The chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the questions that comprise the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) protocol, together with its associated scoring and classification system. Familiarity with the interview and the system with which it is analyzed supplies the reader with an essential point of entry into understanding the chapters that follow. As well, it provides a background for use of the AAI in clinical contexts (AAI protocol: George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985, 1996; system of analysis: Main & Goldwyn, 1984b, 1988, Main, Goldwyn, & Hesse, 2003).

The AAI scoring and classification system focuses on the patterns of speech that emerge in the individual asked to respond to a series of 20 questions that comprise the interview protocol. Many of these concern childhood experiences with primary caregivers. Other questions address individuals' thoughts and feelings about the influence of childhood experiences upon his or her adult personality, the possible reasons caregivers may have behaved as they did when the speaker was a child, and the nature of the current relationships with the caregivers/parents. Questions regarding major loss experiences, as well as any overwhelmingly frightening or traumatic experiences occurring throughout the individual's lifetime, are included. The interview ends by asking what wishes the speaker would have for his or her children's (or imagined children's) future, and what he or she hopes the children would have learned from his or her parenting.

Following an extensive study of the initial texts gleaned from this protocol, Main and Goldwyn (1984a, 1984b) discovered three basic and relatively
organized ways of recounting life history with respect to attachment. Each of these appeared to reflect what they termed a particular “state of mind” with respect to attachment, namely, (1) secure-autonomous (valuing of attachment, but seemingly objective regarding any particular experience or relationship), (2) dismissing of attachment (dismissing or devaluing the importance of attachment relationships and experiences), and (3) preoccupied (preoccupied with or by past attachment relationships and/or experiences).

The central finding first reported was the remarkable degree of overlap between these “organized” states of mind with respect to attachment, as seen in a parent’s AAI and the infant’s response to that parent during a brief separation-and-reunion procedure known as the Ainsworth Strange Situation (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Specifically, in the original study of a Bay Area sample (Main, 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1984b; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; see Steele & Steele, Chapter 1, this volume), and later in many other regions and countries, parents classified as secure-autonomous by the AAI were found to be much more likely than others to have infants who—during the Strange Situation—behaved in ways that indicated the presence of a secure attachment to that same parent. Thus, the infants of secure-autonomous parents typically explored energetically in the parent’s presence, and showed distress or called for the parent during his or her absence. Having actively established proximity or contact immediately upon reunion, however, they soon settled down and returned to play. Parents who dismissed the importance of attachment relationships during the AAI were more likely to have infants classified as avoidant—that is, infants who showed little or no distress on separation from them, then actively avoided and ignored them on reunion. Parents who were preoccupied with their own parents had infants who behaved in an ambivalent/resistant manner; these infants failed to explore even prior to the first separation, and became extremely, rather than moderately, distressed when separated. On reunion, they alternately clung to and expressed anger toward the parent, and were unable to “settle” and turn to play.

These findings were initially reported in the 1980s, and by 1995, a combined overview of existing studies conducted by van Ijzendoorn showed replication across 18 samples, including 854 parent–infant pairs from six different countries. This overview revealed that 75% of secure-autonomous parents had secure infants, a finding that also held when the interview was conducted prior to the birth of the first child (e.g., London: Fonagy, Steele, & Steele, 1991; Steele, Steele, & Fonagy, 1996; Toronto: Benoit & Parker, 1994; Innsbruck: New York: Ward & Carlson, 1995). Additionally, as would be expected, van Ijzendoorn’s (1995) overview showed that across studies, secure-autonomous parents were more sensitive and responsive to their infants than were parents whose AAI texts had been judged as dismissing or preoccupied. Later, it would be shown that placement in the three organized categories was (a) stable when the AAI was given to the same person twice, even if across several years, and (b) unrelated to the individual’s assessed general intelligence or

Eventually, Main and Hesse (1990) discovered that disorganized lapses in speech or reasoning occurred during the discussion of loss or abuse in some speakers, including a substantial minority drawn from low-risk community samples. This led to the development of a fourth AAI category termed unresolved/disorganized. These lapses in the monitoring of speech or reasoning were attributed to the arousal of, and interference from, partially dissociated fear connected with the experience under discussion (Hesse & Main, 2000, 2006). Shortly thereafter, it was recognized that some interview texts could not be classified in terms of any singular organized category, because either “contradictory” strategies were present or the interview was otherwise virtually formless. This led to the development of a fifth, cannot classify, category (Hesse, 1996).

In the case of parent–child dyads, both cannot classify and unresolved/disorganized interviews are associated with the disorganized/disoriented infant Strange Situation classification (Main & Solomon, 1986, 1990). Infants are placed in this fourth Strange Situation category when they fail to maintain the behavioral organization that characterizes those judged secure, avoidant, or ambivalent/resistant. Infants are categorized as disorganized/disoriented when, for example, they approach the parent with the head averted, put a hand to the mouth in a gesture indicative of apprehension immediately upon reunion, or rise to approach the parent, then fall prone to the floor. Infants are also termed disorganized/disoriented when, for example, they freeze all movement with arms elevated or become still, with a trance-like expression. Disorganized Strange Situation behavior has been found to be associated with frightened, frightening, dissociative, and other forms of anomalous parental behavior (Hesse & Main, 2006; Lyons-Ruth, Bronfman, & Parson, 1999; Main & Hesse, 1990). Both the cannot classify and unresolved/disorganized AAI categories have proven especially predominant in clinical samples (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996), and infant disorganized attachment with the mother has been linked with psychopathology assessed in the same individuals in young adulthood (Carlson, 1998), especially in the event of intervening trauma (Ogawa, Sroufe, Weinfield, Carlson, & Egeland, 1997). Disorganized attachment status is seen in the majority of infants in maltreatment samples (Carlson, Cicchetti, Barnett, & Braungardt, 1989; Lyons-Ruth, Connell, Zoll, & Stahl, 1987) and has been found associated with both externalizing and internalizing disorders in low-risk samples (e.g., Solomon, George, & DeJong, 1995).

Before moving on to a description of the protocol and system of analysis, it is critical to consider the strong relation between the AAI and the thinking of John Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980). These ideas fall broadly within the object relations school of thought as Bowlby (1969/1982) readily acknowledged (Balint, 1939/1949; Fairbairn, 1952; Spitz, 1965; Winnicott, 1953). First, from his early works forward, one of the fundamental premises guiding Bowlby’s thinking about the origins of an individual’s emotional difficulties was insistence on the need to take into account, as fully as possible, actual
ond, Bowlby proposed that one must pay special attention to the way these experiences are (re)presented by the individual, and—whether historically accurate or not—presently form his or her “internal working model” or “state of mind” with respect to the self, and the self in relation to parents and important others.

The first of these two fundamental aspects of Bowlby’s thinking with regard to the development of emotional difficulties is addressed by those AAI questions that call directly for the speaker’s descriptions of real-life experiences. Although historical events can never be known retrospectively, experiences with each parent as primarily loving or unloving during childhood are “inferred” or estimated from the full verbatim AAI transcript. Here, the AAI scoring system powerfully complements most of the existing self-report screening instruments aimed at identifying problematic features of childhood experiences, because it does not take at face value the individual’s direct evaluations or report. The AAI also gives emphasis to Bowlby’s focus on other aspects of real-life experiences (i.e., those involving traumatic loss or abuse), allowing coders to estimate the extent to which loss or abuse experiences may be core unsettling experiences that complicate adult functioning, including vital health and relationship domains.

Bowlby’s second focus was the mental representations a person forms of his or her attachment-related experiences, termed states of mind or representation/working models (1973, p. 203). Here, Bowlby was concerned with the representational model of self, other, and the relation between them. The AAI addresses this second focus by repeatedly querying individuals regarding their present thoughts and feelings about specific aspects of their past. In the AAI, these phenomena are approached in terms of what the coder appears to be guiding the speaker in appraising and interpreting attachment-relevant information in the interview context.

Against this background, we now turn to a description of the questions that comprise the AAI protocol, then move on to present the rating scales alongside the overall classification system, which is more familiar in the published literature. The tendency to publish reports regarding AAI data at the level of overall classification (i.e., secure as opposed to insecure [dismissing or preoccupied], and separately, unclassifiable, and unresolved or not unresolved concerning past loss or trauma) has also inevitably been maintained by the majority of the contributors in this volume. In this chapter, however, we also focus on the continuous scales that are assigned to all AAI texts, and that contribute critically to the delineation of the five major AAI classifications. Finally, the three organized AAI categories are also associated with specific constellations of features indicating different overall “attitudes toward attachment,” as we discuss below.

