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Forecasting Outcomes in Previously Maltreated Children

The Use of the AAI in a Longitudinal Adoption Study

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> It is hard enough to predict the weather. That you can predict child outcomes from knowing the parent's state of mind about attachment is truly remarkable!
>
> —JOHN BOWLBY (personal communication, May 24, 1989)

When he shared this remark, John Bowlby was speaking about the emergence of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) as a powerful tool for forecasting infant–parent patterns of attachment (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Years later we applied the AAI to the question of how best to forecast child outcomes when they are most uncertain, that of adoption concerning a school-age child with a history of maltreatment. This chapter details our findings on use of the AAI in this context.

Although adopted children are already overrepresented in mental health and special needs services (Miller et al., 2000; van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2006), evidence suggests that adopted children who have been maltreated within their families of origin experience even greater difficulties. However, compelling data indicate that, especially in the long term, the majority of adoptees show favorable adjustment. Although this has mainly been documented in the case of infancy adoptions, overall, adoption has often been described as the

most radical and powerful intervention we have to alter the course of the lives of traumatized children (O'Connor & Zeanah, 2003; van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2006). Adoption provides in a child's world the chance for change from repeatedly making and breaking of affectional bonds to experiencing benign and, we hope, enduring permanent caregiving arrangements. This chapter highlights how the AAI may significantly forecast these possibilities when administered to adoptive parents of late-placed (older) children with a history of maltreatment.

van IJzendoorn and Juffer (2006) summarize data in their meta-analytic study of adoption research, which highlights the impact of early compared to late adoptions. They found a significant difference in catch-up between early- (before age 12 months) and late-adopted (after age 12 months) children. Once adopted, the early-adopted children managed to catch up almost completely with nonadopted children in terms of attachment security, whereas the late-adopted children lagged substantially behind their peers.

However, what happens if not only the age of the child but also the state(s) of mind of the new caregiver(s) are taken into account? In one of the first studies to look at the connection between foster care mothers' attachment state of mind as assessed with the AAI and infant attachment as assessed by the Strange Situation, Dozier, Chase-Stovall, Albus, and Bates (2001) found a remarkable association. When placed with foster mothers who were secure–autonomous in response to the AAI, infants—most of whom suffered early neglect and some of whom suffered abusive parenting—demonstrated more secure attachment to their new foster mothers than infants placed with insecure foster mothers. There was a 72% match between the foster mother's state of mind and child attachment. Only 21% of secure–autonomous foster mothers had children with disorganized attachment, compared with 62.5% of nonautonomous (i.e., insecure) foster mothers. The children were all between 3 and 20 months of age at time of placement; interestingly, variations in child age at placement were not associated with infant security status. Based on these findings, the authors proposed that foster children may organize their attachment around the availability of their foster parents. An interesting feature of this work highlighted some children's tendency to "miscue" their caregivers, that is, behaving in a way that indicates they are not in need of nurturance or attention when actually they could use some. The secure foster parent is the one who can skillfully "override" this signal and provide sensitive caregiving despite the message that none is sought. It is understood that histories of interactions characterized by neglect or nonoptimal care can give rise to the development of this particular defensive strategy (Cooper, Hoffman, Powell, & Marvin, 2005; Dozier, Higley, Albus, & Nutter, 2002). The caregiver who is sensitive to this behavior is gently able to look beyond what may otherwise be felt as pushing away or rejection, and not respond with retaliatory rejection, or as described by Dozier, "a response in kind" (Dozier et al., 2002). We have described similar clinical phenomena in intervention work with older children (Steele et al., 2007) as part of what goes into the recovery process as

their new caregivers seem able to absorb these and any other potentially hurtful behaviors and respond with "attachment-facilitating behavior," whereby caregivers let the children know—perhaps for the first time in their lives—that it is safe to seek out proximity and contact. As the children learn through repeated interactions that there is now someone available and responsive to them, they begin to show proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behavior when distressed, and correspondingly discover new energies for exploration of their environment. Our wish to chart these possible changes empirically led to our investigation into how the development of attachment relationships proceed when maltreated school-age children undergo adoptive placement.

The Attachment Representations and Adoption Outcome Study

This study, a collaborative effort between experts in social work, child maltreatment, attachment research, and clinical work, was initiated by Jeanne Kaniuk, head of the Coram Family Adoption Service, with Miriam Steele (from the Anna Freud Centre at the time the study was initiated) and Jill Hodges of Great Ormond Street Hospital. One of the unique features of the Coram Family Adoption Service is its specialty in finding permanent families for "hard to place" children, that is, those that have endured repeated maltreatment, neglect, and emotional, often physical, and sometimes sexual abuse. They are further deemed "hard to place" because they are older, making the prospect of finding suitable families even more challenging. The focus of our study was to observe potential change across many dimensions, beginning with not only the assessment attachment representations in both parents and children but also features of the child's cognitive development, behavioral strengths, and difficulties when first placed, then 2 years later. Importantly the study included a comparison group of maltreated children who were adopted in the first 12 months of their lives and were matched to the current age of the late-placed group. Although this group shared the common feature of having been adopted, the children had very different experiences than the older adopted children in terms of the length of time in adverse situations. The study was unique in its attempt not only to investigate possible correlates between the *nonbiologically*-related parents' attachment states of mind in terms of both their own childhood experience but also its focus on the attachment representations of the previously maltreated children as expressed in the repeated assessment of attachment story stem completion narratives. A further important and unique feature of the study was the inclusion of fathers, so often left out of developmental and social work research, who undoubtedly have a critical role to play in the development of their children.

