

Absence of Attachment Representations (AAR) in the adult years: The emergence of a new AAI classification in catastrophically traumatized Holocaust child survivors

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ABSTRACT In the present study we present a new and rare type of discourse in the AAI which is characterized by absence of attachment representations during adulthood. Forty-eight women, who as children lost both parents as a result of the Holocaust, were administered the AAI in their late adulthood. Two cases in this sample could not be assigned to any of the traditional AAI classification system (F, Ds, E, CC), mainly because they were unable to associate themselves with any significant attachment figure throughout their life. We raise the possibility that some devastating experiences during childhood might cause an unrecoverable crash in already established patterns of attachment to an extent that adulthood will be characterized by state of mind that bears no emotional tie to even a single attachment figure. We illustrate this state of mind by presenting the life history as well as quotations from the AAI of two women, and we discuss the possibility of a new AAI classification, namely Absence of Attachment Representations – AAR. The possible effects of the AAR classification on parental caregiving behaviors are discussed.

KEYWORDS: attachment – trauma

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, and Main, 1984–1996) has been in extensive use in the study of intergenerational transmission of attachment (e.g., Hesse & Main, 1999; Main, Kaplan and Cassidy, 1985; Sagi, van IJzendoorn, Scharf, Joels, Koren-Karie, Mayseless, & Aviezer, 1997; Steele, Steele, and Fonagy, 1996). Its utilization has produced many empirical findings inflected in meta-analytical studies (e.g., van IJzendoorn, 1995), all of which highlighting its potential strengths and promise. The accumulation of research however is not free from controversies and difficulties; hence many questions still remain open, including the

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extent to which the AAI's coding system captures entirely the underlying attachment-related representations for all life experiences and circumstances.

Some recent research has suggested that the current coding system, albeit very useful, robust and promising, might not always be adequate to various life experiences, including for example exposure to trauma (e.g., Lyons-Ruth, Yellin, Melnick, & Atwood, 2003). In the history of attachment research this should no longer be surprising. In fact it was Mary Main, the developer of the AAI, who found in her seminal work that it was difficult to force the traditional ABC system with infants who later in the evolution of the field indeed became known as disorganized/disoriented (D-type; Main and Solomon, 1986). Main's work on attachment disorganization first paved the way for broadening the attachment coding system for infants (e.g. Lyons-Ruth, Bronfman, & Atwood, 1999). Similar issues were already raised with regard to the coding system for the AAI, with the appearance of the Cannot Classify category as a complex type of insecure attachment representations in adulthood (Hesse, 1996). This discovery was accompanied with the recently reported difficulties, in particular with non-normative samples, in which some unique coding difficulties are noted (Turton, McGauley, Marin-Avellen, & Hughes, 2001).

In this paper we will share new attachment-based information about the long-term effects of the Holocaust on child survivors (now grandmothers) and their offspring (now mothers). Forty-eight child survivors, drawn from a non-clinically based population who as children lost both mothers and fathers as a result of the Holocaust, were administered the AAI in their late adulthood. They were expected to display enduring disorganization from their horrible experiences with loss of attachment figures and other traumas, and indeed the results confirmed the lasting effects of the Holocaust on the survivors who displayed a very high rate (56%) of unresolved loss and trauma (U) (Sagi, van IJzendoorn, Joels, & Scharf, 2002; Sagi-Schwartz, et al. 2003). At the same time, however, a number of child survivors were found to be extremely difficult to classify in that they showed clear signs of *absence of attachment representations* with regard to any of their attachment figures throughout their life cycle, despite the fact that until their loss they lived with both parents and might have had normal family life.

We believe that we have discerned some signs that could be used as markers for a total break in the representational foundations of the attachment system, especially when people confront severe experiences such as the Holocaust, accompanied by catastrophic loss of father and mother as well as sequential loss or traumatization in the future (Keilson, 1992). Such a collapse is characterized by attachment representations that are surprisingly lacking. In the following sections we will therefore discuss related theoretical issues that may shed light on why under some circumstances it might become impossible to force the traditional AAI classification system, and then we will bring two cases that illustrate the difficulty as well as the possibility of a newly emerging category – Absence of Attachment Representations (AAR).