A central focus that runs throughout this chapter is an elaboration of the definitions of narrative coherence versus incoherence. That a speaker responding to the AAI is coherent and collaborative in describing his or her attachment-related experiences is critical to the judgment that an AAI is secure-autonomous, and as such is a consistent correlate of mental health in adulthood and childhood (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, Chapter 3, this volume). Here the reader gains entrée to the work of the linguistic philosopher H. P. Grice (1975), who provided several principles or maxims that speakers must follow to be considered to be participating in cooperative, rational discourse. It appeared, then, that speakers who could maintain cooperative, coherent, and rational discourse throughout the AAI (adhering to each of Grice’s conversational maxims) were likely to have secure babies. In contrast, those speakers whose conversations went astray in various specifiable ways would have infants who, in the Strange Situation, were classified as either insecure-avoidant or insecure-ambivalent, in accordance with the specific maxims that had been violated.

The AAI Protocol: An Overview of the Questions

All persons have their own individual approach to telling their life story, and the way they do so may vary dramatically depending on their resources, history, and the demand characteristics of the situation. As a set series of questions with follow-up probes, the AAI calls upon speakers to answer direct and challenging queries regarding their life history, the great majority of which they never have been asked before. This is done at a relatively rapid pace and within approximately an hour. Ample opportunities are thereby created for speakers to contradict themselves, to find themselves unable to answer questions clearly, or to be led into excessively lengthy discussions of particular topics (e.g., recent experiences, events, conflicts) that may stray from the request that has just been stated. Moreover, a speaker must not only address the question at hand but also be able to remember what he or she has already said, in order to integrate the overall presentation as it emerges. The central tasks of the AAI, then, are to (1) produce and reflect upon relationships and experiences related to attachment history, while simultaneously (2) maintaining coherent conversation with the interviewer (Hesse, 1996).

It is striking that despite the fact that the interviewee is always informed in some detail regarding the overall topic of the interview prior to its administration, actually engaging in the process often appears to be a far more powerful experience than the speaker had anticipated. This is consistent with clinical observations from Freud’s and Janet’s day forward—that speaking to another person regarding highly personal or emotional topics in a clinical or other professional setting is a unique and potentially profound experience. This given, the protocol is deliberately arranged to elicit structural variations in the ways that speakers organize and present their attachment-related history, together with an evaluation of its influence upon their present personality and functioning. Therefore, interviewers must skillfully ensure that the timing of their queries and the nature of their own discourse serves only to highlight, not to alter, the participant’s natural volition to respond in particular ways (as
seen earlier in Steele & Steele, Chapter 1, this volume). In this way, trained coders who later read the transcription are best able to arrive at a probabilistic estimate of "what happened" during the adult speaker's childhood. To this aim, the interview opens with a request for a brief overview of the persons with whom the participant lived, and whether he or she lived with persons other than the parents. In this case, the interviewer asks, "Who would you say raised you?" If persons other than biological or adoptive parents are named, then they are subsequently included in the central queries. The interviewer next asks for a general description of relationships to parents/parental figures in childhood:

"I'd like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents as a young child if you could; start from as far back as you can remember."

This question is unusual and can be difficult to answer, as is the next question, which unfolds in directions particularly likely to "surprise the unconscious" (George et al., 1985). This comprises a request for five adjectives, words, or phrases that best represent the relationship with each parent or parental figure (hereafter, parent). After adjectives have been provided, the speaker is probed for specific episodic memories (ideally, memories specific to time and place) that illustrate or support each descriptor choice. For example, the interviewer may say:

"You used caring as your first adjective for your relationship with your mother. I wonder whether you could give me some incidents or memories from your childhood that would tell me why you chose that adjective."

Once this process has been completed for the mother, it is then repeated for the father, and, when applicable, for anyone else the speaker named as having raised him or her. The interviewee is asked which parent he or she felt closer to, and why, then what he or she did when emotionally upset, physically hurt, or ill—times when we would expect the attachment system to be especially activated—and how the parents responded. Another important query refers to personal or family responses to separation experiences, a topic to which Bowlby (1973) devoted an entire volume. The interviewee is also asked about possible experiences of rejection, and any threats regarding discipline.

Other questions concern potentially traumatic experiences. Each major loss, whether it occurred in childhood or later, is extensively probed, such that speakers are asked to describe (1) how the death occurred, (2) their reactions to the loss at the time, (3) any funeral or memorial service attended, (4) changes in feelings regarding the loss over time, (5) what they see as effects upon their adult personality and functioning, and, finally, for parents (6) any effects the loss may have had on their behavior with their children. In the case of persons with multiple losses, interviewers restrict their queries to those that seem the most significant.

Losses are not the only potentially traumatic events probed. The interviewer also seeks a description of abuse (or any other overwhelmingly frightening experiences that may have occurred throughout the lifetime). In cases of abuse, the interviewer sensitively attempts to establish its extent and frequency. However, the guide to the protocol suggests that—except when the interview is administered by well-trained individuals with clinical skills—sexual and physical abuse should not be as extensively probed as loss. For some participants, this will be the first discussion of such experiences, and the interviewer's aim should be to leave the individual free from undue distress or regret on account of what he or she may have disclosed.

The speaker is then asked about the overall effects of the experiences with parents on his or her present personality; whether any experiences constituted a significant setback to development; and why he or she believes the parents behaved as they did. These latter questions in particular are useful in elucidating the individual's capacity for reflective functioning (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Moran, & Higgitt, 1991; see also Steele & Steele, Chapter 1, this volume), or ability to put him- or herself in the caregiver's place and to consider the thoughts and feelings that motivated the parent's behavior. An important question following upon the above (see Jacobvitz's Afterword, this volume) is whether there were any other adults to whom the speaker felt especially close, like parents, when he or she was a child.

Toward the close of the interview, speakers are asked about the nature of the current relationship with parents (if living). In addition, whether or not speakers have children, they are questioned as to how they feel (or imagine they would feel if they had a child) about being separated from their child at this time, and how experiences of being parented may have affected responses (or imagined responses) to their own child. Finally, speakers are invited to speculate regarding wishes for their real or imagined child 20 years from now. These questions offer insight into aspects of the individuals' representations of themselves as (real or prospective) parents. They are placed at the end of the interview to move toward a sense of closure in response to the earlier, often more penetrating questions focused on childhood experiences.

The AAI protocol, then, is designed and structured to bring into relief individual differences in deeply internalized strategies for regulating emotion and attention in response to the discussion of attachment. This is achieved despite the fact that although interview transcriptions have recorded the full verbatim exchange, they are nonetheless devoid of reference to body movement or facial expression or intonation, all of which, of course, can be observed in the clinical setting. The AAI coder is then free to look at (rather than behind or through; see Capps & Oakes, 1995) the speaker's language usage in response to each of the interview questions. Remarkably, on the basis of these лица
The Organized Categories of the AAI

Viewed in Terms of Attentional Flexibility

As the reader is now aware, the historical roots of the AAI scoring and classification system lie first in the match between the three central or organized forms of parental responses to the AAI interview queries (secure—autonomous, dismissing, or preoccupied), and the three central or organized forms of infant response to that parent in the Strange Situation (respectively, secure, avoidant, or preoccupied). The term organized originated in Main’s (1990) observation that infants in these original three Strange Situation categories differed with respect to the flexibility versus inflexibility of attention to (1) parent and (2) inanimate environment they exhibited during Ainsworth’s separation-and-reunion procedure. Attentional flexibility was ascribed to secure babies, in that they readily alternated between attachment and exploratory behavior across the episodes of the Strange Situation, exploring in the parent’s presence, and showing attachment behavior (e.g., crying, calling) in his or her absence and again immediately upon reunion (e.g., by seeking proximity and contact). Attentional inflexibility—attending almost exclusively either to the inanimate environment or to the parent—was seen in insecure-avoidant infants, who persistently focused away from the parent and on the toys, as well as in insecure-ambivalent/resistant infants, who focused persistently toward the parent and, typically, away from the toys.

As we would later realize (e.g., Main, 1993), the organized categories of the AAI can also be interpreted in terms of the attentional flexibility observed in secure—autonomous parents as they alternately present their attachment-related experiences and respond to the requirement to evaluate their influence (Hesse, 1996). In contrast, attentional inflexibility is seen (1) in dismissing responses to the AAI, in which the linguistic focus is persistently away from past attachment relationships and their influences, and (2) in preoccupied responses to the AAI, in which the focus is insistently, albeit confusedly, strongly oriented toward attachment relationships and experiences that it prevents appropriate responses to queries. Main (1993, 1995, 2000; Main, Hesse, & Kaplan, 2005) has proposed that inflexibility of attention is closely allied to “working” defensive processes. It should be noted, however, that insofar as inflexibilities of attention are stable across the AAI or the Strange Situation, they still—like flexible responses—remain relatively, and singularly, organized.