The potential for capturing aspects of the children's attachment representations as they may change over time was a central focus of the study. To do

this we used the Story Stem Assessment Profile (SSAP; Hodges, Steele, Hillman, & Henderson, 2003), one of a number of available approaches using doll play and attachment story completions found to be reliable and valid means for accessing the inner world of the child (see Emde, Wolf, & Oppenheim, 2003). In predicting a possible overlap between the adoptive parents' responses to the AAI and their newly placed children's responses to a range of attachment story completion tasks, we were drawing on the conceptual understanding that these two tasks shared some similar features. As well, previous research has shown meaningful and statistically significant overlap between AAIs of mothers and story completions of their genetically linked—and raised from birth—children (Gloger-Tippelt, Gomille, Koenig, & Vetter, 2002; Steele et al., 2003). Both the AAI and attachment story completion tasks are interview techniques in which the respondent's audio-recorded narrative (the story stems are also video-recorded) is the focus of close scrutiny by trained raters, so that we are able to assess thoughts and feelings expressed by the participants in their "own voices." To a marked degree, albeit of course in very different ways, both tasks demand that the listener consider what he or she might do (or in the case of the AAI, might have done) when faced with emotionally challenging situations that are part of everyday childhood experience, including emotional upset, physical hurt, separation from parents, parental discipline, and rejection/exclusion. Furthermore, specific prompts in both tasks invite the respondents to express how they think a parent ought to behave in response to children's misdemeanors. Finally, both interview methods tax speakers' capacities for providing an emotionally balanced and coherent story that may be seen to represent a resolution to frequently occurring dilemmas in routine family life.

In an early study that originated in findings of strong and significant overlaps between parents' AAIs and infant–parent attachment (Steele, Steele, & Fonagy, 1996), we found that when we compared AAIs from these primiparous biologically related mothers and their children's narrative story completions at age 5, mothers whose AAIs were judged secure–autonomous had children whose narratives also demonstrated aspects of security and autonomy (Steele et al., 2003). Thus, children with secure–autonomous mothers differed from the remaining children in that they provided story completions that depicted routine, nonthreatening, and readily expectable events that might happen in everyday family life, with caregivers providing help in the face of distress and firmly but fairly setting limits. In contrast, when parents' attachment narratives were observed to be strikingly lacking in coherence and correspondingly insecure (dismissing or preoccupied and/or unresolved), we observed elevated levels of reference to attachment figures who were inconsistent, ineffective, or overly (physically) punitive in setting limits. We also found that when limit setting was absent from children's story completions, depictions of sadness, anger, confusion, and aggression were more likely to be present.

Similar relations between maternal AAIs and children's' story completions have been observed in two other studies of low-risk samples, one British (Goldwyn, Stanley, Smith, & Green, 2000) and one German (Gloger-Tippelt et al., 2002). Emotion narratives have also been collected from maltreated children, and researchers working with these children note that the trauma they have experienced is amply represented in the emotionally dysregulated and negative story completions they provide (e.g., Toth, Cicchetti, MacFie, & Emde, 1997; Warren, 2003). However, the latter studies of emotion narratives in maltreated children did not include AAIs with the parents. Thus, the work reported here is the first to compare adoptive parents' AAIs and their children's emotion narratives in a sample of older adopted and previously maltreated children.

To date we have reported on several different aspects of this study. We have found, for example, interesting associations between the adoptive mothers' AAI classifications and their newly placed maltreated adoptive children *within* 3 months of the placement. We compared the salient themes of children who were placed with mothers whose AAIs were independently classified as secure or insecure (either dismissing or preoccupied or unresolved/disorganized). We found that those children placed with insecure mothers had significantly more of each of the following themes in their story stem completion narratives than did the children of secure mothers: catastrophic fantasies, child aggression, adult aggression, throwing out or throwing away (of a character or prop), bizarre or atypical content, child injured or dead, adult injured or dead, and adult actively rejects child (Steele et al., 2003).

When we turned these variables into a composite, internally consistent score for "aggression," further links to the maternal AAIs were observed (Steele et al., 2003). Themes of aggression, 3 months into the adoptive placement, correlated significantly with a number of the 9-point interval scales indexing the speaker's "state of mind" concerning attachment (Main, Goldwyn, & Hesse, 2003) such as *insistence on the inability to recall* one's childhood, a signal feature of the insecure–dismissing interview pattern. Similarly, children's high scores on the aggression theme correlated positively with mothers' *derogation* of their own fathers and correlated *negatively* with the hallmarks of an autonomous–secure interview pattern (i.e., ratings of *coherence of mind and coherence of transcript*).

Looking at which themes were most prevalent in the children's story completions (early in the placement) if they were placed with mothers whose AAIs were classified as unresolved with regard to loss/trauma, we observed a number of significant differences, in that they scored highest (in comparison to children placed with nonunresolved mothers) on the following themes: parent appearing child-like, adult aggression, throwing out or throwing away (a child, adult, animal figures, conveying a "rubbishing" of characters). They also scored significantly lower on the themes of realistic mastery and sibling or peer helps (Steele et al., 2003).

These findings suggest that unresolved mourning in a parent, or an insecure (dismissing or preoccupied) state of mind, may exacerbate the emotional worries of a recently adopted child, and confirm and extend the pioneering work linking unresolved mourning to infant disorganization (Main & Hesse, 1990). Adoptive mothers with unresolved prior loss or trauma, or other pronounced attachment insecurities, appeared less able to help a newly placed, maltreated child use or develop an organized strategy to deal with the kinds of conflict depicted in the story stem prompts. A most compelling feature of these results was that we were able to observe differences in the children within a very short period of time after being introduced to their adoptive parents, that is, within 3 months (Steele et al., 2003). These results confirm the Dozier and colleagues (2001) findings in a much younger group of children, but with almost equally rapid results.

