The Adult Attachment Projective:

Measuring Individual Differences in Attachment Security using Projective Methodology

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The projective tradition of personality assessment has long emphasized the idea that meaning in the content of an individual's response is revealed in the ways in which underlying needs are transformed by defensive operations. Thus, Rapaport (1952) and Schafer (1954), writing from a psychoanalytic ego psychology viewpoint, gave to Rorschach test interpretation an illuminating analysis of individual differences in defensive style. The recent contributions of Lerner, Albert, and Walsh (1987) and Cooper and his colleagues (Cooper, Perry, & Arnow, 1988; Cooper, Perry, & O'Connell, 1991) significantly advanced the use of the Rorschach as a technique for assessing defensive operations. Additionally, as summarized by Cramer (1999), contemporary approaches to the interpretation of the Thematic Apperception Test have introduced coding systems that devote particular attention to defense mechanisms.

A major feature of attachment theory is Bowlby's (1980) discussion of the conditions that lead individuals to defend attachment experiences from conscious awareness. Thus, defensive exclusion is one of the key attachment concepts. Bowlby, while acknowledging the influence of the Freudian mechanisms of defense upon his thinking, used an information processing model to re-define defense. Defense, in the Bowlbian sense, refers to the process of defensive exclusion whereby attachment experiences and feelings that should be attended to as information instead are treated as unintelligible or unintegrated noise that is filtered and transformed prior to gaining access to conscious thought. This characterization of defense brings attachment theory into a close relationship with the psychoanalytic perspective on personality assessment, according to which the play of defensive operations needs to be integrated into the evaluation of the individual's inner experience of thoughts and feelings about attachment.

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI: George, Kaplan & Main, 1984/1985/1996) first provided methodological access to the assessment of this inner experience of attachment, or following Main (1995) "the state of mind with respect to attachment." The AAI is a clinical-style interview that leads individuals through a discussion of their childhood attachment experiences. Inferences regarding individuals' current states of mind regarding attachment are drawn from variations in discourse coherence that emerge during the interview. Each pattern of adult attachment represents a particular pattern of thinking, speaking and feeling in regards to attachment experiences. The hallmark of secure attachment, designated "autonomous" by Main (1995), is an unrestricted, free-flowing style of discourse. The patterns of insecure attachment (dismissing, preoccupied and unresolved) derive from the discussion of attachment experiences that is unintegrated – specifically, discourse that is restricted, diverted, or uncontrolled. Although the AAI system for identifying these patterns of adult attachment was not concerned specifically with defensive exclusion, varying forms of its expression may be inferred from the derivation of the AAI attachment groups. When viewed from this perspective, the AAI groups spread out over a continuum of defensive exclusion – from the relative absence of defense (i.e., secure) toward one end and defensive distortion of attachment information (i.e., insecure) toward the other.

Historically, child attachment researchers were the first to link Bowlby's concept of defensive exclusion to specific patterns of attachment (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Solomon, George, & De Jong, 1995). George and Solomon's investigations established explicit and systematic definitions of forms of defensive exclusion that differentiate child attachment classification groups and maternal states of mind regarding caregiving. In this chapter, we extend the work of these researchers by focusing on individual

differences in defensive style as they are manifested in the projective assessment of adult

attachment.   We describe here the Adult Attachment Projective (AAP), a new assessment

methodology which, as the name denotes, uses adults' story responses to pictures of hypothetical

attachment situations to evaluate their "states of mind" or mental representations of attachment.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the attachment concept of defensive

exclusion. We next describe the Adult Attachment Projective, providing a brief summary of the

coding system and validation data for this new measure.   We then take up again the discussion

of defensive exclusion, using story examples from the AAP to illustrate how Bowlby's

conceptualization of defensive exclusion differentiates the four major adult attachment

classification groups used in the field today. Insofar as other aspects of the APP such as

coherency of discourse are interwoven with defensive processing, the analysis of defensive

exclusion contributes to the consideration of other equally important indications of each

classification group. Finally, we present the AAP responses of four individuals to illustrate the

defining features of the major classification groups.

Attachment Theory and Defense

Despite its central place in Bowlby's (1980) third volume of <u>Attachment and Loss</u>, his

theory of defensive exclusion has received surprisingly little attention from attachment

researchers. As noted above, defensive exclusion, like its psychoanalytic counterpart, repression,

refers to those psychological operations that are intended to exclude information from awareness

and thereby avoid the painful consequences that would accrue upon conscious awareness of this

information.

In defining the role of defense in the development of attachment relationships, Bowlby

described two general levels of defensive exclusion that he then used to differentiate patterns of

attachment insecurity. He proposed that at one level, perceptual exclusion resulted in the

<u>deactivation</u> of the attachment system with behavioral and representational pattern consequences

that Bowlby termed compulsive self-sufficiency. At a second level, he suggested that

preconscious exclusion led to stopping the processing of information prior to gaining access to

conscious thought, thus resulting in the <u>disconnection</u> of some attachment information from

awareness. In this case, activation of the attachment system is allowed but accurate

interpretation of the meaning of activation disallowed. Bowlby proposed that two patterns of

insecure attachment, compulsive care-giving and anxious attachment, resulted from this form of

defensive exclusion.

   Thus, for all conditions of insecure attachment, the normal operation of the attachment

system is excluded defensively. Since deactivating and disconnecting strategies suppress direct

expression of attachment memories, feelings, behavior or thoughts, the concept of defense

emphasizes that we must attend to what is substituted in order to differentiate patterns of

insecurity. Before discussing insecurity, however, we focus briefly on defining attachment

security. Bowlby's discussion of defense never specifically addressed attachment security.

Rather, our understanding of defense in relation to security is best derived from assessments that

have been used to define internal working models of secure individuals.

   As noted above, one prominent assessment method that has helped to define states of

mind related to security is the AAI. The AAI requires individuals to tell their life's story of

attachment "on the spot"; individuals do not have the opportunity to reflect on or rehearse their

responses in advance. This makes the AAI an excellent tool by which to observe defensive

exclusion, as individuals struggle to complete the interview while protecting themselves, if

necessary, from attachment distress activated by the interview questions. It is generally accepted

that the coherency of discourse is synonymous with individuals' "current states of mind with respect to attachment" (Main, 1995). As such, evaluations of the degree to which individuals can construct and tell a life story without obvious blockages, interruptions, interferences or distortions indicates a good deal about the secure versus insecure organization of their states of mind with regard to attachment.

Like Ainsworth and her colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), who were able to differentiate individual differences in infant attachment status based on patterns of behavior, Main and her colleagues (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Main, 1995) differentiated individual differences in attachment status in adults based on representational characteristics of discourse in response to the AAI. As defined by Main and Goldwyn (1985/1991/1994), coherence is indicated by adherence to four discourse maxims as explicated by Grice (1975): quality ("be truthful and have evidence for what you say"), quantity ("be succinct, yet complete"), relation ("be relevant"), and manner ("be clear and orderly"). We propose that the varying degrees of coherence evidenced by these maxims as patterns of secure and insecure attachment reflect varying forms of defensive exclusion. We further propose that focusing on these varying forms of defensive exclusion provides a frame of reference for comprehending attachment organization in general, and classifying patterns of attachment in particular. Additionally, they will furnish the necessary background for our discussion of how defensive exclusion is exhibited in responses to the Adult Attachment Projective.