Before moving further into the analysis of the AAI, we turn to a brief review of the work of the linguistic philosopher H. P. Grice (1975, 1989). This introduction to Grice gives the reader a clearer understanding of our presentation of differing “organized” language usages within the AAI. It also facilitates an understanding of what is actually being assessed when coherence versus incoherence within a given text is under consideration.

Although the AAI interviewer presents the exact interview questions and their accompanying probes as faithfully as possible, there are in fact two people involved in this talk exchange. This means that this interview is in many ways far closer to being a conversation than a spoken autobiography. Thus, by focusing especially upon the interviewee, the AAI can be analyzed in terms of the degree to which his or her responses approximate those that meet the “Gricean” requirements for an ideally rational and cooperative conversation.

These requirements were put forward by Grice in terms of four maxims, or principles, to which, he suggested, any cooperative, coherent, and rational conversationalists will naturally “adhere” or follow. To the extent that these principles or maxims are “violated,” the conversation veers away from this ideal. Of course, in any conversation, one or both speakers may be inconsistent and untruthful, long-winded or rude, absent and confusing, unclear, and disorderly. To be classified as secure—autonomous within the AAI, however, coherent, cooperative, and rational discourse is normally maintained by interviewees. This holds true even when they are responding to queries about the most vital, and for some, the saddest, most frightening, and most confusing elements within their history. The four maxims follow.

1. Quality: “Be truthful, and have evidence for what you say.” This maxim is violated when, for example, a parent is described in highly positive general terms, but the specific biographical episodes that the interviewer calls for actively contradict (or simply fail to support) the interviewee’s adjectival choices. Such an interview can also be said to be internally inconsistent, and failures in internal consistency of the type just described appear most frequently in dismissing AAI texts.

2. Quantity: “Be succinct, yet complete.” This maxim calls for conversational turns of reasonable length (i.e., neither too short nor too long). By requiring speakers to be sufficiently “complete,” Grice is saying that excessively short answers are not normally acceptable. This occurs when, for example, “I don’t remember” and/or “I don’t know” becomes the response to several queries in sequence, and no effort to explain or express regret for this apparent lack of recall is undertaken. Excessively terse responses are often seen in dismissing texts.

Conversely, by requiring as well that responses—so long as they are complete—be sufficiently succinct, the maxim of (appropriate) quantity is also violated when a speaker takes excessively long conversational turns. Here, the interviewee may take the floor for several minutes, perhaps wandering off topic or else giving details that become increasingly unnecessary. This form of quantity violation is found in many preoccupied texts.

3. Relation: “Be relevant to the topic as presented.” Adherence to this maxim is necessary to every conversation. Otherwise, the speakers are...
engaged in solipsistic enterprises that not only fail to move ideas forward but also in fact do not require two persons. Thus, the maxim of relation is violated when queries regarding the childhood relationship with the speaker’s mother are met with discussions of current interactions with the mother, or with descriptions of the speaker’s relationship with his or her own children. Violations of relevance occur not infrequently in preoccupied texts and, indeed, may in themselves be indicative of a preoccupation that—once aroused by queries regarding attachment history—thereafter forbids a satisfactory exchange with the interlocutor.

4. Manner: “Be clear and orderly.” This maxim is violated when, for example, speech becomes grammatically entangled, psychological “jargon” is used, vague terms appear repeatedly, or the speaker fails to complete sentences that have been fully started. Violations of manner are particularly striking in preoccupied texts.

Having concluded this discussion of Grice’s conversational maxims:

1. We take our readers through several specific interview queries in a manner that permits them to “listen” to responses that typically would be associated with each of the three organized categories of the AAI. Here, we point out when specific maxims are being violated (or, in the case of secure-coherent speakers, when the speaker has adhered to specific maxims).
2. We then present the state-of-mind scales associated with each of the organized adult attachment categories. These provide an astonishing fit to Grice’s maxims, even though Main and Goldwyn devised each of the relevant scales several years before learning of his work (Main et al., 2005).
3. Finally, we review the strongly differing general features or content characteristics that Main and Goldwyn first identified as reflective of implicit or explicit attitudes toward attachment, and whose presence is carefully noted by coders. Here, too, additional illustrative examples are taken from AAI texts.

Exemplar Responses to Specific Interview Questions

Possibly the earliest point in the interview that calls for especially close attention to a speaker’s response is when he or she is addressed as follows (question 3):

“You described your childhood relationship with your mother [father] as loving. Can you think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate why you chose loving to describe the relationship?”

The range of possible answers is virtually infinite, yet even at this early point in an AAI, the response given already reveals information that can be approached with a view toward ultimate scoring and classification. It is likely that the speaker’s response bears deeply on the degree of his or her own self-awareness and, in some cases, whether or not the speaker is conscious of it, upon the motivation to convey a particular impression to the interviewer.

Consider as an example, then, the following, not at all uncommon, response to the interviewer’s probe calling for specific memories or incidents (in this case, to support loving):  

“Now I’d like you choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother, starting as far back as you can remember in early childhood—as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine. I know this may take a bit of time, so go ahead and think for a minute . . . then I’ll ask you why you chose them. I’ll write each one down as you give them to me.”
RESPONSE: I don’t remember... *(5-second pause)* Well, because she was kind, and generous. And supportive, she was also supportive. [Note that here the speaker is simply using similar words to describe previous words. In essence, rather than providing memories or incidents, the speaker is simply substituting one word for another.]

INTERVIEWER: Well, this can be difficult, because a lot of people haven’t thought about these things for a long time, but take a minute and see if you can think of an incident or example.

RESPONSE: *(10-second pause)* Well... *(5-second pause)* I guess like, well, you know, she was always giving things, giving things to the community, baking cakes, or volunteering her time for charitable causes... that sort of thing... That’s all I recall.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. And, I just wonder whether there might be another example?

RESPONSE: Just that... everyone saw how generous and loving she was... that’s all.

From this brief exchange, many tentative hypotheses can be made about the possible direction the interview will follow, and we can already see that the speaker is attempting to convey a positive impression of the mother. However, concerning the proposition that the speaker had a loving relationship with her during childhood, we have been given no real supporting evidence. Instead, the speaker has elected to discuss his or her estimate of the impression that may have been gained by the community as a whole. Perhaps convincingly loving interactions will be recalled later in the interview, but at this point, we can say that if the speaker continues along these lines (i.e., seeming to attempt to create a positive picture of childhood experiences with the mother, but in fact frequently blocking discourse yielding a paucity of support for the positive adjectives chosen), there is a good likelihood that the transcript as a whole will be classified as dismissing. Thus, dismissing speakers, as noted, violate Grice’s *quality-truthfulness* maxim in failing to provide evidence for what they have claimed.

Now let us consider a second speaker, who has also begun the description of his or her childhood relationship to the mother with *loving*.

RESPONSE: Ah... sure, well I, when I was really little and had nightmares she would come into my room and sit with me until I felt better, just talk to me until she pretty much took away my fears. And if I was sick, she was always right there, guess she coddled me a bit then if I played it up right.

INTERVIEWER: OK, well, I wonder if you remember a specific time or incident where you found her loving.

RESPONSE: That’s hard... Oh, I remember once I had been mean, no question, to another kid I was mad at in my school. I had said...

Although speech of the type exemplified here is uncommon, it gives an example of part of an AAI text that, if continued in this style, points to the passively preoccupied subclassification (subtype E1; see Chapter 1, this volume). Here we see a slight violation of expected manner when the speaker refers to her mother as “Mommy.” We also see more marked violations (i.e., elusive additions to already completed sentences [“and that”], nonsense speech [“dadadadadada”], and the mix-up of personal pronouns regarding whose room was whose [“her my”]).

But now let us look at speakers who have begun with a negative descriptor for the childhood relationship with the mother—in this case, *difficult*. The interviewer again will have set the stage as follows:

“Difficult. Are there any memories or incidents that come to mind with respect to difficult?”

Here is a response taken from a first speaker who, should responses continue as they do here, will not be classified as secure.

RESPONSE: Difficult. Well, things, cried, difficult. Fall apart at funerals.
The AAI IN CLINICAL CONTEXT

INTERVIEWER: OK, well, I wonder if you have any specific memory of times you found difficult?

RESPONSE: When she was weak, when she cried. Sobbed through our neighbor’s funeral. Embarrassing, couldn’t wait to get away from her. Next question?