Change in the children's story stem themes across the first 2 years of the adoptive placement in this late-adopted group has been reported (e.g., Hodges, Steele, Hillman, Henderson, & Kaniuk, 2005). First, in relation to the nonmaltreated comparison group of adopted children who were the same age as the maltreated children when assessed, we found differences in their story stem assessment narratives that fit with differences in their experiences. For example, the previously maltreated group showed more avoidance and more disorganized themes as a strategy to resolve the dilemmas in the stories, and this difference remained even at 2-year follow-up. However, despite continuing to have higher levels of the more negative indicators of avoidance and disorganization in comparison to the nonmaltreated group, overall they showed decreased negative indicators compared to those in assessments when they were first placed (Hodges et al., 2005). Second, all the children in the previously maltreated group showed increases in their "secure" themes. This hugely important finding highlights the success of the adoption intervention in this high-risk sample. It also highlights an important aspect concerning the nature of mental representations, with interesting implications for therapeutic intervention, because it focuses on potential trajectories for change and adaptation; that is, it seems much easier to accommodate and take on positive representations than to "extinguish" negative representations, as indicated by the persistence of avoidance and disorganized themes. This has obvious and important implications for clinical work with both children and adults. As Hodges and colleagues (2005) explain:

> Children develop new and more positive sets of mental representation in competition with the existing negative representations rather than the new replacing the old. The old expectations and perceptions remain as vulnerabilities in that they can easily be triggered by events and interactions that seem to confirm their validity. It is all too easy for adoptive parents inadvertently to provide such triggers; they may have no idea of the way in which the children, on the basis of their abuse history, construe a particular interaction. The job of adoptive parents is one of active disconfirmation of the negative models that the children have brought

> with them and the building up of competing models that eventually, if all goes well, may become the predominant ones. (p. 115)

In the results presented in this chapter, we ask whether the state of mind of the adopters, *both the mothers and the fathers*, at time of placement may be shown to relate to the state of mind of the children *2 years after* having been placed into the adoptive home. If longer-term links to parents' state of mind concerning attachment can be found, we wondered, might we not gain a fuller understanding of how not only positive secure emotional themes may increase (as we have seen to be the case for all children), but also how negative insecure themes may decrease? Additionally, we report on the extent to which the AAIs of these adoptive parents resemble the distribution in the general population (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996, Chapter 3, this volume).

Methods

Sample

The main sample comprised 58 "late-placed" children between the ages of 4 and 8 years (*M* = 5.5 years, *SD* = 1.4 years). These 58 children were adopted by 41 mothers, 25 of whom adopted one child, 15 of whom adopted sibling pairs, and 1 who adopted a trio of siblings. Five of the adopters were single. The mean age of the mothers was 40 years (*SD* = 6); mean age of the fathers was 43 (*SD* = 7).

The sample of children comprised 43% boys, and 85% were Anglo-European. The children had all suffered serious adversity, including neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. A global tally for type and severity of abusive experiences yielded an index with a range from 2–5, with a mean of 3.2 (*SD* = 0.7), indicating that all children had experienced at least two or more of the following types of abuse (physical, sexual, severe neglect). The number of caregivers they had experienced ranged from 2 to 18 different placements (*M* = 5.2, *SD* = 2.8).

Measures

Adult Attachment Interview

The AAI was administered to 40 of the 41 adoptive mothers and 34 of the 36 adoptive fathers. By the time of the 2-year follow-up, two adoptive placements had broken down (in both cases the parent(s) were insecure; one was also unresolved). This left us with AAIs available from 32 couples whose 47 children provided attachment story completions. The interview is described in detail (Hesse, 1999; Main, Hesse, & Goldwyn, Chapter 2, this volume) and the protocol followed in the work reported here adhered fully to the established procedure. The 74 interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed ver-

batim for later study by a trained, experienced, and reliable rater (M. Steele). Twenty of these transcripts (from 8 fathers and 12 mothers) were independently rated (by H. Steele), and there was 100% two-way agreement (insecure vs. secure) with the primary rater. High three-way (90%) and four-way (100%) agreement was also achieved. In two cases (10%) of this reliability set, where there was agreement that the interviews were unresolved with respect to loss, conferencing was required to agree the best-fitting insecure alternative (dismissing or preoccupied). Also considered was a cannot classify (CC) designation (see Main et al., Chapter 2, this volume), which was conceived, in part, for these rare cases that combine both dismissing and preoccupied themes. In the results below these two interviews are included in the insecure category.

For the results reported, we computed four types of parent AAI data according to 47 children who had parents with AAI profiles showing that (1) neither parent was secure (n = 7), (2) only the father was secure (n = 6), (3) only the mother was secure (n = 17), and (4) both parents were secure (n = 17). We further reduced the AAI classification data into two groups: children whose parents' AAI data suggested that neither parent was secure (n = 7), and those that indicated one or both parents were secure (n = 40).

Story Stem Assessment Profile

The SSAP comprises in part five story stems originally devised by Jill Hodges for use in clinical and research settings, with an original, clinically based coding system (Hodges et al., 2003). In three of these five stories human doll figures are used, and in two stories, animal figures. Eight additional stems from the MacArthur Story Stem Battery (MSSB; Bretherton & Oppenheim, 2003) are included in the protocol, for a total of 13 story stems. The stems are always administered in the same order and are designed for children between the ages of 4 and 8 years. The interviews with the children are video- and audio-recorded, and are not only transcribed in terms of the verbal narrative but also contain a record of what the child portrayed in nonverbal actions. Transcripts in this study were then rated according to the manual (Hodges et al., 2003), with each of the child's 13 stories rated for the presence of 30 themes. These themes broadly cover the following areas: adult and child representations, aggressive manifestations, indicators of avoidance, aspects of positive adaptation, and indicators of disorganization.

For our present purposes we rely on two distinct aggregate and internally consistent scales, based on 15 discrete coding categories applied to the children's story completions at 2-year follow-up: one concerning "disorganized" themes and the other capturing a range of clearly "insecure," aggressive themes, including both extreme aggression and avoidance.

The internally consistent aggregate scale (α = .72) indicating "disorganization" was based on the following six coding categories: (1) *catastrophic fantasy*; (2) *bizarre/atypical material*; (3) *bad-to-good shift* (shifts between a fig-

ure being represented as bad or frightening, alternating in an unexplained way with portrayals of the same figure being "good" or from going from good to bad); (4) *extreme aggression*; (5) *magic omnipotence*; and (6) *child appearing parent-like or role reversal*.

The "insecure" composite, which at the 2-year follow-up was found to have excellent internal consistency (α = .78) was based on the following nine codes: *child endangered*, *child injured/dead*, *adult unaware*, *adult actively rejects*, *adult injured/dead*, *excessive compliance*, *extreme aggression*, *neutralization*, and *throwing away*.