According to Main, secure or "autonomous" attachment is defined by specific features of coherence, in particular a willingness to recall attachment-related memories and feelings and speak about them in a thoughtful and reflective manner.   Evaluating this definition in terms of defense, we have stressed in our work that it is the relative absence of defensive exclusion that

makes it possible for secure individuals to elaborate accounts of their childhood attachment

experiences clearly, without contradiction, distortion, or distraction (West & George, 1999; for

other discussions see, Bretherton & Munholland, 1999 and Solomon et al., 1995)

Individuals who are not secure are by definition incoherent. Insecurity at the

representational level is marked by defensive processing that excludes attachment information

(including feelings) in the service of protecting the individual from attachment-related anxiety

and distress. Thus, as a product of defense, insecure individuals compromise one or more of the

elements Grice defined as necessary components of coherence.

Looking carefully at the discourse styles associated with the insecure attachment groups,

we see that typically different types of incoherency (i.e., coherency errors or violations) are

associated with different forms of insecurity. For example, dismissing individuals defend against

attachment distress through deactivating strategies (George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Solomon et

al., 1995), that is, they attempt to minimize, avoid or neutralize difficulties related to attachment

experiences (Main, 1990). As a result, deactivating strategies allow dismissing adults to

prototypically describe their childhood experiences with attachment figures more positively than

can be supported by memories (violating the quality maxim). Defensive maneuvers to deactivate

attachment often also mean that attachment as a topic of discussion is closed for them.   Their

responses to questions requiring them to describe attachment experiences (e.g., describing their

relationships with parents, or parental responses to injury, illness, or childhood fears) tend to be

strikingly unreflective and terse (violating the quantity maxim). Interestingly, despite the fact

that dismissing individuals never achieve full integration of attachment experience and affect,

they typically do not appear to be bothered by this lack of integration. Quite to the contrary, as

the result of deactivating strategies their descriptions of relationships and past caregiving

experiences are presented as normal and supportive. For example, parents are described as involved and caring in ways that are applauded by our society. Their mothers are described as making school lunches, assuming leadership roles in child-centered activities (e.g., Brownie leader), and as listening and offering advice about problems at school or with peers. Their fathers are described as taking the family on vacations, teaching the individual the pragmatic necessities of life (e.g., gardening, how to work machines), and helping with academic projects (e.g., science projects). Deactivation, however, disrupts integration because these individuals strive for normalcy by editing out attachment from their generalized view of relationships and the self.

In contrast, attachment topics, while open for discussion, are also hyperarousing for preoccupied individuals. As a result, they dwell on the details of memories, frequently emphasizing past or current grievances against attachment figures, (Main, 1990, 1995). Defense in this group is characterized by cognitive disconnection, the attempt to separate attachment information from the source of arousal or distress (Bowlby, 1980; George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Solomon et al., 1995). Disconnection as a defense is less effective that deactivation in preventing or "smoothing out" attachment distress. Based on the style of discourse associated with cognitive disconnection, the disconnecting and sorting processes shown by these individuals during the AAI results in a different form of failed integration of relationships and self. Incoherency among preoccupied individuals is typically revealed by their immersion in lengthy descriptions of childhood experiences (violating the quantity maxim), tangential wandering off topic (violating the relation maxim) and a plethora of long run-on, entangled and vague thoughts (violating the manner maxim). As a result, disconnection leads to contradiction, confusion, and a literal preoccupation with the issues of attachment figures and their caregiving behavior.

The AAI identifies one other major insecure group – unresolved attachment. This is a superordinate pattern that occurs in conjunction with the states of mind that characterize the autonomous, preoccupied or dismissing patterns.   Similar to these patterns, unresolved attachment is also incoherent although it does not adhere quite as clearly to the violations of Grice's maxims. Mental representations of unresolved attachment occur as sequelae to experiences of attachment-threatening trauma, such as sexual or physical abuse or loss of an attachment figure through death (Main, 1995). Individuals judged unresolved exhibit a particular form of incoherency that appears when discussing the above traumatic events. In particular, individuals show striking lapses in their ability to monitor how they describe the details of these events (e.g., giving years later the minute details of the deceased on her death bed) or their reasoning about the occurrence of these events (e.g., suggesting that physical abuse was in fact caused by the individual and, thus, deserved). In terms of defensive processing, we suggest that this quality of discourse is captured aptly by Bowlby's (1980) concept of "segregated systems." Segregated systems result from a pervasive repressive emphasis occasioned either by strong attempts to deactivate or cognitively disconnect traumatic attachment information. We further suggest that the lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse described by Main are the consequence of traumatic attachment material that emerges when defensive processes are failing. (George & West, 1999, 2001; West & George, 1999). Thus, unresolved attachment means that defense is failing, that segregated systems material is consequently emerging, and that the individual is prone to dysregulation such that thought and discourse are likely to be disorganized and disoriented in quality.

<u>The Adult Attachment Projective</u>

The AAP is a projective measure that is comprised of a set of eight black and white line drawings developed in the traditional projective tradition to contain only sufficient detail to identify the selected event. (Examples of three pictures from the projective set are provided in Figures 1, 2, & 3.) Facial expressions and other details were omitted or drawn ambiguously. The drawings were also developed carefully to avoid gender and racial bias.

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The scenes in the AAP projective set were selected to capture three core features of attachment as defined by Bowlby (1969/1982).   The first feature is activation of the attachment system. Drawing on the characteristics of behavioral systems described by ethologists, Bowlby (1969/1982) stressed that the valid assessment of the attachment system depended on observing individuals under conditions that threatened or compromised physical or psychological safety. Therefore, in developing the projective set, we developed pictures that depicted situations that were likely to elicit attachment distress, such as separation, solitude, fear, and death.

The second feature is the availability of an attachment figure. According to attachment theory, it is only the prompt and effective response of an attachment figure that can successfully alleviate attachment distress resulting in deactivation of the attachment system (Ainsworth, 1974; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982) and "felt security" (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). For infants and young children, termination of the attachment system requires the physical proximity of and access to attachment figures. For older children, adolescents, and especially adults, physical proximity is increasingly replaced by psychological proximity such

that individuals can now appeal to internalized attachment figures (drawing on internal working models or mental representations of attachment figures) when the attachment system is activated. Some AAP scenes portray adult-adult or adult-child dyads, thus depicting physical proximity and the availability of a potential attachment figure. Other AAP scenes portray an adult or a child alone. Because an attachment figure is not present in these pictures, responses that reflect representations of internalized attachment figures may be elicited.