This response is likely to have come from a dismissing speaker. However, this speaker dismisses attachment relationships not through an inability to focus on them in the personal way called for, as shown by the first (probably) dismissing speaker described, but rather by casting the parent aside and refusing discussion. Responses of this kind tend to come from interviewees who fall in the derogating subclassification of the dismissing AAI category (D2; see Steele & Steele, Chapter 1, this volume). Note that like the previous dismissing speaker who gave only brief responses and failed to support loving as an adjectival choice, this speaker also has little to say—or, in Greek terms, violates expected “quantity” for the conversation in being overly succinct.

Let us now consider a second speaker who has also selected difficult as her first adjective describing her childhood relationship with her mother:

“Difficult. Well, she was difficult, no question. I had three siblings and I’d say it’s likely that all of us found her difficult. She had a harsh voice most of the time, I remember that, and she also had a harsh hand. But like I said, my father left when I was 4, and she was the sole breadwinner, and she was trying hard to keep us on the straight and narrow. The time she spanked me the hardest was the day when she came home and I wasn’t there. I was over at our neighbor’s house. I think it scared her. So she was a difficult mother for me.”

This speaker is responding coherently, in that her entire discussion is relevant and sufficiently elaborated. In addition, she gives a specific example (“the time she spanked me the hardest”) within her discussion. There is no difficulty in following her reply; hence, there are no violations of manner.

Finally, here is a third speaker who has been asked to support difficult as the first adjective given for her relation with her mother in childhood:

“Uh, yeah. . . . Wait ’til your dad comes home. . . . There were some bad times with her, you know she called me up the other day and . . . like, what did I think of her new boyfriend? Like who needs this? But yeah, difficult, like when she does come over she can be impossible with her grandson, and I’m the only one who’s got her a grandchild. She should be grateful.”

This speaker has gone immediately off topic, hence violating the maxim of relevance. She is talking about the present relationship.

Of course, was to describe the difficult aspect of her childhood relationship with her mother. There are also some violations of manner. Thus, she slips into the parent’s voice in her opening by suddenly stating, “Wait ’til your dad gets home.” This is indicative of preoccupation generally, because the speaker appears to be addressing herself in the parent’s voice rather than talking to the interviewer in the present. In addition, in that the passage as a whole indicates a lack of monitoring of the discourse context, from a Greek point of view this speaker is not cooperative.

These initial examples are relatively “prototypical” for insecure-dismissing, secure-autonomous, and insecure-preoccupied transcripts, and are, of course, far too brief for interview classification. They do, however, demonstrate distinctly different forms of discourse response to the same interview question that—if predominating in type across the text as a whole—would lead to placement in different AAI categories. We now continue through different responses to several other interview questions.

Question 10 focuses on the speaker’s view of the overall effects that experiences with the parents may have had on his or her personality, and includes a follow-up probe regarding possible setbacks to development. At this point in the AAI, to answer the question in a way that “fits properly” with the earlier description of life history presented thus far, the speaker must be able to recall and evaluate what he or she said and provide an answer that is consonant with that presentation.

In short, question 10 asks that the interviewee engage in integrated thinking or mentalizing, a component of the Reflective Functioning Scale for the AAI (Fonagy et al., 1991; Steele & Steele, Chapter 1, this volume). The Reflective Functioning Scale also places special emphasis on still another question near interview midpoint:

“Why do you think your parents behaved as they did during your childhood?”

With respect to this question, speakers across all the major AAI categories may discuss their parents’ parents (their grandparents), and the ways their parents may have been influenced by them in growing up. However, some secure-autonomous speakers’ responses are impressively complex. Other secure-autonomous speakers’ responses can, of course, be more mundane, but they seldom give “automatic” or simplistic answers to this query, and may leave room for error in their reconstruction. For example, an especially thoughtful secure-autonomous speaker might reply as follows:

“I know a lot was going on for my parents when we were little, just problems with my dad’s job, and my mother always finding herself in new places and having to make new friends, and everything else that goes with constant moving around. And I think maybe my mother’s mother
This speaker seems to be thinking through how to answer the question in the moment, evidencing the "freshness" of speech that is characteristic of secure-autonomous speakers. In contrast, speakers whose transcripts will be judged dismissing or preoccupied are more likely to give "rote" answers. A dismissing speaker might simply say, "Because they were just normal parents behaving like everybody in the neighborhood, just like their own parents did, doing what was right." Another example of a different kind of "rote" answer seen in some preoccupied speakers is overly psychological, such as "Because of the way they were treated by their parents, definitely, they carried that baggage their parents handed down, and that's why they handed it down to me too."

As Steele and Steele have already indicated (Chapter 1, this volume), secure-autonomous speakers seem to be able to stay in the present, not only in response to queries that directly call for current evaluations but also across the interview as a whole. We therefore consider a question that comes near the close of the interview and sometimes raises issues involving anger. But, as we have emphasized throughout this chapter, it is the form rather than the content of speech that provides the interview analyst with an index of the speaker's current state of mind with respect to attachment. This time, let us imagine we are speaking to late adolescents, perhaps just at the ending of college (Question 16):

"Now I'd like to ask you, what is your relationship with your parents [or remaining parent in cases of loss] like for you now as an adult? Here I'm asking about your current relationship."

A first response then—this one taken from a secure-autonomous speaker—might be as follows:

"I'd have to say it hasn't changed much since I was a child, and all the things I've been telling you are pretty much the same. My relationship with my mother is still pretty good, and she sends me regular care packages to college, and I'm probably still a little too dependent on her, 'cause I call her pretty often, especially if I've had a bad day at school. And my relationship with my father, it's still strained, and he's still distant. We... still can't think what to say to each other... and I still get more angry with him than I should at times: I'll probably be over it by next week, and things were fine last week, but we had a blow up just now over Thanksgiving break, and I yelled and stormed out of the room. So, basically no change—and me already way past childhood!"

This speaker is certainly sufficiently coherent, but we can also see some aspects of the "attitudes toward attachment" (discussed below) that typify secure speakers, including acceptance of imperfections in the self—and implicitly, in others. Note as well that the speaker remains simply descriptive of an argument and butt of angry behavior toward her father. She does not become

Among dismissing young speakers, we often see answers of the following kind.

"Current relationship. Well, I think it's gotten even better now that I'm older. They respect me more now that I'm in college, and they leave me alone more, and there's not so much interference from my mother. I had had a tendency to blame my dad sometimes for not paying attention to me when I was 14, 15, but now I know he was just trying to help me grow up. So, it's fine right now."

In this portion of his interview, this dismissing speaker is being clear in manner and is not notably violating coherence, quantity, or relevance. On the other hand, he appears to view his father's neglect and his parents' tendency to leave him alone as ultimately desirable, because it has fostered his independence. However, this kind of response also shows the sadness that may underlie dismissing mental states and has sometimes been associated with depression (Ivarsson, Chapter 9, this volume).

Finally, we turn to an answer that might be found in a young insecure-preoccupied speaker, this time one who is passively preoccupied (E1). Again, of course, the interviewer has called for a description of the current relationship with parents.

"Uh, not so easy, not easy at all. Saw 'em just last week. My grades were really hard on them; they weren't good grades and that hurt them again. Good people, but there's still that lack of fit. Fit, yeah, something about my temperament just isn't right for my mother, never has been, and my grades just, uh, uh."

This passage is not especially incoherent. But a trained coder would nonetheless be alert to consider preoccupation, and especially the passive subclass of preoccupation because of the violation of manner (the speech is not fully clear and orderly) and the presence of attitudinal features (described in a forthcoming section) indicative of passive preoccupation, evidenced by strong and unbalanced self-blame accompanied by an apparently unexamined sense of having failed to please the parents. As in the dismissing discussion of current relationships given previously, the speaker's sadness is also implicitly evident.

Analyzing AAI Texts for Placement in the "Organized" Classifications

Every AAI text is assigned to one of the three organized classifications (secure, dismissing, or preoccupied), whether it is primarily either of the unresolved/disorganized or cannot classify categories that were briefly de-
the three readings or steps taken by AAI coders as they set out to determine a text’s best-fitting organized category placement. The process begins with the use of two sets of 9-point rating scales. Starting with the first of these, the coder attempts to ascertain (1) the speaker’s probable childhood experiences with each parent. A second set of scales (2) is then applied to assess the speaker’s current state of mind with respect to attachment-related experiences, as revealed in the specifics of particular conversational/discourse usages. Once these state-of-mind scale scores are assigned to the interview text, the transcript is studied a third time (3) using features representative of the speaker’s explicit or implicit attitudes toward attachment (Main et al., 2003).