To permit cross-tabulations of two-way AAI data (neither parent secure vs. one or both parents secure) and the children's attachment narratives, we recoded the composite scores for children's disorganization and insecurity into three equal groups, creating low-, medium-, and high-scoring groups for insecurity and disorganization. We then relied on these in computing the results presented below.

Results

Results are organized into three sections. The first section considers the distribution of observed AAI classifications. The second section concerns the cross-tabulation of parent AAI groups (neither parent secure vs. one or both parents secure) and children's low versus high scores for insecurity and disorganization derived from their story completion responses 2 years into follow-up. We also consider here what interval scale scores derived from the AAIs were most informative relative to parent membership in the neither parent secure versus one or more parents secure groups. The third and final section concerns qualitative data, in terms of excerpts from parents' AAIs and children's story completions, to illustrate the quantitative findings.

Distribution of the AAIs from the Adoptive Mothers and Fathers

The AAIs obtained from the 40 adoptive mothers yielded a four-way distribution of 27 (68%) autonomous–secure, five (12%) insecure–dismissing, zero (0%) insecure–preoccupied, and eight (20%) unresolved concerning past loss or trauma. The eight interviews judged unresolved were alternatively categorized as dismissing in four cases, preoccupied (E1, passively preoccupied) in two cases, and autonomous–secure in two cases. Regarding the AAIs obtained from the 34 adoptive fathers, the four-way distribution revealed 18 (53%) autonomous–secure, 12 (35%) insecure–dismissing, two (6%) insecure–preoccupied (E1), and two (6%) unresolved. The two unresolved interviews were alternatively categorized in one case as dismissing and in the other as preoccupied. For the purposes of computing the results below, we collapsed insecure interviews into one group (dismissing or preoccupied) for comparison with the autonomous–secure group.

Links between Parents' AAIs and Children's Stories

Combining maternal and paternal AAI classifications for the 47 children in two-parent families who completed the 2-year follow-up yielded the following distribution: 5 families in which neither parent was secure (7 children adopted); 5 families in which only the father was secure (6 children adopted); 12 families in which only the mother was secure (17 children adopted); and 10 families in which both parents were secure (17 children adopted).

We then correlated the children's low-, medium-, and high-scoring groups for insecurity and disorganization in the SSAP with parents' AAIs, that is, neither parent secure versus one or more parents secure. Children's insecurity correlated significantly with the parental AAI variable (Spearman's $r = -.29$, $p < .05$, two-tailed), such that the presence of one or more secure parents in the children's lives made insecure themes in the children's stories significantly *less likely*. Similarly, and more significantly, children's disorganization correlated negatively with parental security (Spearman's $r = -.36$, $p < .01$, two-tailed), such that parental insecurity was strongly linked to elevated levels of disorganization in their adopted children. In other words, when neither parent's AAI was secure at the time of adoptive placement, at 2-year follow-up, 86% of their children scored in the highest group for disorganization.

Qualitative Results: Illustrative Examples from Parents' AAIs and Children's Story Completions

This section of our results presents verbatim excerpts from the AAIs of adoptive mothers and fathers, obtained prior to the placement of the children. This section also includes verbatim excerpts from the attachment story completion responses of the children, from the 2-year follow-up. The material presented below follows two families: one—called here the Smith family—in which both parents' AAIs were judged autonomous–secure *and* in which low levels of insecurity and high levels of security were evident in their child's story completions at the 2-year follow-up; and the other—here called the Drew family—in which both parents' AAIs were classified as insecure *and* in which their child's story completions indicated high levels of disorganization and insecurity 2 years into the adoptive placement.

Both Parents' AAIs Classified Autonomous–Secure: The Case of the Smith Family

Mrs. Smith's childhood experiences with her parents, as revealed in her AAI, were rather complicated and provided her with neither any consistent feeling of a safe haven or a secure base. Fortunately for her, these vital attachment experiences were delivered by her paternal grandmother. Mrs. Smith provided a compelling example of what is known as an "earned" secure interview, because her mother was neglectful and emotionally abusive, but Mrs. Smith

was able to draw on these experiences in a balanced and thoughtful way. During the AAI she was asked, "Which parent were you closest to in childhood?" Mrs. Smith responded:

> "Didn't have a parent I was close to. It was my grandmother . . . I actually, I actually felt like an orphan, which was mad, because I actually had four parents, right, I sort of, mother, father, stepmother, stepfather, and I actually did not have anybody but this grandmother who knew every single, tiny thing that happened in my life. I mean she really was my soul mate she would sort of listen to all the details I shared about my life at school, with friends and with other people in the family. She was so absorbent it was unbelievable; in fact I've got all my listening skills from her, totally and it was partly she had the time to do that in that she only she had only one son so I was like a sort of daughter to her and, umm, I've never, ever come across somebody like her, and she really took it all in as well because she would remember it and when I would say something later she would tie it all to the other things I said, so umm, an extraordinary listener."

Despite having reason to look down upon or derogate her parents, Mrs. Smith does not do this. Instead her mind is attuned to all the good lessons she learned from her grandmother. Later in the interview, when asked about the loss in her adult life of this grandmother, Mrs. Smith demonstrates her understanding of this important loss; in fact, she highlights something crucial to the pathway toward resolution (i.e., being convinced that the dead loved one is, in fact, dead and gone). Consider how Mrs. Smith responds to the following question from the AAI concerning the loss of her grandmother:

> INTERVIEWER: What were the circumstances surrounding the death of your grandmother? (*Mrs. Smith began by describing a long illness, during which time she visited her grandmother frequently, until eventually she "slipped away."*)
>
> MRS. SMITH: So, it was terribly peaceful, I mean, it couldn't have been more calm.
>
> INTERVIEWER: And you went to her funeral?
>
> MRS. SMITH: Yeah. And I saw, in fact that was the only body I have ever seen, you know, visited, and that really helped actually, because it made it quite clear that person was definitely gone.