The third feature is Bowlby's (1969/1982) life-span view of attachment: He proposed that the attachment system, together with the availability of real and internalized attachment figures, was essential to mental health from infancy through adulthood. We captured this feature in the projective set by including characters that represent a range of ages, from the young child to the elderly.

Similar to other attachment assessments, the AAP stimuli are administered in an order that is designed to gradually increase attachment distress. The AAP order of presentation parallels other methods of assessing attachment, including the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978), child attachment assessment techniques using doll play or picture story stems (e.g., Bretherton, Ridgeway, & Cassidy, 1990; Kaplan, 1987; Solomon et al., 1995), and the AAI (George et al., 1984/1985/1996). The AAP begins with a warm-up picture depicting two children playing with a ball. Seven attachment scenes follow: Child at Window – a girl looks out a picture window; Departure – an adult man and woman with suitcases stand facing each other; Bench – a youth sits alone on a bench; Bed – a child and woman sit facing each other at opposite ends of the child's bed; Ambulance – a older woman and a child watch as a stretcher is being loaded into an ambulance; Cemetery – a man stands at a gravesite; and Child in Corner – a child stands askance in a corner with one arm extended outward. (We refer the reader to West

and Sheldon-Keller (1994) and George and West (2001) for a discussion of the selection of the specific pictures that now comprise the AAP.)

Although the pictures were drawn as projective stimuli, the method of administration combines projective and interview techniques in the form of a semi-structured interview. This technique has strong demonstrated success in adult and child attachment research (e.g., George et al., 1984/1985/1996; Bretherton et al., 1990, Cassidy, 1988; George & Solomon, 1996; Gloger-Tippelt, 1999; Green, Stanley, Smith, & Goldwyn, 2000; Slade, Belsky, Aber, & Phelps, 1999; Solomon et al., 1995; Zeanah & Barton, 1989). In the Adult Attachment Projective, the interviewer begins by asking the individual to describe what is happening in each AAP picture. The individual's initial response is followed by probes, as needed, to obtain information about what led up to the events of their story, what the characters are thinking and feeling, and what will happen next.

Validation of the AAP

Based on Ainsworth's seminal work (Ainsworth et al., 1978), the last three decades of attachment theory and research have concentrated on the differentiation of individuals in terms of their relative attachment security. Following this tradition, we developed the AAP classification scheme specifically to identify the four main attachment groups that are identified by the "gold standard" measure of adult attachment status, the AAI. The AAI identifies four main groups -- secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and unresolved attachment.

We approached the development of the AAP classification scheme in two stages. The initial classification scheme was developed based on 13 AAP transcripts of men and women recruited from the community through newspaper advertisement. Because defensive processes influence both the content and the way in which a story is told, we examined verbatim transcripts

of their AAP stories from a number of different aspects, including themes, specific content features, descriptive images, and discourse patterns. Nine of these individuals had also been given the AAI prior to administration of the AAP and classified blind by the first author. Subsequently, guided by attachment theory and research, we developed a set of coding categories for the AAP stories that allowed us to differentiate individuals classified into one of the four AAI attachment groups. We checked our AAP classifications against the AAI and then used our knowledge of the AAI classification to refine the AAP classification system on a case-by-case basis.

The next step was to test our scheme with larger samples. We began with a sample of 25 mothers drawn randomly from an ongoing study of infant risk conducted by Dr. Diane Benoit at the University of Toronto. Dr. Benoit collected AAIs and AAPs on this sample of women, randomly changing the order in which these two measures were administered. Dr. Benoit, a trained AAI judge, classified the AAIs. Dr. Benoit was blind to all information about the mother, including her infant's status (risk versus control) and her AAP stories. Three judges, the authors and our colleague, Dr. Odette Pettem, classified the AAP transcripts. We next tested our classification scheme with a sample of 23 women who participated in a large-scale study of depression (West, Rose, Spreng, Verhoef, & Bergman, 1999).   The first author did blind AAI classifications. The second author and Dr. Pettem did blind AAP classifications. Recently we have been engaged in a large validity study for the AAP. To date we have completed data collection for a sample of 48 individuals (N = 42 women, 6 men) recruited through community, university, and clinical settings. We have followed the same AAI and AAP classification procedure on this data set as described for the depression sample. (Note: This study was

designed to examine test-retest reliability, and any relation of intelligence and social desirability

to the AAP. Data on these variables are related to the AAP are not available at this time.)

The results of our work to date demonstrate strong interjudge reliability and agreement

between AAI and AAP classifications. Interjudge reliability and agreement between AAP and

AAI classifications were calculated using percentage agreement among judges based on the

samples described above. AAP interjudge reliability for secure versus insecure classifications

was .97 (kappa = .68, p < 000); interjudge reliability for the four major attachment groups was

.92 (kappa = .86, p < 000). Convergence between AAP and AAI for secure versus insecure

classifications was .96 (kappa = .76, p < 000); convergence between AAP and AAI

classifications for the four major AAI classification groups was .94 (kappa = .86, p <000).

<u>The AAP Classification System</u>

Attachment classification using the AAP is based on the analysis of the verbatim

transcript of the "story" responses to the seven attachment pictures.   Three existing attachment

classification schemes contributed to the initial development of the AAP classification system.

The AAI (George et al., 1984/1985/1996; Main & Goldwyn, 1985/1991/1994), the Attachment

Doll Play Procedure (Solomon et al., 1995), and the Caregiving Interview (George & Solomon,

1989, 1996) were instrumental to our thinking about coherency and defensive processes. The

AAP classification system also includes several new discriminating features derived

conceptually from attachment theory. As a result, the AAP classification system is comprised of

a set of coding categories that evaluate three different dimensions of the stories: 1) defensive

processes, 2) discourse and 3) content.   In this section we provide an overview of the markers

that comprise each of these dimensions.

Defensive Processes

Like psychoanalysis, information-processing models describe how individuals represent (encode) and remember (retrieve from long term memory storage) attachment-related experience, both at the conscious level (information in short-term memory) and the unconscious level (nonconscious, parallel processing). Unlike traditional cognitive models, Bowlby expanded the concept of "information" to include emotional information. Upon activation of the attachment system, defensive processes select, exclude, and transform behavior, thought, and emotional appraisals to allow, if possible, termination of the attachment system while preventing undue distress. During the course of administering the AAP, each projective picture increasingly activates the attachment system. The AAP, therefore, provides an excellent framework from which to observe individuals' defenses "at work" and to identify the kind and pervasiveness of their defensive operations.

As we have seen, Bowlby distinguished three forms of defensive exclusion: deactivation, cognitive disconnection, and segregated systems. Recently, George and Solomon explicated the defining features of each form of defense to distinguish between child attachment groups (Solomon et al., 1995) and the corresponding maternal caregiving representations (George & Solomon, 1996, 1999). Based on this work, we have defined the identifying criteria for deactivation, cognitive disconnection, and segregated systems to differentiate the attachment groups on the AAP.