First Reading: Examining a Speaker’s Inferred Experiences with Parental Figures

In the first review of an interview text, the coder assigns ratings to each parent on five 9-point scales. Here 9 is a high rating, and 1 indicates that the transcript is sufficiently elaborated to allow the coder to infer that this experience was not present. (Where information is simply unavailable, rather than attempting a score, the coder records “n.i.” for no information.) These include four scales for negative parental behavior (rejecting, neglecting, role-inverting, and pressuring to achieve) and a summary “loving” scale. Experience scores are assigned via the coder’s own assessment of probable experiences, rather than what the interviewee states directly.

Each scale is introduced with exemplars of “what qualifies” as, for example, loving parental behavior, and qualifications for scores of 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 are spelled out. Coders are urged to use the extremes of the scales as well as the middle ranges. With respect to “loving” parental behavior, for example, a rating of 9 (Very loving) can be assigned in the face of occasional untoward behavior. Similarly, a parent who provides for a child’s physical well-being, academic, and material success, without any indications of personal attention or emotional availability, is rated a 1 (Absence of loving behavior). In this first experience-oriented pass through the text, coders record any significant losses, as well as abuse or other frightening events. A record is also made of moves from the original home, divorce, and the presence of any stepparents.

The eventual assignment of a transcript to an overall “organized” state of mind classification has no direct or consistent link to a speaker’s probable experiences, except perhaps that when high loving scores are assigned to both parents, the overall classification most often is secure–autonomous. At the same time, low loving scores for both parents do not dictate an insecure classification, because placement in the secure–autonomous category is based exclusively on the overall coherence of the text. Because coherence can change, whereas life-history cannot, this latter point is no doubt of special import to all those involved in intervention.

Second Reading: Assigning Ratings on the “State-of-Mind” Interview Scales

Once the coder has assigned scores for probable experiences with each parent during childhood, he or she assigns scores on the several 9-point scales for language usage as it pertains to states of mind with respect to attachment. As we show below, when scores on particular state-of-mind scales are especially high, the coder is further directed to place the interview text in a particular, associated organized category. Before describing these scales and providing illustrations of the way they are utilized, we pause to consider them in terms of Grice’s maxims (1975, 1989). This discussion clarifies how and why the state-of-mind scales are critical to determining AAI category placement. Whereas speakers who adhere to Grice’s maxims for cooperative discourse are identified as secure, difficulties with particular maxims identify the two “organized” forms of insecurity:

1. Dismissing speakers largely violate Grice’s maxim of quality (“Be truthful, and have evidence for what you say”), especially via high scores for idealization of the parent(s). Many dismissing speakers are also overly succinct, thus violating quantity. Excessive brevity is seen when the speaker implies that a given attachment figure is beneath discussion, via curt, contemptuous remarks, and receives high scores on the scale identifying derogation. Cutting short the conversational exchange can also occur via the use of statements such as an unelaborated “I don’t remember,” which is scored on the scale for insistence on lack of memory for childhood.

2. Preoccupied speakers, unlike dismissing speakers, usually adhere to the maxim of quality insofar as the coder is likely to agree if the speaker asserts that childhood experiences have been challenging. Where preoccupied speakers drift from and violate Grice’s maxims is in terms of relevance (straying from the topic), quantity (going on at unnecessary length), and manner (showing peculiar, confusing, and noncollaborative speech). Violations pointing to the preoccupied classification are scored on the continuous scales identifying passivity or vagueness of discourse (violating manner) and involved/involved anger (often simultaneously violating relevance, quantity, and manner).

Scales Associated with the Dismissing Adult Attachment Category

Three scales are normally associated with the dismissing adult attachment classification. Scores above a 5 on either idealization of an attachment figure or contemptuous derogation require that the text be assigned to the dismissing category. Insistence on lack of memory for childhood is also associated with this category and, as noted, often occurs in conjunction with idealization (and sometimes with derogation).
Idealization of a Primary Attachment Figure. This scale assesses the discrepancy between the overall view of the parent taken from the subject's speech at the abstract or semantic level, and the interviewer's inferences regarding the probable behavior of the parent. Because the speaker's actual history is, of course, unknown, any discrepancies come from within the transcript itself. For the higher ratings, there is a marked lack of unity between estimates of the speaker's probable experience with the primary attachment figure(s) and his or her positive to highly positive generalized or "semantic" descriptions. Thus, despite low scores assigned to a particular parent for loving behavior during childhood, the portrait presented is consistently positive. Additionally, gratuitous praise of the parents may be offered (e.g., references to "wonderful" or "excellent" parents).

As an illustration, we quote from one transcript wherein the adolescent speaker used only positive adjectives to describe his relationship with his mother. Later he would reveal that she nevertheless had both repeatedly threatened him and placed him in foster care in his early teens. At the outset of the interview, however, one of his adjectives for his mother had been outstanding.

INTERVIEWER: What about outstanding? You used that word to describe your relationship with your mother.

RESPONSE: Um, my mother is an outstanding person. She knows what is going on inside my head and she can understand me better than anyone else in the world and she just, oh, how can I describe it? She has always been there for me and I do find that outstanding.

As noted elsewhere in the transcript, this young person had referred to repeated threats to place him in care, and an actual placement in care. Nonetheless he responded as follows to the question regarding rejection:

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel pushed away or ignored by your parents?

RESPONSE: No, never.

INTERVIEWER: Your mom and dad?

RESPONSE: No, they have always been there. They've never pushed me away. They have never ignored me. They have always had to listen to what I've got to say. They have always seen what I've done and yeah, no.

The strong discrepancy between what he described his parents as having done (i.e., given him away to others) and his saying they had "always been there" and "never pushed me away" led to a high idealization score for this speaker.

Insistence on Lack of Memory for Childhood. This scale assesses the speaker's insistence upon her inability to recall her childhood.

An Introduction to the AAI she uses this to block further queries or discourse. The scale focuses on the subject's direct references to lack of memory. High ratings are given to speakers whose first response to numerous interview queries is "I don't remember," especially when this reply is repeated or remains firmly unelaborated.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like you to try to describe your relationship with your parents as a young child ... if you could start from as far back as you can remember?

RESPONSE: I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it can be hard. Just, well, why don't you just take a minute to think.

RESPONSE: I don't remember that far back. Just normal.

INTERVIEWER: Does anything come to mind?

RESPONSE: No.

Active, Derogating Dismissal of Attachment-Related Experiences and/or Relationships. This scale deals with the cool, contemptuous dismissal of attachment relationships or experiences and their import, in which the speaker gives the impression that attention to attachment-related experiences (e.g., a friend's loss of a parent) or that one or more parental figures are foolish, laughable, or not worth the time. As an example, an adopted teenager, who had experienced disrupted attachments and was currently being seen for significant attachment difficulties, used derogating statements throughout the interview to describe her difficult relationship with her mother.

INTERVIEWER: What would be another word or phrase to describe your relationship with your mother?

RESPONSE: Well, from 6 onwards I just thought she was a total cow and I hated her.

Asked later to about the nature of her current relationship with her mother, she replied as follows:

RESPONSE: Um ... the same for ages, um, not talking to her, um ... still hate her.

INTERVIEWER: You still hate her.

RESPONSE: The same as it has been for god knows how many years.

INTERVIEWER: So it has not changed a whole lot?

RESPONSE: No.

INTERVIEWER: What thing satisfies you most about your relationship with your mother?
Scales Associated with the Preoccupied Adult Attachment Category

High scores on either of the following state-of-mind scales—involving anger and passivity of discourse—lead to placement in the preoccupied category.

**Involved/Invoking Anger Expressed toward the Primary Attachment Figure(s).** Accurate ratings on this scale depend on close attention to a particular form of discourse that can take when anger toward a particular attachment figure is implied or expressed. Importantly, direct descriptions of angry episodes involving past behavior (“I got so angry I picked her favorite magazine and threw it at her”) or direct descriptions of current feelings of anger (“I’ll try to discuss my current relationship with my mother, but I should let you know I’m really angry at her right now”) would receive a rating of 1 on this scale. In contrast, high ratings are assigned to speech that includes, for example, run-on, grammatically entangled sentences describing situations involving the offending parent; subtle efforts to enlist interviewer agreement; unlicensed, extensive discussion of surprisingly small recent parental offenses; extensive use of psychological jargon (e.g. “My mother had a lot of material around that issue”); angrily addressing the parent as though he or she were present; and, in an angry context, slipping into unmarked quotations from the parent. Thus, when asked about his current relationship with his parents, one man responded with significantly angry preoccupied discourse that wandered from the topic. Below, he is asked to elaborate on why his current relationship with his father makes him sad.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what’s the part with your dad that is the most disappointing for you, that makes you sad?