Toward the end of the interview, Mrs. Smith contemplates the following questions, tapping into her hopes for the future and for her adopted child:

> INTERVIEWER: If you can think, looking forward in 20 years' time, what three wishes would you have for your children?

MRS. SMITH: The main thing is for him to be happy all throughout his childhood with us, you know. I want him to be happy and to look back, and to say that he has been happy is more important than academic achievements, or jobs or anything else. I really want a lot of sort of sunshine in his life. So that's overriding everything. Next thing, umm, gosh, 20 years time, so he'll be in his mid-20s, umm, to be doing something that he feels is fulfilling. . . . And I suppose, thirdly, that he is rounded enough and not scarred enough, of course, he is coming to us very damaged and will carry that inside at some level, but umm, that he is able to enter into and enjoy decent relationships of his own making . . . that he is able to, to carry through a relationship rather than have lots of things that block it . . . that he will have had enough of a normal loving life to be able to, to share.

INTERVIEWER: And what would you like your children to take away as adults from having been parented by you and your husband?

MRS. SMITH: That is a lovely question actually, umm, just things like warmth and love really, I can't be specific, but umm, a feeling utterly relaxed and that he could do anything, say anything, and it would not all effect how we felt about him. I mean, he could say that he has robbed a bank or something, and we'd be very concerned but we'd help him face the consequences—but hopefully through being honest with us and sharing, I'd hope that he make the kinds of choices that don't often lead to sad or painful consequences. Yeah, I would love him to take away a feeling that he could share anything at all with Mr. Smith and me.

Mr. Smith, in his own preplacement AAI, shows why fathers in this "one or more parents secure" group had significantly higher "coherence of mind" scores, and "reflective functioning" scores than their insecure counterparts. Here he talks about the effect that losses (of his parents) might have on his parenting. He is balanced, open, valuing of attachment and resolved.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the losses have had an effect or are likely to have an effect and you and how you bring up these prospective children?

MR. SMITH: Well, I shall talk openly about death with him, which my parents hardly ever did to me, to talk about the possibility. One doesn't want to go on about it, but death is a part of life and everybody has to face it in the end and if you got children you got to face the fact that your parents are going to die. And, I shall not hold back in talking about it, but I won't go on and on about it and bore him to tears with it. But certainly shall not hold back about it.

Mr. Smith, in his AAI, shows insight into how he might feel being separated from the child he is about to have placed with him:

MR. SMITH: Well, you mentioned separating. I see what you mean, umm, I don't think I have thought about it at all. I am still imagining the situation of coming together with him and getting to know him and establishing a bond. How on earth, well, I have not reached the stage of imagining how I would be separating from him. Well, I think, if I had established a bond with him and I have established a sort of bond that he has come to rely on me and see me as a father figure, umm, well obviously he will miss me. The real question, what's my reaction going to be? Umm, depends on what the circumstance are, if it was just the question of him going away on holiday for a week, I don't think I would have a problem. But the problem, the thing about children, particularly disturbed children, is they are, quite sure you realize it, they are quite often far more reliant on the parental figures than the average child is. Eventually the children have got to go off and grow up and be on their own. And I think that that process starts pretty early. I mean, I don't mean you chuck a 4-year-old out the front door, but you sort of prepare them for the idea that they are separate people and their parents are separate people, and that you have this wonderful bond, in the end, you do move physically apart.

Mr. Smith then echoes the sentiment and belief of Mrs. Smith in emphasizing the value they will place on truthfulness or honesty.

INTERVIEWER: Is there any one particular thing you have learned from your own childhood experience, from your own upbringing?

MR. SMITH: Yes, I think you should always be honest with children. Don't mean you have to tell them everything all at once. I mean if they ask where babies come from you don't give them an hour lecture on biology. But you always tell them the truth.

John was 6 years old when he was placed with the Smiths. He had been in six previous homes prior to joining the Smiths. In terms of the 5-point tally of abusive experiences, John scored 4, at the 70th percentile for the sample. He was placed with a sibling. We present John's response to the "bike story" stem that sets up a scene in which the protagonist boy asks his mother if he and his friend can ride their bikes. Mom agrees but says, "Be careful," and the stem continues with the protagonist falling and getting hurt. Here is what John provided when he was 8 years old, after having lived for 2 years with the Smiths. The representation of a protective, caring mother is evident in his story completion.

INTERVIEWER: Can you show me and tell me what happens now?

CHILD: The boy fell over.

INTERVIEWER: The boy fell over. So what happens?

CHILD: Uhm, he calls, he calls his mum, and she says, "The boys have been knocked over."

INTERVIEWER: Then Dave goes and tells George's mum. And what happens?

CHILD: She picks him up, and they go to a hospital.

INTERVIEWER: She picks him up and goes to a hospital.

CHILD: Where's the hospital?

INTERVIEWER: You make it up. You show me where it might . . .

CHILD: Here!

INTERVIEWER: Right. So, he takes him to hospital, and what happens?

CHILD: Uhm, he goes onto . . . the couch and laid down, to check what's wrong with him.

INTERVIEWER: They go and see what might be wrong with him.

CHILD: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I see. What happens?

CHILD: Uhm, that's the end!

INTERVIEWER: That's the end?

CHILD: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Nothing else happened?

CHILD: No.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Is he OK after that?

CHILD: Yeah!

Both Parents Classified as Insecure: The Drew Family

The following excerpt is from a mother's AAI classified as insecure–dismissing (Ds1, the subcategory of dismissing in which both high idealization and insistence on lack of an ability to recall are identified). The father's interview was also classified as insecure–dismissing (Ds3, the subcategory of dismissing in which scores on the above variables may be lower, and some recounting of negative experiences or feelings may be offered and then withdrawn). The child's story stems over the period of 2 years since he was placed indicate little change in the negative themes he expressed when first placed.