The task of evaluating defensive processes requires the AAP judge to record the details of each form of defense as expressed in the words, images, and language patterns in the story response to each attachment picture. It is not possible to describe this complex coding process in

detail here. We describe instead the general characteristics that define each form of defense and

provide examples of these characteristics in Table 1.

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Deactivation. This form of defensive exclusion functions to diminish, dismiss, devalue,

or minimize the importance or influence of attachment and is the form of defense that

characterizes dismissing attachment. The goal of deactivation is to shift attention away from

events or feelings that arouse the attachment system (similar to avoidance in the Strange

Situation or dismissing discourse in the AAI). Deactivation enables the individual to complete

the task of telling a story without being distracted by attendant attachment distress. A common

form of deactivation is the development of story lines that avoid themes of personal distress;

instead, themes emphasize relationships and interactions that are guided by stereotypical social

roles, materialism, authority, or achievement. Frequently, characters are evaluated negatively,

such has having done the wrong thing or gone against an authority or rules. Deactivation is also

seen in story lines that seemingly avoid an attachment theme, emphasizing instead exploration

(hitchhiking adventure), affiliation (friends), or romantic interludes (dating).

Cognitive Disconnection.   According to Bowlby, cognitive disconnection functions to

split attachment information, so to speak, so that distressing information and affect are literally

disconnected from their source. George and Solomon (1996) proposed that the foundation of

cognitive disconnection is uncertainty that results from the individual continually shifting back

and forth in both attachment behavior and thought. In the AAP, cognitive disconnection is

clearly inefficient and rarely functions to terminate the arousal of attachment distress (see also

Solomon et al., 1995). Cognitive disconnection produces an inability to make decisions about

the story line, and uncertainty and ambivalence about events. Some individuals are unable to

make up their minds as to what is going on in a story and are frequently unable to complete their

thoughts. Cognitive disconnection is perhaps most clearly observed when individuals develop

two diametrically opposed themes. For example, in Departure the man is sad because he wants

the woman to stay and the woman is happy because she wants to leave.   In Bed, theme

opposition maybe seen when the boy is described as either waking up in the morning or getting

ready for bed at night.

Segregated Systems. As we noted earlier, Bowlby (1980) proposed that segregated

systems were the product of an extreme form of defensive exclusion adopted by individuals who

had experienced attachment trauma. The concept of segregated system is complex. Before

describing how a segregated system is identified in the AAP, it is important that we define the

concept in more detail.

Bowlby developed the term "segregated system" carefully to capture both the

psychoanalytic features of repression and the cognitive theory of mental representation. A

segregated system represented to Bowlby the strongest form of repression. The system

contained traumatic material that was blocked (thus, segregated) from conscious awareness by

strong forms of defensive exclusion (deactivation or cognitive disconnection). According to

attachment theory, behavioral systems such as attachment are organized by mental

representational structures (internal working models) (Bowlby, 1969/1982; 1979). Thus, he used

the term "system" here to suggest that this traumatic mental representation was organized, that is,

it had its own representational rules, postulates, and appraisals.

Bowlby's original thinking regarding segregated systems centered on explaining the lack of resolution of the loss of an attachment figure during childhood, and the seemingly unexplainable behavior subsequently exhibited when adults.   His concept of lack of resolution has since been expanded to include other traumas, such as abuse or parental abandonment (Ainsworth & Eichberg, 1991; George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Solomon & George, 1999; Solomon et al., 1995; West & George, 1999).

George and Solomon noted that segregated systems are prone to defensive breakdown, that is, to a state of mental or behavioral dysregulation that results from the undermining or collapse of normative forms of deactivation or cognitive disconnection.   Importantly, the failure of defense and the concomitant dysregulation of segregated systems appear to be associated with strong stressors to the attachment system and in most individuals are not a pervasive quality of their behavior or thought (Solomon & George, 1999).   The breakdown of defensive processes results in disorganized, dysregulated behavior, or a complete shut down.   During moments of disorganization or dysregulation, Bowlby discussed at length how an individual's behavior might now appear out of context and even bizarre.   He proposed that this behavior resulted from the sudden and ill-organized emergence of attachment memories and the accompanying distress.

The identification of unresolved segregated systems material in AAP stories is the single most important feature for judging unresolved attachment status (see George, West, & Pettem, 1999, for an extensive discussion of the links between unresolved attachment status and attachment disorganization). Segregated systems markers in AAP stories are evaluated in a two step process.

The first step is to identify the presence of segregated systems material in the story. Following George and Solomon's work, segregated systems evidence or "markers" include those

aspects of a story that connote helplessness, fear, failed protection or abandonment (see Table 1),

such as references to dangerous events, being helpless or out of control, or isolation.   Some

segregated systems markers have a dissociated or eerie quality, a feature that parallels Main's

(ref***) link between unresolved attachment and dissociation. Others are manifested in the

sudden intrusion of descriptions of the individual's own traumatic experiences into a story, a

feature similar to the intrusions observed in unresolved AAI transcripts.

The second step is to evaluate resolution of segregated system markers. Resolution

indicates that individuals, drawing upon their internal working models of attachment,

successfully integrated or contained this material within the context of their stories. We stress

once again that integration, as evidenced by resolution at the representational level, is the sole

indicator that differentiates organized from disorganized/unresolved attachment status in children

and adults (Main, 1995; Solomon & George, 1999; Solomon et al., 1995). AAP stories are

considered resolved when the story content demonstrates that characters have drawn on internal

resources to understand events or have taken action to protect the self. Other forms of resolution

include the use of attachment figures to provide physical comfort or to provide the security

needed to explore threatening events internally (see "haven of safety" and "internalized secure

base" described in the next section). For example, in Ambulance, the grandmother comforts the

child; in Cemetery, the man thinks about the importance of the deceased. Resolution through

containment is noted when the individual is protected without appeal to attachment figures (e.g.,

protective services step in to prevent abuse) or the individual takes steps to change the situation

(e.g., tells an abusive parent to "Stop.")

A story is judged unresolved when there is no evidence of integration or containment of

segregated material. Typically, the unresolved story is devoid of events or people that provide

comfort, protection or help, or the character continues to be "haunted" or threatened by feelings

of abandonment, fear, helplessness, and vulnerability.

In some instances, unresolved segregated systems are indicated by a total shut down

response (constriction). In this form, the individual is profoundly unable or refuses to engage in

telling a story about one or more AAP pictures.   The individual may, for example, pass the

picture back to the administrator, recoiling from it as if the attachment stimulus is upsetting,

dangerous, or personally threatening. It should be noted in this regard that an analogous form of

constricted response to a projective stimulus is characteristic of some disorganized children, the

child attachment group linked empirically to unresolved adult attachment (George et al., 1999;

Solomon et al., 1995; Main et al., 1985; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999).

So far in this chapter we have explored Bowlby's concept of defensive exclusion as

central to the regulation (activation and termination) of the attachment system. In terms of

measuring attachment, defense is certainly related to attachment status. However, the

identification of specific forms of defense is not sufficient to differentiate secure from insecure

attachment patterns.