Over the past three decades the important role of attachment relationships in young children has been extensively discussed and studied (e.g. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Sroufe, 1988; Thompson, 1999). Research has also focused on conditions under which children are at risk from the development of insecure attachment, as is the case in institutionalized children (e.g., Rutter and The English and Romanian Adoption Adoptees Study Team, 1998) and adoptive children (e.g., Dozier, Stoval, Albus, & Bates, 2001; Wolkind & Rushton, 1994). At the same

time very little is known about the development and consequences of what Lieberman and Pawl (1988) referred to as 'non-attachment', a term applied to children who had no opportunities in their life to form attachment relationships with specific figures. Zeanah and Boris (2000) have suggested a category termed 'nonattached attachment disorder'. Children classified as nonattached did not have the opportunity to develop a unique attachment relationship, and as a result they fail to demonstrate an attachment to any figure, even when distressed or threatened. They frequently appear to be detached and removed. Nonattached children are found among those who had multiple caregivers, such as institutionalized or neglected children. It is important to note that these children do not necessarily lack the natural capacity for developing attachment relationships, and instead they have been subjected to insufficient relational experiences that are necessary for attachment to develop and form (Zeanah & Boris, 2000). A limited number of studies have been reported recently in this regard, especially with institutionalized Romanian orphans, suggesting increasing signs of disordered attachment in toddlers and children living in more socially depriving environments (O'Connor, Rutter, and the English Romanian adoptees study team, 2000; Smyke, Dumitrescu, & Zeanah, 2002; Zeanah & Koga, 2003).

Many questions still remain concerning the long-term effects of such harsh caregiving experiences on children's adjustment and functioning. Tizard and Tizard (1971) were the first to conduct a longitudinal study that focused on the effect of non-attachment on later functioning. Their careful examination of institutionalized children at different ages (Tizard & Hodges, 1978; Tizard & Rees, 1975) open an important window for examining the question concerning the impact of early institutionalization on later development and whether children can recover from such adverse experiences, especially when there is substantial positive change in the emotional and caregiving environment. By age of 4, some of the children in their study were adopted and were raised by highly motivated and investing parents, whereas others were reunited with their biological parents. It was found that by age 8 most of the adoptive parents, but only half of the biological parents, reported that their children established close relationships with them. Such findings set the stage for the proposition that even under very harsh conditions, rehabilitative exposure of children to warm and loving care may facilitate reconstruction of trust in caregiving figures. However the issue is still awaiting further systematic research (O'Connor et al., 2000).

The focus in the studies reviewed thus far was on difficulties in establishing early attachment relationships, but even less is known about children who might have experienced normal early childhood, which later was jeopardized by catastrophic life events and experiences, like the Holocaust. May such devastating experiences during childhood cause *unrecoverable* impairment of already established and existing patterns of attachment? Can life circumstances be so debilitating so that they might break and crash already existing attachment foundations to such an extent that adulthood will be characterized by the absence of attachment representations? In this paper we suggest that the answer could be positive and that despite the fact that the children had spent their early years with both parents, such an attachment infrastructure could be totally damaged by catastrophic events in their life.

The first 3 years of life are generally seen as crucial for children's development of attachment relationships with their primary caregivers. Bowlby (1982) suggested that patterns of attachment, once formed, tend to resist change, but it was also noted that

such fixed patterns may transform either to more favorable or to more unfavorable ends as a result of major changes in the child's caregiving environment and experiences (Bowlby, 1988, Sroufe, 1988). In fact, recent data from longitudinal studies show lack of concordance between infancy and adulthood attachment data in individuals experiencing negative life events (such as parents' divorce), in contrast to a concordance that was found in individuals with more stability during their course of life (e.g. Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000; Weinfield, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2000). Such data suggest that negative experiences may be conceived as a potentially risk factor in causing a change from secure attachment during infancy to an insecure state of mind during adolescence.