The mother's narrative responses to the AAI reveal how her view of her father is high in idealization, and the attitude she conveys toward the mother in the interview is somewhat derogatory, but with good reason, because the picture she presents is of a mother who derogated her. Also, she reveals that the "help" that was on offer at home as she was growing up was occasional help (from father) with schoolwork, but emotional help, in the sense of a par-

ent being available as a safe haven, was not apparent. We pick up the AAI with the mother as she elaborates on why she remembers her father as having been helpful.

INTERVIEWER: The third adjective you gave was "helping" so if you can think of a time, remembering an incident, that could illustrate what made you think of that word.

MRS. DREW: Yeah. Umm, I can't remember now. Umm, he, umm—of the things that I was allowed to do being a girl and Dad would always help me if he could. So he would, umm, always help me if I had problems with schoolwork like math, which was not, I was never very good at, er, and he would sit and he would help me with that. So sort of saying that he, you know I wasn't allowed to do certain things, but the things that I was allowed to do . . . then he would always, he would always be there to help, you know, he would help me so, umm, whereas perhaps my mum would be less, umm, of the two my mum's a lot more intelligent and sharp than my dad, so I think perhaps he, he would recognize, umm, someone who needed help in something that he could do, whereas my mum used to say "Don't you want to be able to do it? What's the matter with you? Are you stupid or what?" Umm, Dad would sort of say "Oh well, you do this, you do that" and he, he'd sit and he would help me and then, you know, sort of . . .

Later in the same interview, Mrs. Drew is asked to contemplate what it felt like to be distressed as a child.

INTERVIEWER: When you were upset as a child, what would you do?

MRS. DREW: Umm—if I was upset, umm, I would probably do my best to avoid letting anyone know I was upset [*hmm hmm*] in case it was seen as, umm, as, umm, a sign of weakness.

And further into the interview, Mrs. Drew is asked one of the questions that in our view demands "reflective functioning"; that is, the subject is asked to evaluate her attachment experiences by putting herself in her parent's shoes and to think about the thoughts, feelings, and intentions that may help to explain her parents' behavior.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think your parents behaved as they did during your childhood?

MRS. DREW: {3-second pause} Why? Because that's the way that everybody else behaved. You kn-, I wouldn't, I mean I, I, probably it was, the way that my parents behaved was no different from the way that other people of my age's, where I lived, parents behaved. Umm, they,

er, it was probably the way that their parents brought them up and they just passed that on, umm, so they, you know, their, their behavior . . . and just sort imposed that on their children.

In terms of reflective functioning, this would score at the low end of the 10-point scale, because Mrs. Drew shows little interest in exploring the specific lessons that her parents may have learned from her grandparents. She stays at the level of banal generalizations about the norms of "other people of (her) age."

Mr. Drew's AAI, akin to the one provided by his wife, also revealed an insular dismissing emotional stance, but he was able (cognitively) to recall challenging family circumstances in his family of origin. This is typical of the Ds3, insecure–dismissing AAI pattern, in which the speaker reveals some childhood difficulties but without displaying or describing accompanying emotions. We join his interview as he is asked to think of memories that illustrate the adjective phrase "determined for the kids to do well" in respect of his childhood relationship to his mother.

INTERVIEWER: OK. In terms of your mother being "very determined for the kids to do well" do any specific memories or incidents come to mind which reflect that?

MR. DREW: Long hours going through school books umm, reading, writing skills, this sort of stuff, a lot less time spent on playing. I can't remember playing at all with me mother or me mum or anything like that. She just wasn't that sort of person. Umm, you played with your brothers and sisters.

When Mr. Drew is asked to describe his childhood relationship with his father, the only term he provides is "quite remote," and he is asked to provide a supporting memory.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of sort of a specific memory from your early childhood?

MR. DREW: {*Subject exhales.*} Very early childhood, umm, the only memories I've had of my very early child-, childhood with my dad is when I've done something wrong. {*Subject gives wry laugh.*} That's basically when he's, he's around to give the old sort of like turn-off.

Further into his AAI, Mr. Drew is asked to consider what it felt like to be distressed as a child, and then ill as a child:

INTERVIEWER: When you were upset as a child, what would you do?

MR. DREW: Probably bottle it up I should think. Yeah, still do now I suppose. {*Subject laughs.*}

INTERVIEWER: How did you react when you were ill?

MR. DREW: I'd just be in bed. {*Subject laughs*.} I think on that, umm, I'd probably be after tea and sympathy. Umm, the only other real illness that I had—I suppose was, umm, I used to get asthma quite a bit as a kid, umm, and it used to frighten the life out of my parents and teachers and stuff like that until you, you get used to, get used to it. Umm, but that was only, you know, alright, I had an asthma attack and a couple of hours later I'd be over it so you know again you just, I can't really think of any other long ter-, well it wasn't any real long-term illness or anything, lots of it just coughs and colds. Apart from that I was fairly healthy.

Toward the end of the AAI, Mr. Drew is asked one of the interview questions that arguably demands that he show the extent to which he can be reflective and thoughtfully examine the consequences of his upbringing.

INTERVIEWER: In general, how do you think your overall experiences in your childhood have affected your adult personality?

MR. DREW: Umm . . . I definitely have the organizational trace of my mum. Umm, I tend to, er, be too tidy apparently. Er, well it depends, you know, I try not to go to extremes. Er, Jenny's [Mrs. Drew] probably a bit the other way, umm, so we have a little bit of fun and banter about that. Umm, so I've definitely got that. Umm, I'm definitely not very keen on physical violence against kids. I can see how kids have, are brought up and what the, one thing I really hate is things like grazing (i.e., eating snacks throughout the day instead of regular meals), er, and no fixed meal times, no this that and the other and I, I think kids lose a lot out with the order and the discipline that you would have had earlier on. Er, on the other hand, I probably would be, although I'm not very touchy-feely and I'd probably not. I still don't show emotions very well and I should probably do that a bit more.