Discourse and Story Content

In addition to defensive processing, a complete evaluation of the AAP stories requires us

to examine story discourse (language patterns related to how stories are told) and content

(features of the characters and the plot) for each attachment picture. Of course, these features of

a projective story are inextricably intertwined with defensive processing; however, the

identification of the specific qualities of these features is essential to discriminating among the

four attachment groups. Evidence for the defenses we just described only tell us how the

attachment system is regulated, not the quality of its organization. Indeed, the features that are used to evaluate resolution of segregated systems, for example, are content features of the story.

Two aspects of discourse are evaluated, story <u>coherence</u> and references during the telling of a story to the individual's <u>personal experience</u>. Again, coherence, as already described in detail in the introduction, evaluates the degree to which the story is logically connected, consistent, clearly articulated, and intelligible. Each attachment story is judged as high, moderate, or low in coherence based on the qualitative synthesis of the features of quality, quantity, relation and manner as defined specifically for the AAP (see Table 2).

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Personal experience is a particular form of a relation violation that is noted separately. In contrast to interview techniques, the AAP task is never defined as a context for telling about one's own experience. Probes never ask individuals to connect events portrayed in the picture with their own life events. According to attachment theory, individuals whose internal working models of attachment are maximally balanced and flexible (i.e., secure) maintain self-other boundaries. By contrast, representational merging (i.e., the inability to keep the self and other separate) has been shown to be a defining feature of attachment disorganization (George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Solomon & George, 1999) as well as a characteristic of a preoccupation with attachment. Thus, the personal experience marker tells us the degree to which the individual maintains boundaries between the self and the fictional character(s) in response to the pictures; the more stories in which personal experiences are present, the more preoccupied and potentially overwhelmed the individual is with his or her own attachment stress. Our evaluations

of this dimension simply note whether or not reference(s) to personal experience is present in the story.

We developed a set of content dimensions to evaluate the portrayal of relationships in story events. Two content dimensions are coded for stimuli that depict characters as alone: Agency of Self and Connectedness.   Connectedness is coded only for the Window and Bench alone pictures, as this feature of relationships is compromised in scenes of death (Cemetery) or potential abuse (Corner).   Only one content dimension is coded for stories that depict characters in dyads. This dimension is called Synchrony.

Following attachment theory, we developed agency of self to evaluate the story character's ability to draw on internal or external resources in order to resolve personal stress or threat (see Table 2). This capacity is present when the character is depicted as distressed and subsequently resolves this distress either by appealing to an attachment figure as a haven of safety or by drawing on his or her own internal resources. We term this latter phenomenon "internalized secure base."

The concept of the attachment figure providing protection and safety upon activation of the attachment system is central to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Bretherton (1985) used the term "haven of safety" to refer to this phenomenon and we incorporated her term in the AAP.   "Haven of safety" is coded when the story identifies events in which the character's problem or distress results in a successful appeal to an attachment figure. Typically, these types of events are seen in stories in which the individual has specified the character as a child, as for example in the Child at Window picture.

Other characters, particularly adult ones, are depicted as drawing upon their own internal resources instead of appealing directly to attachment figures in response to activation of their

attachment systems. We, thus, included a second form of agency of self "internalized secure base" to capture this internal capacity. In contrast to "haven of safety," this form of agency is seen when the story character is portrayed as engaging in some form of self-reflection, and/or using solitude to explore feelings and experiences. "Internalized secure base" is a new concept that has emerged from our work with the AAP and is central to attachment security. We pause briefly, therefore, to clarify how this concept fits within the framework of attachment theory.

The secure base phenomenon in early childhood is wholly dependent on the physical proximity and availability of the attachment figure; the attachment figure literally becomes the child's secure base.   In the developmental phase of the attachment relationship Bowlby (1969/1982) called a "goal-corrected partnership," the emerging ability of the child to form enduring internalized models of the relationship with the caregiver especially takes hold. Increasingly, mental representations of the attachment relationship have the capacity to supplement actual interactions with the caregiver; for secure children, separations are less likely to be threatening because representations of attachment figures allow the child to maintain secure models of them even in their physical absence. Over time, a more highly differentiated internal representational capacity emerges such that the older child's sense of security is maintained not by seeking physical proximity to the attachment figure (except in times of high activation of the attachment system) but by reference to the internal working model of the attachment figure. In an essential way, the secure base effect in adults is demonstrated in the absence of the attachment figure; that is, maintenance of proximity to the attachment figure becomes almost exclusively an internalized representational process. Further, internalization of the attachment relationship informs and shapes mental representations of the self (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986), allowing the individual to not only explore the external world, but to also explore the

internal world of the self. We thus use the concept of "internalized secure base" to refer to that state in which the sense of security and integrity of self are derived largely from the individual's internal relationship to the attachment figure.

There is one further elaboration with regard to the effect of "internalized secure base" that has been emphasized particularly by Fonagy and Target (1997) in their discussion of reflective self-capacity. Because adults predominantly maintain proximity to their attachment figure by reference to an internal working model of this person, it becomes possible to use solitude for self-exploration. Just as the young child uses the caregiver as a secure base from which to initiate exploration, the presence of an internalized secure base provides the foundation for self-reflection. Thus, on the basis of the foregoing considerations, we define "internalized secure base" as story content in which characters are depicted as having entered and actively explored their internal working models of attachment.

Finally, we have identified a third form of <u>agency of self</u>, called "capacity to act." In this case, the story character demonstrates that he or she is able to do something constructive in response to stress or difficulty. In other words, capacity to act means that the central story character can at least take action although they do access external or internal attachment resources. Importantly, when attachment figures are not available, taking action at least keeps the individual organized. It may be helpful to think of "capacity to act" in the context of the AAP as a secondary attachment strategy. Main (1990) defined a secondary attachment strategy as one that enabled the child to resolve attachment stress indirectly, that is, in lieu of a direct approach or appeal to the attachment figure. Similarly, in terms of AAP story content, secondary strategies bypass direct appeals to internal working models of attachment; the character is instead

described as engaging in some specific behavior or activity, such as going home, going to work, or becoming involved in an activity.

The Window and Bench pictures are also evaluated on the dimension of <u>connectedness</u> (see Table 2).   <u>Connectedness</u> assesses a character's desire to be with others. It is a more general evaluation of relationships than <u>agency of self</u>, which refers specifically to attachment relationships. According to ethology, in addition to attachment, the individual establishes other relationships such as friendships (affiliative behavioral system) and intimate adult relationships (sexual behavioral system) over the course of development (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Hinde, 1982). Connectedness, then, designates story content that indicates a character's desire to be with others, including interactions, for example, with parents, friends, intimate partners, teachers, neighbors, protection authorities (e.g., police) or health professionals. Interestingly, our work to date suggests that individuals who are judged secure most frequently create story lines in which <u>connectedness</u> is depicted to real or internalized attachment figures. This is not the case for individuals judged insecure. For example, dismissing adults often show <u>connectedness</u> in stories that describe distressed characters "hanging out with" friends instead of turning to attachment figures. Notably, preoccupied adults characteristically portray characters as alone, that is, not connected to others in any type of relationship.