**RESPONSE:** When he smokes and drinks, I don’t like it when he does that, well it is up to him what he does with his health but you know, I just think if he wants to waste his life away then he is doing that perfectly isn’t he, that is just my opinion you know, his is probably “I like a few drinks and you know I can’t help smoking because I’ve got addicted” and it’s like well “You can always get someone to help you because you have done it before and you could always cut back on the amount of beer that you have every night or whatever” you know, so but he don’t, he don’t drink too much but he does drink a bit it’s like the fridge is just clogged with alcohol it just like get the alcohol away it’s like if you want to drink something just go and open a bottle of wine and I will be happy to drink that because beer is awful [Goldwyn, 2005].

Passivity or Vagueness in Discourse. High scores are assigned when, in many places within the transcript, the speaker seems unable to find words, seize on a meaning, or focus on a topic. Vague expressions or even nonsense words may be used, or a vague ending may be added to an already completed sentence (“I sat on his lap, and that”). Discourse is also considered vague/passive with respect to intrusions from irrelevant topics or slips into pronoun confusion between the self and the parent. In addition, as though absorbed into early childhood states or memories, the interviewee may inadvertently speak as a very young child (“I runned very fast”) or describe experiences as they are described to a young child (“My mother washed my little feet”). Vague discourse should not be confused with restarts, hesitations, or dysfluency. The following passage would be assigned a high score for passivity:

**INTERVIEWER:** Could you tell me a little bit more about why you used the word close to describe the relationship?

**RESPONSE:** Well my mom, you know like she kind of shaded me in her. And I remember mornings I runned to be with her uh walking the . . . well the dog had a leash and I guess she had to go fast ‘cause the dog was pulling on her, leash was like this big long leather thing I don’t know whether you can still get those I haven’t seen one long like that since I was little but a lot’s changed since then, you know even when you think about like just going downtown and you look at the storefronts and things and the way the signs are and the lights and this and that and the other it’s like a different world now (continues . . .).

Scales Associated with the Secure–Autonomous Adult Attachment Category

**Coherence of Transcript.** For high ratings, the speaker exhibits a steady and developing flow of ideas regarding attachment. The person may be reflective and slow to speak, with some pauses and hesitations, or speak quickly with a rapid flow of ideas. Overall, however, the person seems at ease with the topic, and discussions often have a quality of freshness. Although verbatim transcripts never look like written narratives, there are few significant violations of Grice’s maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The reader has the impression that, on the whole, this text provides a “singular” as opposed to a “multiple” model of the speaker’s experiences and their effects (as discussed by Main, 1991).

We supplied some examples of speech indicative of coherence in a secure–autonomous speaker’s well-elaborated (hence, internally consistent) support for the term loving (pp. 41–42), and also when we referenced another speaker’s care in venturing to describe why his or her parents may have behaved as they did (p. 45).

Although Grice’s maxims are not notably violated by secure speakers (i.e., there is an absence of substantial indices of coherence violations), Main and colleagues’ (2003) scoring system for the AAI in fact also includes positive indices of coherence that were not specifically described by Grice. Some of these add to the integrated nature of the text as a whole, such as when a
speaker forewarns something the interviewer may want to ask about at a later time:

“Well, in my childhood, my relationship with my parents was pretty good, like I guess I'll be saying, but when I was about 15, which I guess is you're calling out of childhood, it changed. Actually. And you may want to ask me more about that later.”

Or the alert interviewee may not only struggle actively to answer a difficult question but also refuse to allow a tired or inattentive interviewer to (very incorrectly; see George et al., 1996) “put words in his mouth,” as in the following example:

RESPONSE: This last adjective is a hard one, um, something good, like glad, um, I know what I'm thinking but I just can't...I can't get it yet, wait, I...

INTERVIEWER: (breaking in) Loving?

RESPONSE: No. Not loving. It wasn't really a loving relationship, it's just there were times when we were um, well, happy with each other. Put down happy at times.

Metacognitive Monitoring or “Thinking about Thinking in the Moment” (Full Scale Development Still in Progress). For high ratings on this scale, evidence of active monitoring of thinking and recall is evident in several places within the interview. Thus, the speaker may comment on logical or factual contradictions in the account of his or her history, possible erroneous biases, and/or the fallibility of personal memory. Underlying metacognitive monitoring (Fugson & Gopnik, 1988) is active recognition and acceptance of an appearance-reality distinction (the speaker acknowledges that experiences may not have occurred as they are being presented), representational diversity (the speaker remarks that a sibling does not share his or her view of the father), and representational change (the speaker remarks that what is said today might not have been said yesterday). Here are some examples:

“That's how I see it at least. But come to think of it, my father might see our childhood relationship entirely differently. It's been a while since we saw each other.”

“Rejected? No, I didn't feel rejected. No. Well...I say 'no' but, um, maybe I'm just not admitting it [7-second pause]. OK, if I look back on it, back then I—I guess I did feel rejected.”

Coherence of Mind. Ratings on this scale are assigned only after scores for all other state-of-mind scales have been undertaken. As an example, a speaker who stumbles sufficiently to be unclear in places, and whose transcript includes many dysfluencies and restarted sentences—yet whose underlying thinking is nonetheless readily comprehensible when carefully read—may receive a higher score on coherence of mind than on coherence of transcript. In a second, contrasting example, a speaker who is generally coherent and fits to the secure-autonomous classification may also be unresolved/disorganized (e.g., having elevated scores for lapses in reasoning regarding dead-not-dead status of a loved one, see below). Although the unresolved/disorganized status may have been derived from just a few sentences, it is clear that the global coherence of this speaker's "mind" is lower than the linguistic coherence seen in the transcript as a whole.

Once a transcript has been assigned scores on each of the aforementioned scales, the coder consults a table within the AAI manual (Main et al., 2003) that ordianarily allows the coder to turn any particular configuration of scores into a best-fitting classification. Thus, if scores for idealization of one or both parents are high, as are scores for insistence on lack of memory, the dismissing classification is assigned. This process of moving from individual scale scores to the various configurations of scores that point to placement in one of the three organized categories is informally termed the bottom-up approach to AAI classification.

Third Reading: Classifying AAI Texts via Apparent Attitudes toward Attachment (a “Feature Analysis”)

In this final step in identifying an organized category, coders determine the applicability of all features associated with each major classification (and later, subclassification; see Steele & Steele, Chapter 1, this volume) to the transcript at hand. These features are delineated in a section of the scoring and classification manual designed exclusively for this purpose. In completing their work with this aspect of the transcript, coders indicate whether each feature is present to a strong, moderate, or weak degree.

Here, we elaborate upon some of the features that point to particular AAI classifications. In the analysis actually undertaken, some of the features listed in the manual guidelines are required for classification placement, whereas others are simply noted as frequent correlates. Features leading to a particular categorical/classificatory placement are informally termed the top-down approach to text analysis, and should dovetail with the classification derived from the bottom-up configurations produced by the state-of-mind scales.

Insofar as is possible, this final step is undertaken independently of consideration of the continuous scale scores. This makes a cross-check available: If the bottom-up (scales) and top-down (overall features) analyses do not point to the same classification, then the interview transcript is rechecked. Provided that the coder still considers his or her discordant judgments accurate following this rechecking, then the interview transcript is placed in the "cannot classify" category (below).
Attitudes toward Attachment Leading to Secure–Autonomous Category Placement

As always, the reader should remember that for parents, the AAI classifications are predictive of the quality of their infant’s attachment to them. Hence, in pointing to features identified with each of the three AAI classifications, we are essentially highlighting attitudes toward attachment that predominate in persons who raise infants falling in particular organized attachment categories. Due to space limitations, we outline only some of the most striking and distinguishing features associated with each organized category.

The following features would point to a secure–autonomous category placement:

- Whether openly or subtly, the speaker indicates the capacity for missing, needing, and depending on others. At places in the interview, the speaker states that attachment-related experiences have affected his or her development or functioning.

  Statements applicable to these features could include:

  “And I really missed her, more than I even expected. I was so happy to see her, and actually, when we’ve been apart awhile, I still feel that way now.”

  “I guess one setback was the way I took my mother’s criticism to heart. I think it made me a little paranoid and I try too hard to be ‘perfect’ even now.”

- The interviewee seems open and “free to explore” the attachment-related interview topic, treating the recounting and evaluation of his or her life history with respect to attachment as neither “closed” nor “foreign.” The speaker can flexibly change his or her view of person or event, even while interview is in progress, suggesting autonomy and ultimate objectivity.