This response from Mr. Drew shows a glimpse of understanding about how his emotionally restricted childhood has left him, well, emotionally restricted, but it would seem that the function of his speech is to distance himself from emotional concerns and focus instead on tidiness, eating behavior, and a statement about his opposition to violence against children (uncontroversial and impersonal). This passage would attract low scores on both coherence and reflective functioning. Overall, the AAI provided by Mr. Drew indicates an attachment state of mind that was classified as insecure–dismissing of the "restricted in feeling" subclass. This subject does point out some of the lack of closeness with his parents, but he does not dwell on thinking about the implications this may have had. When speaking about his illness as a child, there

seems to be a strong wish to be regarded as strong because he was able to get over asthma attacks quickly, as if it were no big deal. We do catch a glimpse of a possibility, or perhaps our hope, that for his own sake and perhaps that of his newly placed adoptive child, he would begin to move toward a more valuing of attachment stance as he says, "I should probably do that [show emotions] a bit more."

Two years into his placement, we see the following narrative examples from 7½-year-old Donald Drew's story completions. Donald had been in six previous homes prior to being placed with the Drews. He was placed with a sibling. In terms of the 5-point tally of abusive experiences, Donald scored a 3, at the 40th percentile for the sample. In this first example, the interviewer sets out a scene in which a little boy (designated by Donald to be Sam) has made a drawing at school that he thinks is very good and is then shown going home with it. When asked to show and tell the interviewer what happens next, Donald does as follows (note that Donald involves a brother doll he calls Bill, who is at home when Sam returns with his picture from school):

INTERVIEWER: Can you show and tell me what happens now?

CHILD: And then dad goes . . . Bill goes to answer the door. And then Sam comes and says Mum, Dad, Mum, look at my picture, look, look . . . Will you please get out of the telly?
Mum, I am not inside the telly.
But get out of the way.
But look at my picture.
Oh that's good.

INTERVIEWER: Mummy says that's good.

CHILD: Yeah . . . and then Bill says what about me? What about me?

INTERVIEWER: Then he says show me . . . Wha: What is Bill doing?

CHILD: Jumps up and falls on Sam.

INTERVIEWER: Falls on Sam.

CHILD: Then Sam starts hurting Bill. Stamping on him.

INTERVIEWER: Why is he doing that?

CHILD: Don't like him.

INTERVIEWER: I see, what happens then?

CHILD: The next day, he went back to school and the teacher said, "why did you take your picture home?" He said I thought it was good. I go home . . .

INTERVIEWER: So he went back home.

CHILD: Ding dong. Bill goes to the door and just stands there. [*repeated by interviewer*]
He doesn't answer the door. [*repeated by interviewer*]

INTERVIEWER: So what does Sam do?

CHILD: Gets a big hammer and smashes the door open.

INTERVIEWER: What does he do?

CHILD: (Shows doll landing on mother and father dolls on the sofa.)

INTERVIEWER: So he lands on mommy and daddy on sofa?

CHILD: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What happens then?

CHILD: And then Bill comes to see what is happening?

INTERVIEWER: So Sam is underneath the sofa now. What is Bill doing?

CHILD: Then he falls out and then the sofa falls on Bill. And no one knows and everyone is saying, "Where is Bill?" But no one knows he is under the sofa.

INTERVIEWER: Why is he under the sofa?

CHILD: 'Cause this happens, the sofa went in the air and landed on him.

INTERVIEWER: So what happens to him?

CHILD: Killed him.

INTERVIEWER: Is that the end of that story?

CHILD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: In this story, did Mummy and Daddy say anything about the picture Sam did?

CHILD: Dad said that's good.

We see in this story many themes reflecting insecurity and disorganization, including intense sibling rivalry leading to injury and death of a child; bizarre- or atypical-type sequences with a sofa flying through the air and landing on people, which all happen because a child brought home a picture from school about which the child feels "good and proud." It is so interesting that the level of aggression is elicited by a story depicting a positive event, which brings up questions about how a sense of pride in achievement and confidence in attachment figures can come to be established when severe adversity, including diverse forms of chronicled abuse, and sudden changes in caregiving have typified the first 5 years of life—and when the new adoptive home is run by parents with documented insecurities of their own.

Discussion

The first thing to note is the distribution of parents' AAIs collected prior to the adoptive placement. On the one hand, there is the impressive result that, compared to the general population meta-analysis (n = 889 nonclinical

mothers) of van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg (Chapter 3, this volume), in which 20% were dismissing, 55% were observed to be secure–autonomous, 10% were insecure–preoccupied, and 15% were unresolved in four-way groupings, the highly skilled social workers selected more secure–autonomous mothers (68%), and no mothers with insecure–preoccupied states of mind (0%). However, there was also a sizable minority, on the model of the general population, of adoptive mothers whose interviews were classified insecure–dismissing or unresolved. Additionally, the interviews from the adoptive fathers show comparable levels of the secure–autonomous group to that observed in the general population of nonclinical fathers (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996), but somewhat higher levels (35%) of insecure–dismissing states of mind, more than twice the level observed (15%) in the general population of nonclinical fathers. It would appear that the social workers' focus veered toward greater sensitivity to the applicant mothers. This is important because, as we discuss, at least in this first study, having a secure–autonomous mother *or* father appears equally predictive of a better outcome in terms of the adoptive child's attachment representations. Because we know that there is a worldwide acute shortage of appropriate foster and adoptive parents willing to accept a school-age child with a history of maltreatment, special attention could be paid to the attachment states of mind of interested fathers—especially because these men could make all the difference and their potential might be too easily overlooked. For an attachment-informed model of how the interest of adoptive fathers and adoptive mothers can be cultivated and supported, there are now a variety of valuable resources (see Bick & Dozier, Chapter 18, this volume; Steele et al., 2007).

We turn next to our findings regarding insecurity and disorganization in the attachment narratives from the adopted children after 2 years in the adoptive home. Our previous (Hodges et al., 2005) report that negative themes in the adopted children's stories decline over time can now be qualified. For some children, it would appear that the themes of insecurity and disorganization in their attachment narratives remained high or escalated over time, that is, in those children who had *both* of their parents' AAIs judged insecure prior to the adoptive placement. On the other hand, insecure and disorganized themes did decline for other children, the vast majority of whom who were placed with one or more adoptive parents whose AAIs were classified secure–autonomous. In other words, the current findings support and extend the results reported in Steele and colleagues (2003), that being placed with a secure–autonomous (as opposed to insecure–dismissing or –preoccupied or unresolved) adoptive mother led to significantly lower levels of insecurity within 3 months of placement. Here we have shown that this pattern continues to hold after 2 years in the adoptive home, and this positive outlook is evident if *either* parent's AAI was secure–autonomous at placement. Below we examine how we might understand this link between parents' AAI responses

and their children's attachment story completions, collected 2 years after placement in the adoptive home.