<u>Synchrony</u> is the analogous relationship dimension that is coded for dyadic pictures (see Table 2). The pictures themselves depict a potential attachment figure in the actual drawing (a mother-figure in Bed; an adult partner in Departure; a grandmother-figure in Ambulance). <u>Synchrony</u>, then, assesses whether or not the story content portrays the dyad as participating in a reciprocal, mutually engaging, and satisfying relationship. When a story character is distressed or vulnerable, the evaluation of <u>synchrony</u> indicates how the dyadic partner (by definition, an

attachment figure) responds in order to solve a problem or reduce anxiety. An important feature

of synchrony is that the actions and feelings of the dyad are coordinated, that is, the story

describes characters as engaged in a "goal-corrected" partnership. For example, in the

Ambulance story, content is evaluated as synchronous when the child is described as being upset

and the adult is described as responding to the child immediately and appropriately by providing

comfort or solace. By contrast, a story that depicts an adult attempting to calm a child who

pushes the adult away is not a synchronous relationship. Non-synchronous relationships also

include stories in which the characters are not seen as related, or in a story told about only one of

the characters with no reference to the other character in the picture.

<div align="center">Assigning Attachment Status using the AAP</div>

Classification using the AAP requires the judge to examine the pattern of attachment

markers or dimensions across the entire set of stories. We describe in this section the general

AAP patterns for secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and unresolved attachment. We highlight the

discussion by including examples from each attachment group in response to the Bench picture

(see Appendix). We emphasize that classification requires coding of the full set of picture

responses; it is never based on the individual's response to only one picture.

Secure Adult Attachment

Secure attachment is characterized at the representational level by flexible and organized

thought about attachment situations and relationships (George & Solomon, 1996, 1999; Main et

al., 1985; Solomon & George, 1996). Securely attached individuals are confident that they can

rely on attachment figures to achieve care, safety, and protection and, when alone, have access to

internalized attachment relationships. Because of their ability to acknowledge and cope with

distress, secure individuals do not rely excessively on defensive processes to modulate

attachment anxiety. As such, their story content and discourse reveal little or no evidence of defensive exclusion. Many secure individuals have experienced attachment trauma and their stories sometimes include segregated systems markers. When these markers do appear, they are clearly and swiftly resolved.

The hallmark of security in the AAP is individuals' depiction of attachment relationships as remedying the distress that follows upon activation of their attachment system by the projective stimuli. Further, only secure individuals demonstrate "internalized secure base," that is, the capacity to use internal resources to resolve attachment stress. Secure individuals also show the importance of relationships more generally in their stories through expressing the desire to be connected to others (Connectedness in alone pictures) and descriptions of balanced, reciprocal interaction (Synchrony in dyadic pictures). Finally, secure individuals demonstrate moderate to high discourse coherency in the telling of their stories. Attachment security is rarely associated with markers for personal experience, thus demonstrating the ability of these individuals to maintain clear self-other boundaries in response to the pictures.

Many of these qualities of secure attachment are present in the following story. Italics in the story text in the left column indicate dimensions identified by our coding system for the AAP; annotated explanations of this text are provided in the right column.

This looks like someone who isn't very happy. Maybe feeling a little, a little sad. Felt like they needed to <u>get away and have some time to themselves</u> so they went for a walk and they found this bench, decided to sit on it and <u>think for awhile and maybe feeling um, just trying to reflect on what's going on in their life</u> and feeling maybe a little overwhelmed or maybe something has happened that they're saddened by and they need this time to get their- <u>gather their thoughts</u> and they'll maybe um just sit there for awhile and then have a good cry and	Defense: Cognitive Disconnection -- Withdraw Agency of Self, Internalized Secure Base. Note the use of solitude. More Agency of Self, Internalized Secure Base.

feel better and be able to get back up and go home and <u>deal</u> with what they need to.	Deactivation language: Weak evidence of deactivation. Note the character's resilience as the product of Internalized Secure Base.

The most striking feature of this story is the character's use of "internalized secure base" to cope with her distress. In terms of story content, the girl is described as sitting on the bench gathering her thoughts.   Drawing upon her own internal resources, she gets ready to face her problem again.   This individual's story content is relatively undefended. In terms of coding defensive exclusion, the story has only one form of cognitive disconnection (withdrawal to be by herself). It also contains a minor form of deactivation language ("deal with") that hardly counts as defensive exclusion in the overall scope of the story.   Like many of the stories of secure individuals, the strongest evidence of any kind of defensive processing is revealed in the story's coherency. This story is only moderately coherent. The individual spends a lot of time discussing the girl's thinking activity, but we only have a general notion of the preceding and following events. The actual manner of discourse would best be described as "windy" as the individual describes the thinking activity using a long run-on sentence.

<u>Dismissing Adult Attachment</u>

Dismissing attachment is characterized by the individual's attempts to minimize, avoid, or neutralize attachment in an effort to modulate stress (George & Solomon, 1999; Main, 1995; Solomon et al., 1995). Dismissing individuals typically develop stories in which distress is discounted and attachment relationships (real or internalized) are not described as integral or important to remedying the situation. Although their AAP stories may portray characters as having the "capacity to act," <u>agency of self</u> in the forms of "internalized secure base" or "haven

of safety" are notably lacking.   Connectedness may be directed toward non-attachment figures, such as friends or sexual partners. Reciprocal forms of interaction indicative of synchrony are usually also lacking in their stories. Relationships often are "functional;" that is, these interactions are based on a basic script that fits a particular context. Examples of such scripts include descriptions of behavior that follows cultural rules for how people should act at a train station or when someone is hurt. In other instances, relationship synchrony may be violated by rejection, such as a mother refusing to give a child a hug at bedtime. And further still, their story content may be devoid of relationships entirely and characters are only described as involved in their own activities.

As we have stated, defensive deactivation differentiates dismissing attachment from other insecure groups. George and Solomon (1996; see also Solomon et al., 1995) demonstrated that deactivation and cognitive disconnection defensive processing commonly characterize both the avoidant/dismissing and ambivalent/preoccupied attachment groups. What is uniquely characteristic of dismissing individuals in response to the AAP is the predominant use of deactivation in response to a significant number of the stories. We note that in terms of coherency, their coherency scores are often similar to secure individuals. Thus, both coherency and the story content markers must be examined in order to place an individual in the dismissing attachment group.

The inclusion of reference to personal experience while responding to the projective stimulus generally characterizes insecure attachment, but the presence of a personal experience marker does not clearly differentiate among the insecure attachment groups (dismissing, preoccupied, or unresolved attachment). Based on the work we have completed to date, it appears, however, that dismissing individuals are less likely to refer to personal experience as

compared to preoccupied or unresolved individuals. In other words, deactivation appears to help

dismissing individuals maintain the boundaries of self and other while they are engaged in the

projective task.