In this paper we hope to take the field one step further in suggesting that extreme and chronic negative experiences that endure for many years during childhood and adolescence may even break the infrastructure of attachment representations. Such a break may leave the individual with a state of mind, which is empty of internalized caring relations, without any reference to figures that can be regarded as attachment figures. Should indeed such a process take place, then early-established attachments with parents might not necessarily protect the growing child when confronting with extreme negative situations, and the opportunity to make further use in the future of the attachment experiences from infancy might not be useful.

We will present two cases in which the attachment relations of two little girls were brutally cut-off during the Holocaust. Moreover, in the years following the girls' separation from their parents they were taken care of by different rotating figures without any opportunity to form new intimate relations with any specific caring adult. Such a trajectory of experiences resulted in what we propose as a new AAI classification, namely Absence of Attachment Representations due to a crash in the foundations of the attachment system. Before we expand on this issue, let us summarize briefly the main attachment classifications as used in adulthood research.

The Adult Attachment classification system (Main & Goldwyn, 1998) details four main states of mind regarding attachment concerns. It is a semi-structured interview in which the interviewee's childhood memories and current perceptions of these experiences are discussed (George, Kaplan & Main, 1996). The questions in the AAI elicit general descriptions of past experiences, as well as specific biographical events. The interviewees are asked to describe attachment-related experiences from their childhood, including situations of emotional upsetness, illness, and separation from the parents. Although the interview focuses primarily on childhood experiences, the subjects are also asked to provide their interpretation of those experiences and to reflect on the possible influence on their personality as adults.

The central task presented to the interviewees is that of producing and reflecting upon attachment-based memories, while at the same time maintaining coherent discourse with the interviewer (Hesse, 1999). The interview is thought to be coherent when the style of speech is consistent, and the flow of ideas about attachment and their effect on later development is clear and connected (Main & Goldwyn, 1998). The coherence dimension is central to the assessment: Classification of adult attachment is influenced primarily by the degree of coherence in the subjects' speech, and less by the actual content of the descriptions. The overall classification assigned to an AAI is intended to capture the speaker's state of mind concerning their attachment representations stemming from childhood experiences with specified caring figures. Individuals may show an autonomous/free to explore state of mind (F), a dismissing state of mind (Ds) or preoccupied/enmeshed state of mind (E). In addition,

individuals who exhibit errors in monitoring of reasoning or monitoring of discourse when traumatic events are discussed are rated as unresolved (U) with regard to a specific loss or trauma. It must be emphasized that it is not simply the loss experience *per se* that determines this rating; rather it is the degree to which the loss or trauma has been worked through in an appropriate manner. The U classification is given only when experiences of loss or trauma are reliably seem to 'intrude' upon the organized attachment pattern and add a dimension of confusion and disorganization to the narrative. Finally, there are situations for which the Cannot Classify (CC) category has to be proposed. This category refers to situations in which the subjects display two conflicting states of mind in the same interview, e.g., Ds and E (Hesse, 1999), and such a mixed classification has been reported to have associations with several psychopathologies (e.g. Allen, Hauser & Borman-Spurrell, 1996).

The current version of the AAI classification system functions under the premise that some enduring attachment relationships existed during childhood, and subsequently one of the categories regarding attachment representations specified above can be applied. But what kind of AAI classification might be given to an adult who had relationships that existed only very early in life (say first 4–5 years), which were then totally interrupted and terminated *without* any opportunity to develop close relations with new caregivers during childhood and adolescence? As mentioned earlier, little is known about later development of such children. The Holocaust unfortunately created a catastrophic context in which it became possible to follow the consequences of growing up under such devastating circumstances. We may assume that such childhood experiences will manifest themselves in the thought and speech processes when challenged by the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) questions, but in what ways?