How is it that parental attachment states of mind are transmitted in these unique situations when the child has endured significant and prolonged adversity before beginning the new relationship? First, we are mindful that for all children in the study, the adoption involved dramatic changes in their caregiving environments, with permanence over 2 years being a radical and welcome arrangement. And in this respect it is noteworthy that for the full sample of late-adopted children there was steady and increasing evidence of more secure narrative themes across the three time periods of observation covering the first 2 years in the adoptive home (Hodges et al., 2005). That for some of the sample this was accompanied by a significant decline in insecure and disorganized themes suggests that the permanence of the new adoptive home penetrated, and changed, more deeply the inner world of the adopted child. Daniel Stern has recently written on how subjective experiences must reflect actual lived experiences to achieve change:

> The basic assumption is that change is based on lived experience. In and of itself, verbally understanding, explaining or narrating something is not sufficient to bring about change. There must also be an actual experience, a subjectively lived happening. An event must be *lived* with feelings and actions taking place in real time, in the real world, with real people, in a moment of presentness. (Stern, 2004, p. xiii, original emphasis)

We think this description is especially pertinent to imagining how the experiences in children's daily lives impacted their attachment representations, so that secure themes were likely to increase over time. These ideas bring us back to some of Bowlby's early writings on how the actual experience of the child in interaction with the caregiver is of crucial importance. Relative to the traumatic histories of the adopted children in our study, Bowlby had sobering thoughts on the influence of early experiences on later development:

> Once a sequence of behaviour has become organized, it tends to persist and does so even if it has developed on non-functional lines and even in the absence of the external stimuli and/ or the internal conditions on which it first depended. The precise form that any particular piece of behaviour takes and the sequence within which it is first organized are thus of the greatest consequence for its future. (1973, p. 201)

This perspective raises questions about the extent to which current positive "lived experience" (Stern, 2004) may overwrite, transmute, or otherwise change early harsh experiences. Clues as to how such comprehensive change may happen come from the children in our study who showed not only a rise in secure themes (Hodges et al., 2005), but also a decline in disorganized and insecure themes (Steele et al., 2003). These fortunate children, the vast major-

ity of the current sample, had been living in a new adoptive home for more than 2 years with one or both parents whose AAIs at placement were categorized autonomous–secure. Given what we know about the strong stability of AAI security over time (see Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002), we can assume that the autonomy and security observed in one or both parents at placement remained and spread across other family members, including the newest family member with a harsh past. How did this security spread? We speculate that it did so because the secure adoptive parent was open to the entire range of emotions shown by the adopted child, both positive *and* negative. This we know to be a defining feature of parents who facilitate a secure attachment in the children: They not only support and enjoy their children's exploration and play, forming a secure base, but they are also attuned to signs of distress, concern, or protest from their infants, thus creating a safe haven. The probable characteristics of the ongoing, day-to-day interactions that typify children and their autonomous–secure, as opposed to insecure (dismissing, preoccupied, unresolved) mothers may be conceived of in the following way. Of central importance, commonly seen in mothers of securely attached children, is the spontaneous and balanced readiness to respond to and discuss negative emotions openly (Grossmann, Grossmann, & Schwan, 1986; Laible & Thompson, 1998; Steele, Steele, Croft, & Fonagy, 1999). Truthfulness in conversations that include but are not overburdened by negative emotion may indeed be the core feature of secure–autonomous relationships (see Cassidy, 2001). This perspective would seem to be one that is shared by Mr. and Mrs. Smith, who both emphasized, in their AAIs (cited earlier in the Results section), the value they place on truthfulness. It is not difficult to take delight in the joy of young children; the challenge is to take notice of their distress and respond without becoming overwhelmed by, or derogating of, their negative emotional displays.

Trying to delineate how parental representations lead to qualities of interacting with their older adopted child, which in turn lead the child to form attachment representations with more secure and less insecure and disorganized themes, has been the focus of a recent chapter based on close observations of parent–child interactions in the context of adoption (Steele et al., 2007). That work highlighted the value of adoptive parents addressing their children by name, referencing shared personal experiences, and being able to "override any inclination they feel to ignore or reprimand the child, and instead see the child's behavior as a wish to be included" (Steele et al., 2007, p. 80). By contrast, other adoptive parents in that work, whom we here speculate to have had insecure AAIs, showed a troubling, adverse cyclical pattern of parent–child interaction, including parents and children exchanging negative facial expressions and insensitive touch in the context of sparse impersonal conversation.

We finish this chapter by summarizing two main findings from our study of attachment representations in previously maltreated children and their adoptive parents, and pointing to practical implications.

1. In comparison to nonclinical samples, the AAIs from the adoptive mothers revealed greater than expected levels of secure–autonomous states of mind, whereas the interviews from the fathers revealed greater than expected levels of insecure–dismissing states of mind.
2. In terms of the attachment narratives collected from the adopted children 2 years into placement, security had increased significantly for all the children (compared to early in the adoptive placement), but insecurity and disorganization *were significantly lower* in those children placed with parents in which a secure–autonomous state of mind prevailed in at least one parent's AAI.

We conclude that the AAI may be a useful way of both forecasting positive outcomes for children with complicated traumatic histories and identifying adoptive parents toward whom therapeutic and social support services may be most prudently directed. Furthermore, our findings point to the spreading effect of attachment security: Given a couple taking the brave step of providing a permanent home for a child who has known only disruption and a lack of permanency, the attachment security likely to be sufficient for the child if, at placement, *only one* member of the couple (mother or father) is secure–autonomous.

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