  A statement fitting to these headings could include:

  “OK, well I guess I’d have to say closer to my father than my mother. I know I said I saw a lot more of my mother and that’s true, but the way I felt—inside, I guess, I did, I felt closer to my father. That’s not how I ever saw myself up to now, but with all the things we’ve been discussing.”

- A sense of balance, proportion, or humor.

  “OK, my dad was flawed, I was flawed, we’ve discussed it backwards and forwards. Sometimes he flagellates himself over his inadequacies, but then just when I’m feeling pretty righteous he rears up again and flagellates me over mine. Sometimes we end up laughing. I guess neither of us is quite housebroken.”

- Seems at ease with imperfections in the self. Relatedly, there is explicit or implicit forgiveness of/compassion for/acceptance of parents’ failings.

  “I try to call my parents a lot and I should, I really should, but my wife and kids and my work—well, I attend to them and sometimes that means I put my parents second, even though they’re getting old now. I do try to look in on them more often now. They’re still very difficult people, I guess, but it’s going to stay, that hasn’t changed.”

- Ruefully cites untoward flawed behavior of self appearing at times despite conscious intentions or efforts.

  “When I’m with [child] I try hard not to be like my mom was with me, and most of the time I guess I succeed most days. But sometimes I do just act like her. I feel so bad but I do. I hear her raging, screaming voice in my mind. But I try to catch myself, and when I do, I apologize.”

Attitudes toward Attachment Leading to Placement in the Dismissing Category

- Self is described positively as being strong, independent, or normal, with little or no articulation of hurt, distress, or feelings of needing or depending on others. The speaker minimizes or downplays descriptions of negative experiences, and may interpret such experiences positively, in that they have made the self stronger.

  “My parents raised me strictly. They used the belt on me when I needed it, didn’t with my little brother. I’m, a lot stronger than he is because of it. I handle stress at work a lot better than he does, and I’m more independent, I’ve noticed.”

- Responses are abstract, and seem remote from present or remembered feelings, or memories, and the topic of the interview seems foreign. Often, for example, the speaker may emphasize fun or activities with parents, or presents and other material objects when asked about relationships.

  “My relationship with my parents in childhood. Um, lots of toys, lots of fun things, piles of toys at Christmas, pretty much spoiled me with toys I’d have to say. So . . . I’d say, both of them, really great parents.”

- Identifies with negative aspects of the parent’s behavior.

  “They didn’t go visit my sister at boarding school because we knew she didn’t need it. She was 8 that year, like I was when I left for boarding school. Time for her to learn like I did.”
Attitudes toward Attachment Leading to Placement in the Preoccupied Category

- The topic of the interview is addressed, but it seems inflexible and closed. Interview responses may seem memorized.

  "Yeah, from my early life with my parents, I've realized they were totally dysfunctional, and why they were. I could tell you all about that."

- Responses to the interview are persistently tied to experiences with the parents, even when these experiences are not the topic of inquiry.

  "What would I hope for my child's future? To begin with, not to turn out to be the kind of parent my parents were."

- The speaker may attempt to involve the interviewer in agreement regarding the parent's faults.

  "She was impossible, just selfish and impossible. You know the type I mean, right?"

- The speaker may oscillate repeatedly and indecisively in evaluations of parents, sometimes within the same sentence.

  "Great mother—well, not really. Mothering wasn't her area. No, I mean actually, really grateful to her, except when she . . . ."

- Unbalanced, excessive blaming of either the parents or the self.

  "My mother had a hard time with me when I was little. I had a hard temperament to deal with. Guess I was too much for her . . . ."

The Cannot Classify and Unresolved/Disorganized AAI Categories: Global and Local Breakdowns in Discourse Strategy

As noted in our introduction to this chapter, the cannot classify and unresolved/disorganized categories had not been discovered when the AAI scoring and classification system was first developed. This was probably due to their subtlety and complexity, which left them unrecognized until the three organized categories were well understood. As is often true, "exceptions to the rule" only become apparent after much basic experience with a particular phenomenon has been obtained.

As soon as these two categories began to appear within AAI manuals in the late 1980s, they were found to be especially prevalent among persons in severe psychological difficulty—for example, patients diagnosed with borderline, dissociative, and obsessive-compulsive disorders, as well as psychologically distressed forensic populations (for overviews, see van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996; Chapter 3, this volume). Thus, an understanding of these two latter AAI categories is inevitably of special relevance to clinicians.

We first discuss the cannot classify category, which represents contradictions and anomalies usually seen throughout the transcript. The unresolved/disorganized category differs from the cannot classify category in that it is identified via brief or "local" disruptions in discourse during the discussion of loss or other potential trauma.

The Cannot Classify (Unorganized) Interview Category

The cannot classify category emerged in the early 1990s as expert judges began noting a small percentage of transcripts that failed to meet criteria for placement in one of the three central or organized attachment categories. This was first observed in transcripts where, for example, an unsupported positive description of one of the parents led to a relatively high idealization score, yet in direct contradiction to the expected accompanying global patterning, this same parent was later discussed in an angrily preoccupied manner. Thus, although a high score for idealization would have called for placement in the dismissing category, at the same time speech indicative of preoccupation was also evident at high levels in other places. It was therefore concluded (see Hesse, 1996) that these transcripts were unclassifiable and should be placed in a separate group.

To illustrate an AAI transcript designated as cannot classify, we use extracts from a text originally presented by Hesse (1996). In part of his interview the speaker, Mr. K, indicated that he had suffered neglect, rejection, and physical abuse from his parents, and that he still had a scar "from one of the beatings." Nonetheless, at the opening of the interview he had described his relationship with his parents as "pretty good . . . everything was fine . . . I didn't have any problems." He used the following five descriptors for his relationship with his mother: placid, friendly, uninvolved, easy, and tensionless. Mr. K said that these five adjectives would describe his relationship with his father as well. This degree of "semantic-episodic" discrepancy (see p. 50), of course, led to very high scores for idealization, and fit the dismissing AAI category.

However, in a strong departure from the dismissing stance just described, this interview also contained substantial lapses into angrily preoccupied speech that led to a high score for involved/involving anger. Hence, placement in the preoccupied category was warranted as well. The following examples are excerpts from three consecutive pages of preoccupied speech within Mr. K's AAI:

  "But my father got off easy, since he wasn't the religious fanatic and he
... and it was reinforced constantly as I was growing up that my mother had a very warped view of sex, and she thought it was dirty and nasty and evil and horrible, and, you know, disgusting. . . . But see whenever she told us anything it was just really stupid things and so, like . . . and . . . I would try and make her feel better and then she would kind of get hysterical on me saying that I should be like this when obviously I was trying to make her feel better, and I did not want to be told how I should be like and how I should live the way she wanted me to live, and have the same attitudes."

As the reader can see, this approach to the interview task reveals two incompatible strategies for the organization of information relevant to attachment that lead to scores forcing placement in two opposing insecure categories; therefore, it is assigned to the cannot classify category.

A second type of unclassifiable transcript was identified in the same year (Minde & Hesse, 1996), when Hesse was asked to analyze an AAI text without knowing that the speaker was a woman being seen in therapy. The patient, Mrs. A, had been noted by her therapist to be unusual in several ways (e.g., in demanding successfully to have her infant removed from her body at fetal age 8 months, and—immediately following birth, when her infant was necessarily placed in intensive care—in visiting continually and demanding to breast-feed against the requests of the nurses).

It was concluded that the interview text of Mrs. A—like that of Mr. K—should also be considered unclassifiable, in this case due to overall low coherence of transcript in the absence of elevated insecure state-of-mind scores. Therefore, Mrs. A’s AAI was described as presenting a second type of unclassifiable or cannot classify text. Interestingly, however, despite the lack of observable contradictory strategies within the text, Mrs. A’s therapist observed that long after the postnatal period, her caregiving behavior still alternated startlingly between minimizing/dismissing and maximizing/preoccupied behavior.

Although emerging within journal articles as early as 1996, this second subtype of the cannot classify category has only recently been added to the AAI scoring and classification manual and—given the articulation of new guidelines (Main et al., 2003)—used by advanced coders (e.g., Ivarsson, Chapter 9, this volume). The reason for this delay had been the far greater difficulty involved in learning how to recognize texts of this latter kind, and it is still recommended that only highly practiced coders attempt this type of cannot classify identification.