In a recent project designed to assess the traumatic stress and mental representations with regard to early attachment relations in Israeli women with and without Holocaust experience (Sagi et al., 2002, 2003), 98 women were administered the AAI. The research group included forty-eight women, all of whom had lost both of their parents prior to the age of fourteen. The comparison group consisted of 50 carefully matched women who immigrated to Israel before World War II and therefore did not experience the Holocaust. Coding the subjects' AAI transcripts revealed that the most common classification of interviews from both groups was the dismissing state of mind. Still, as was hypothesized, Holocaust child survivors had significantly fewer secure attachment representations (23%) than the comparison group (46%), with a large number of unresolved classifications in the Holocaust group (56%). In addition, in the process of coding the Holocaust group's transcripts it became apparent that two out of our 48 Holocaust survivors do not correspond to any of the existing classifications, mainly because of what seemed to be *absence* of attachment representations. Next we will illustrate this state of mind by providing the life story of two women from our Holocaust group.

The case of Berta

Berta was 5 years old when Polish soldiers invaded their house and took her parents. She has no memories from her childhood prior to the separation from her parents. She does not remember how they looked, what they used to do; she does not even know what her father did for a living. The only thing she could say about her mother was that she had long hair but she has no specific memories regarding her relationships

with either parent. Berta does not remember in details the night when her parents were taken away. In fact, she has only one picture that stands alive when she thinks about the last time that she saw her parents; she was sitting on the floor with her two brothers near by, watching her mother who was wearing two coats because of the cold outside. She did not realize then that they were separating from their mother. She thought that her mother would soon come back. One of their neighbors took the three kids to the nearest monastery where they stayed for several months and then were taken to a camp of the red-cross or the united unions; she does not know for sure which of these agencies: *'There were so many people there, I didn't even know who they were, I didn't know who was the one that brought food... I can't tell you who took care of us...people, some people, but I don't know who they were'*.

The lack of one specific figure to whom she could turn for comfort and protection was a dominant line in her life story from that point on. Berta was moved, with her brothers, to a children's camp, constituted of about 60 orphans and abandoned children and spent about 3 years there. There were some caregivers who took care of the children, and Berta remembers the caregiver telling them about hygienic issues, about ways to deal with the fleas, or teaching them to put newspaper in their shoes as a mean of protection from the cold. But she had no specific figure that was responsible for her safety or well-being. She was one of 60 children and she has no memories of individuals caring for her or of any personal connection with any adult. In the same vein, when asked about feelings of rejection she said that she was never on her own, she was always one of 60, and all of them got the same treatment: *'I was like everybody else, you see, there was no difference between me and the others, that's why I didn't feel rejected nor did I ever felt favored'*. She stayed with her brothers – one brother who was 18 months older and one who was 2 years younger than her. She said that it was good to have the older brother nearby because he was the only one who knew her birth date or her parents' birth date, but she says that their relationships were *'nothing special: We were together and moved together from one camp to another, but nothing more then that'*. She does not have any specific memories from a dyadic interaction with neither of her brothers.

Berta does recall difficulties and harsh times. She cannot recall one specific episode in which she was upset, but she says that she was upset all the time and actually describes herself as a sad child with no joy. She does recall fears and she says that she used to walk during her sleep, probably because she was emotionally hurt. On occasions such as fear, illness or being upset she does not remember physical contact or any other signs of closeness with any of the caretakers. When Berta tries to think about the overall implications of her childhood experiences on her adult personality she relates mostly to lack of self-confidence. She said that she did not learn much since learning Hebrew in itself was a difficult task for her. In addition she found it difficult to concentrate on cognitive tasks, and consequently performed poorly at school. These experiences led her to think about herself as incapable of learning and she lowered her expectations from herself, believing that it was useless to even try because she felt she would fail anyway. With regard to emotional implications she said: *'I am a normal woman. I am a healthy normal woman with a broken heart'*.

Focusing on the losses of Berta reveal that she lost both parents when she was 5 years old. She does not remember her reaction to their death. As a young child she did not grieve after the separation since she waited for them to come back. She waited to receive evidence that her parents were no longer alive and although it took many years to get such evidence she never lost hope. Berta was not alone with such hopes.

Children in the same position surrounded her. They were all waiting for their parents; they all refused to give up the dream about reunion with their families, and as she said, they were all sad children. We contend that such hopes for a reunion with her parents can be seen as signs that parental representations were active and accessible for some time, but at some point, perhaps as a consequence of absence of alternate protective figures, a fading process of attachment representations went into motion. Winnicott (1971) related to such a process by stating that 'if the mother is away over a period of time which is beyond a certain limit... then the memory of the internal representations fades' (p.15).

