families), infant "D" strange situation behavior to mother was the strongest overall predictor of psychopathology in late adolescence, even controlling for maltreatment.

Goya: "The sleep of reason"

This makes it highly worthwhile to have discovered two outstanding predictors of infant disorganized attachment status:

- (1) The parent's disorganization in speech or reasoning during the discussion of their own traumatic experiences during the AAI, and
- (2) their associated exhibitions of frightened, frightening or dissociative behavior in the infant's presence.