The example below illustrates many of the features of the dismissing attachment group.

Um, this is at school, and this person, again <u>has no friends</u>, and or maybe they're being <u>teased</u> um, and, they're sad and um, again lonely I guess and, um, it's recess so that's why there's no other kids around cause she's on the bench by herself while everyone else is at the. And maybe um, she doesn't have friends not necessarily because other people are mean but maybe <u>because she doesn't she won't make the effort to make friends</u>. Um, she's just <u>afraid</u> too. Um, and I guess probably one of the reasons is that everyone else or everyone <u>she will be going in with everyone else and she'll sit by herself again in class</u>, and nothing will really change.	Defense: Deactivation -- Negative evaluation of a character Defense: Cognitive Disconnection -- Entanglement. Defense: Deactivation – Negative evaluation of a character. The lack of friends is her fault. Segregated Systems Marker: Danger Agency of Self, Capacity to Act The girl does not use attachment to resolve the danger but she does have the capacity to go into the classroom and sit down. Note that without use of an attachment figure or internalized secure base nothing has been transformed.

The main theme of this story is negative evaluation of the story character, a strong

indication of the defensive deactivation of the attachment system. Note that negative evaluation

appears twice during the story; there is no doubt that the girl is the source of her own problem.

We also see evidence of cognitive disconnection through the suggestion of peer teasing. Teasing

stirs up feelings and results in relationship entanglement and mental preoccupation.

As is typical in the stories of dismissing individuals, the girl fails to demonstrate the use

of attachment to terminate her distress. We see no use of an attachment figure as a secure base

or of an internalized secure base. We do see some agency, as the girl is able to return to the

classroom and sit down. Consistent with attachment theory, we see that behavioral action alone in the absence of attachment, however, does not result in personal transformation or change in her anxious state.   Further, the individual drives this point home in the story by stating at the end, "nothing will really change."

Defensive exclusion again affects the story's coherency. The repeated statements of negative evaluation diminish the quality of the story. The individual also compromises quality by her indecision in the beginning – the girl's condition is due to not having friends or being teased. The story plot is generally vague and is told in a manner that includes several run-on sentences. Finally, this story has a segregated systems marker in that the girl is described as "scared". The story is resolved by her behavioral action that keeps her organized and moving forward. She may be afraid but, unlike the unresolved individual, her fear is not paralyzing.

Preoccupied Attachment

Preoccupied attachment is characterized by mental confusion, uncertainty, ambivalence, and preoccupation with attachment events, details, and emotions (particularly anger and sadness). Similar to the dismissing group, the AAP stories of preoccupied individuals portray non-connected and non-synchronous relationships. Unlike the "capacity to act" commonly seen in the stories of dismissing individuals, preoccupied individuals frequently describe characters as not taking any action at all, leaving them alone and often passive and immobilized.   Consistent with these portrayals of agency (more correctly, the lack of agency), characters in the stories of preoccupied individuals are less likely to express the desire to be connected to others and, in response to dyadic pictures, do not demonstrate synchrony.

Cognitive disconnection is the predominant form of defense used by individuals judged preoccupied. These individuals typically display a host of cognitive disconnection markers in

any given story, particularly uncertainty and disconnected (i.e., split) story lines. Although some

forms of deactivation may be present in one or two of the stories, the presence of deactivating

defenses in the responses of preoccupied individuals is minimal. Cognitive disconnection

interferes strongly with coherency of thought and discourse. The stories of preoccupied

individuals are typically incoherent; contradictory story lines, a plethora of detail, run-on or

unfinished sentences, jargon, stumbling, passive language, and an overall empty or vague quality

of discourse encumber them. As well, it is often difficult for preoccupied individuals to maintain

self-other boundaries, resulting in frequent and often lengthy descriptions of personal experience

in their stories.

The following <u>Bench</u> story exemplifies many of the features of the preoccupied

attachment group.

Well someone looks <u>a bit up to it</u> there I suppose, sitting on the bench having a bit of a cry, obviously something <u>traumatizing</u> happened before-- sitting there thinking <u>why did this happen to me</u> and, <u>I don't know I wouldn't know what happens next</u>, I expect <u>she gets up and walks away</u>.	Passive language: Nonsense or jargon phrase Highly exaggerating language, not real trauma. Defense: Cognitive Disconnection – Uncertainty. The character asks a question. Defense: Cognitive Disconnection – Uncertainty. The individual is uncertain about how to continue the story. Absence of Agency of Self

In this story, cognitive disconnection results in a meaningless story characterized by

uncertainty and passivity in both the girl on the bench and the individual telling the story.

Overall, this story says nothing and, with the exception of noting "a bit of a cry," is devoid of

attachment. Further, the girl's distress is described in the prototypic manner of the preoccupied

individual -- vague jargon ("a bit up to it") and over-exaggeration ("traumatizing"). The story

content fails to describe clear events that led up to the situation, any real activity while she is

sitting on the bench, and the events that follow. In all respects, this story has no beginning,

middle, or end. The uncertainty that results from attempts to disconnect events of attachment is also pervasive. The girl doesn't know why this happened to her. The individual telling the story is "stuck" and doesn't know what to say next. The more casual reader (i.e., one not trained to use AAP classification markers) might be tempted to suggest agency of self from the story content because the character is described as asking why this was happening to her. Looking at this statement to evaluate <u>agency of self</u>, we see that the question stops short of discovering a solution or transformation (internalized secure base). It also stops short of giving the girl the <u>capacity to act</u> to remedy her distress. She gets up and walks away, leaving the situation unchanged and herself alone with no expressed desire to be with others (lack of <u>connectedness</u>).

The uncertainty and passivity in this story adversely affect coherency, judged low. The reader may also note that cognitive disconnection results in a drawing out of this individual's thoughts, as if she is buying time to figure out what is going on in order to tell a story. As a result, the story itself is essentially one long run-on sentence, a strong manner violation.

<u>Unresolved Attachment</u>

Unresolved segregated systems are the key features of defensive processing that characterize the unresolved attachment group.   Unresolved individuals have not reworked and integrated trauma and loss experiences into their current mental representation of attachment. As a result, they are prone to dysregulation and the sudden emergence of segregated material when their attachment systems are activated. They are then "haunted" by feelings of failed protection, abandonment, vulnerability, threat, and extreme mental distress (George & Solomon, 1999; Solomon et al., 1995; West & George, 1999).

It is important to note that overall the other forms of defensive processes found in the stories of unresolved individuals are similar to those of individuals in the other attachment

groups (i.e., they reveal similar patterns of deactivation and cognitive disconnection). We also

may note that the segregated systems markers of unresolved individuals are not necessarily

autobiographical. The dysregulated, "unmetabolized" quality of unresolved attachment trauma,

combined with other forms of defensive processing, typically result in low coherency, and an

absence of agency of self, connectedness, and synchrony.