However, it does appear that “low coherence” transcripts of this newer kind, like those displaying “contradictory strategies,” do predict disorganized and unclassifiable offspring responses (Behrens, Hesse, & Main, 2007). Other AAI researchers have also found convincing and intriguing reasons why certain texts do not fit to the earlier “contradictory strategies” approach to identifying unclassifiability. These have included, for example, apparent complete absence of attachment representations in a Holocaust survivor (Koren-Karita, Sagi-Schwartz, & Joels, 2003), and self-derogation (for which there is as yet no scale) seen in forensic populations (Turton et al., 2001). It is not known yet whether these same texts will also fit to the “low coherence” formulations of the newer manuals.

The Unresolved/Disorganized Attachment Category

Main and Goldwyn had noted as early as 1984 that the parents of disorganized/disoriented infants often spoke in unusual ways regarding loss experiences. Thus, these speakers seemed “unresolved,” but the particulars of how and why were as yet difficult to specify or articulate. Over time, however, it would become increasingly clear that what the parents of disorganized infants exhibited could be termed lapses in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse during discussions of loss or other potentially traumatic experiences. These discourse—reasoning lapses suggested temporary alterations in consciousness, and are now believed to represent either interference from normally dissociated memory or belief systems, or unusual absorptions involving memories triggered by the discussion of traumatic events (Hesse & Main, 2006).

Lapses in the monitoring of reasoning are manifested in statements that appear to violate our usual understanding of physical causality or time-space relations. Marked examples of reasoning lapses are seen when speakers make statements indicating that a deceased person is believed to be simultaneously dead and not dead in the physical sense, for example:

“It was almost better when she died, because then she could get on with being dead and I could get on with raising my family.”

This statement implies a belief, operative at least in that moment, that the deceased remains alive in the physical sense (albeit perhaps in a parallel world). Statements of this kind may indicate the existence of incompatible belief and memory systems that, normally dissociated or segregated from one another, have intruded into consciousness simultaneously as a result of the interviewer’s questions. Another example of a lapse in reasoning would include a statement such as the following:

“I’m still afraid he died that night because I forgot to think about him. I promised to think about him and I did, but that night I went out, and so he died.”

Lapses in the monitoring of discourse, in contrast, sometimes suggest that the topic has triggered a “state shift” indicative of considerable absorption, that frequently appears to involve entrance into peculiar, compartmentalized, or even partially dissociated/segregated states of mind (Hesse & Main, 2006). Thus, for example, an abrupt alteration or shift in speech register inappropriate for the current topic can suggest that the speaker is suddenly swept up in a state of intense absorption or distraction.
between unresolved/disorganized and cannot classify parental status, and the
exhibition of such behaviors in the presence of the offspring. Like lapses in the
monitoring of speech or reasoning seen within AAI texts, such behaviors may
result from the effects of fear upon the maintenance of normal consciousness.
Thus, for unresolved and cannot classify parents, fear may intrude upon interac-
tions with the infant in the form of (often inadvertently) frightening behaviors
(Abrams, Rifkin, & Hesse, 2006; Jacobvitz, Leon, & Hazen, 2006), leading to
disorganization and disorientation in the infant under stress.

Conclusion

The AAI is a semistructured protocol that focuses on an individual's descrip-
tion and evaluation of salient early attachment experiences, and the ways
these experiences are perceived to have affected current personality and func-
tioning. The verbatim interview text is analyzed via an accompanying scoring
and classification system, which serves to identify five differing “states of
mind with respect to attachment,” each corresponding to a particular cate-
gory of offspring Strange Situation response to the speaker. The continuous
scales that assist in identifying classificatory status were found some years fol-
lowing their development to have a striking conceptual fit to those aspects of
the work of H.P. Grice, which pertained to the ideal of cooperative, rational
discourse. Perhaps the most critical finding regarding Grice’s approach to the
analysis of language as adapted for use with the AAI is that the parents of
insecure infants seldom appear able to discuss their own attachment-related
experiences without significantly violating one or more of Grice’s conversa-
tional maxims. In contrast, the maintenance of coherence and collaboration
during these discussions has repeatedly been shown to predict secure infant
attachment. Additionally (see van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg,
Chapter 3, this volume), cooperative, coherent discourse maintained during
the AAI is associated with emotional health, while uncooperative, incoherent
discourse is associated with clinical levels of difficulties. However, as Levy and
his colleagues demonstrated in their study of borderline patients (see Preface,
p. xviii), 1 year of psychotherapy— which cannot alter a person’s life history,
but may engender changes in the way it is described and evaluated—can
significantly increase both the degree of coherence seen in AAI narratives and
the proportion of patients who are judged secure-autonomous.

Finally, we note that the tradition of AAI research conforms closely to
vital aspects of the consulting room, where clinicians listen to what a patient
says, paying careful attention to what is said, to how it is said, and as well to
what is not said. This way of listening is likely to be significantly enhanced
by familiarity with the AAI and the expanding body of literature related to it.
In turn, as increasing numbers of individuals utilize the protocol and learn its
accompanying system of analysis, new avenues for refining and improving
upon clinical interventions will likely be created—as this volume attests.
Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Howard and Miriam Steele not only for encouraging us through many rereadings of this chapter, but as well for their careful explication of the relation between the AAI and Bowlby's original thinking, utilized within our introduction. They have gone far beyond the usual editorial role in contributing to this chapter.

Notes

1. This, of course, is estimated from the judge's study of the full text rather than simply the speaker's overt attempts at presentation; even then, it will be subject to inaccuracies (Hesse, 1999, 2008).

2. Occasionally, a speaker may be unfamiliar with the word adjective (e.g., owing to lack of schooling); in such cases the interviewer speaks instead of words or phrases that describe what the relationship was like.

3. Violations of these maxims are permitted when "licensed" by the speaker (see Grice [1989] and Mura [1983]). An excessively long speech turn can, for example be licensed if the speaker begins, "Well, I'm afraid this is going to be quite a long story," whereas a very short turn can be licensed by "I'm really sorry, but I don't feel able to discuss this right now."

4. Although the interviewer encourages the speaker to provide five adjectives, and indicates readiness to wait, not all speakers provide this many. This early in the interview it is not necessarily indicative of insecure attachment status, especially given that a fuller description of interactions with a given parent may appear later on.

5. High scores on a scale for fear of loss from an unknown source are used to place speakers in the dismissing category (subcategory Ds4). This subcategory is sufficiently rare that the scale is not detailed in this chapter.

6. Derogation is rare in low-risk samples but is more prevalent in clinical samples. Derogating statements are noted for their dismissing brevity and the speaker's apparent intent of casting the individual or topic aside (see recent discussions by Goldwyn, 2005; Tutron, McGauley, Marin-Avellan, & Hughes, 2001; Wallis & Steele, 2001).

7. Training in the analysis of the Adult Attachment Interview takes place through a 2-week institute involving one or two certified trainers and 15-20 participants. Usually about seven institutes are offered per year, and are taught only by those who have been certified to train via (1) participation in two full conventional institutes, and (2) 2-3 weeks of participation in "training-to-train" institutes held by Main and Hesse. Those interested in obtaining training in the analysis of the AAI should contact any or several of the following 11 certified trainers regarding upcoming institutes: Anders Broberg, Anders.Broberg@psy.ou.edu; Nino Dazzi, Nino.Dazzi@unina1.it; Sonia Gojman de Millan, sgojman@yahoo.com; Erik Hesse, Fax: (510) 642-5293; Tord Ivarsson, Tord.Ivarsson@ugrowth.se; Deborah Jacobitz, debj@mail.utexas.edu; Nancy Kaplan, Nancy.Kaplan@hotmail.com; Mary Main, Fax: (510) 642-5293; David and Deanne Pederson, Pederson@uwo.ca; and June Sroufe, jsroufe@visi.com. Trainings are frequently offered in the United States, as well as Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Scandinavia, Mexico, and occasionally in other regions and countries.

References


How are attachment representations associated with psychological disorders? Some 10 years ago Dozier suggested that preoccupied attachment representations might be associated with felt experience of distress and be expressed in internalizing disorders such as depression or borderline personality disorder, whereas dismissing representations might be associated with more externalizing indices of distress, such as eating disorders, conduct disorders, and hard-drug use (Dozier, Chase Stovall, & Albus, 1999; Dozier & Tyrrell, 1997). In recent years the role of disorganized or disoriented attachment representations has been stressed. Unresolved attachments are suggested to be important in the emergence of disorders with a dissociative component, such as posttraumatic stress disorder, and to make individuals more vulnerable to developing psychopathology (Harari, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2007; Hesse, 1999b; Liotti, 2004; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

Here we draw on the accumulated data collected with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; see Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 1993, for the