The following Bench story is from the transcript of an individual judged unresolved.

Um, again it's a, well not again it looks to me like a picture of of absolute despair or isolation, sitting on a bench looks like totally withdrawn I when I first saw it I thought either um, a jail situation or, you almost can maybe be a sauna situation but you wouldn't sit in that posture in a sauna. Um so I think it's a negative um, the person looks bare, as if they had everything stripped away from them, um, so to me, and because I've done so much third world development it immediately I immediately thought of a third world situation where something has been totally stripped away from the individual, and they are in total despair and anxiety and um, almost withdrawn. And I suppose it could be because of my physio occupational therapy training it could be a mental patient who's way back in the olden days had everything taken away from them and they're in total despair. *OK*. **What might happen next?** I almost think they might even lie down and curl up in the fetal position. **Anything else?** No.	Segregated System Marker: Emptiness/ Isolation

Defense: Cognitive Disconnection – literal interpretation of the figure's body posture convinces individual that the girl is in a severely isolating environment such as jail.

Segregated System Marker: Continued elaboration of emptiness, despair, and isolation.

Defense: Cognitive Disconnection – Anxiety is an entangling emotional state. Also Withdrawn.
Personal Experience

Segregated System Marker – Individual shifts theme to severe mental disorder and continued elaboration of isolation.
Unresolved: Complete withdrawal into the self. |

This story is an excellent example of Bowlby's (1980) predictions regarding the effects

of "unlocking" unresolved material that has previously been kept segregated from consciousness.

Here, the individual became dysregulated and the story told is disorganized and

"unmetabolized." In this story, segregated systems material is demonstrated in the intense, repetitive descriptions of personal emptiness, isolation, and despair. At one point, the individual attempts to get control of her attachment stress by a weak depiction of the girl as being in a sauna. This depiction does not work, however, as the individual is struck by the literal drawing of the figure on the bench. The individual appears resigned to the fact that the girl is helplessly alone (jail) and desperate. The girl's seclusion on the bench leaves her vulnerable, in danger, abandoned, and unprotected. Attachment despair is never resolved; the dysregulated material is never re-organized, contained, or integrated. Instead, the girl withdraws even further into a helpless fetal position.

<u>Summary</u>

With the projective assessment of adult attachment as our frame of reference, we have described the intricacies of defensive operations as defined by Bowlby, the analysis of story content and discourse coherency, and theoretical and procedural aspects in classifying patterns of attachment. Avowedly, following the nature of defense and mental representation, this presentation of AAP coding and classification principles was necessarily complex and may have overburdened the reader. To supplement the study of AAP interpretation, it will be worthwhile to conclude these discussions by representing the classification process diagramatically.

The integration of these features of the AAP to assign an attachment classification can be represented as a hierarchically integrated series of decision points (see Figure 4). Classification is assigned on the basis of analysis of the coding patterns for the entire set of seven attachment stories. A judge first notes if there is at least one unresolved segregated systems marker. If an unresolved segregation systems' marker is present, the case is assigned the unresolved classification. If all segregated systems markers have been resolved, the judge then examines

the pattern of codes that are used to differentiate secure from insecure cases (<u>coherency, agency of self, connectedness, synchrony</u>). It the case does not fit the secure pattern, the judge then proceeds to examine the specific patterns of defensive exclusion in order to differentiate dismissing and preoccupied attachment. Inspection of each decision point emphasizes that defensive processing is an integral aspect of internal working models of attachment and the interpretation of the Adult Attachment Projective.

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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Table 1. Defensive Processing Dimensions Coded in the AAP

Defense Variables	Stimuli Coded	Definition	Some Examples of Evidence in AAP Stories
Deactivation	All	Evidence of deactivation and demobilization.	Negative evaluation – e.g., person is wrong or being disciplined. Rejection – e.g., person is ignored; child requests hug but mother gives medicine instead. Social roles – e.g., a child this age should not act this way; gravestones should not be defaced Authority – e.g., power (materialism, prestige); personal strength. Achievement – e.g., taking responsibility; problem solving.
Cognitive Disconnection	All	Evidence of uncertainty, ambivalence, and preoccupation.	Uncertainty – e.g., cannot decide who the character is; the story is left unfinished; characters are bored, confused, worried. Withdrawal – e.g., character leaves the scene prematurely; reserve. Withhold – e.g., hides face so as not to show sadness; surrender. Anger – e.g., fight, argument. Busy – parents have no time for the child; bake cookies to distract child from distress. Feisty – e.g., child is naughty, bratty. Entangled – e.g., tease, nag, scold. Glossing over – e.g., "He'll grow out of it."
Segregated Systems	All	Evidence of overwhelm or dysregulation by attachment trauma.	Danger – e.g., death, abuse. Failed protection – e.g., abandonment. Helplessness -- e.g., overpowered, trapped Out of control – violence, disintegration. Emptiness/ Isolation – e.g., in jail, desperately alone. Dissociation – e.g., speaking to the dead. Intrusion – e.g., references to own loss or abuse.

Table 2. AAP Coherency and Content Dimensions

Dimensions	Stimuli Coded	Definition	
Discourse			
Dimensions			
Coherency	All	Degree of organization and integration in the story as a whole. Quality: The degree to which there is a basic plot with specific details to understand the basics: who, what, why, what happens next. Quantity: The degree to which the response is sufficient to tell a story. Relation: The degree to which the response is relevant to the story. Manner: The degree to which language is clear.	3-point rating scale combining quality, quantity, relation, manner
Personal Experience	All	A particular form of relation violation in which the response includes reference to one's own life experience.	Present; Absent
Content			
Dimensions			
Agency of Self	Alone	Designates degree to which story character is portrayed as integrated and capable of action.	Internalized Secure Base, Haven of Safety; Capacity to Act; No agency
Connectedness	Alone	Expression of desire to interact with others.	Clear signs of a relationship in the story. Relationship not possible (e.g., someone walks away, someone is dead); Engaged in own activity

| Synchrony | Dyadic | Characters' interactions are reciprocal and mutually engaging. | Mutual, reciprocal engagement; Failed reciprocity; No relationship is acknowledged in the story (story told as if one of the characters is alone). |

Figure 1. AAP Projective Picture: Bench

Figure 2. AAP Projective Picture: Bed

Figure 3. AAP Projective Picture: Cemetery

Figure 4.   Summary of Classification Process: AAP Decision Rules

Start	→	Unresolved Segregated Systems Marker(s)	<u>Yes</u> →	Unresolved

↓ No

<u>High Coherency,</u> High Agency, Connectedness Synchrony Scores (and, if present, Segregated Systems Markers are resolved)	<u>Yes</u> →	Secure

↓ No

Deactivation Markers in 3 or more stories (and, if present, Segregated Systems Markers are resolved)	<u>Yes</u> →	Dismissing

↓ No

Cognitive Disconnection Markers (and, if present, Segregated Systems Markers are resolved)	<u>Yes</u> →	Preoccupied