When referring to her adulthood years, Berta portrays a picture totally empty from emotions. She came to Israel as a young girl, and lived in a kibbutz. Like all the other survivors she was matched with an 'adoptive family', a term that needs some clarification so as to ensure misinterpretations. All kibbutz's children at that time, including Berta, lived in 'children-houses' and were together with their biological parents only for a few hours during the afternoon, spending the nights away from their parents (for more details see, Aviezer, van IJzendoorn, Sagi, & Schuengel, 1994). Therefore, Holocaust child survivors were not different than regular kibbutz children in that these adoptive families spent hardly any time with them, except for 3–4 hours daily (4 pm–8 pm). For the rest of day and night the children were in children houses with other caregivers and with minimal contact with their parents. Such a setting might explain why Berta does not recall any emotional closeness with that family.

At a certain stage her brothers left the kibbutz but she says that she did not really miss them. She meets them occasionally, mostly on formal gathering such as Holocaust Memorial Day. Berta got married and she has three children and nine grandchildren. She lost her husband in a car accident when she was 40, and tells us about difficulties stemming from the situation in which she saw her children becoming orphans. As for herself, she said that there was no love in their marital relations: '*I got used to live with him. He had his own life and I had mine. Love or close relationships were not part of our life*'. Fraiberg (1987) referred to such a situation by saying that 'in the absence of love, there is no pain in loss' (p.13). As for her widowhood she claims that she finds it quite rewarding to be on her own, independent to do what she wishes to do, and therefore she does not seek new spousal relations.

Berta's children are all living nearby and she speaks about their current relationships in technical terms of helping with the grandchildren and inviting them for dinners, and the only time in the very long transcript where she refers to positive emotion is in her closing statement: '*I give my children all the help I can give. I think they love me*' she never said a word about her own emotions. It should be noted that the AAIs of the daughters as well as the attachment classifications of the grandchildren were also assessed. Berta's daughter was coded as displaying a dismissing state of mind with regard to attachment concerns (Ds3), and her grandchild was coded as having secure attachment relationships with his mother (using the traditional Ainsworth Strange Situation).

The case of Zina

Zina's history is very similar to that of Berta. She lost her father when she was 5 years old and her mother a year later. She has no recollections whatsoever from these early years. The only memories she has are concerned with physical vulnerability. She

remembers having been ill and stayed in isolation from the others, and she also remembers that she was taken to an appendicitis operation, remembering sounds of alarm and being left alone on the stretcher.

Zina was 9 years old when immigrated as an orphan to Israel at the end of World War II and arrived at the kibbutz, where she was placed by immigration officials accompanied by her older sister and her younger brother. As was the case for Berta, she also was 'assigned' to an 'adoptive family' but she cannot recall any meaningful relationship with the members of that family: *'they were nice, good people'*, she says; *'they gave me a home to go to during the afternoons, as the other children did'*. It appears that the 'adoptive' parents were never seen as parental figures or as an emotional address to approach to. This family left the kibbutz when Zina was 13 years old, apparently without offering her the opportunity to join them, and she never saw them again. She speaks about them in a matter-of-fact tone, describing functional relationships with no closeness and with no claim for having any significant or differentiated feelings towards that family. Zina does not remember specific times of needs or upsetness. She thinks that she used to approach her kibbutz metapelet (i.e., caregiver) but she could not raise any specific episode to illustrate such incidents.

Zina does not identify any figure throughout her life that had any influence on her personal development. She cannot refer to anyone whom she really trusted or felt close to: *'I was independent, she says, not because I wanted but because I had to. There was no other choice'*. Such an expressed remark might be seen as valuing of close relations, but at the same time, her life circumstances did not allow such proximity seeking attempts to take root, and over the years, they instead withered and faded. A careful examination of Zina's transcript suggests that the total absence of a stable and reliable caregiving adult in her life may account for that feeling. After losing both parents she had no one to attach to, and when she came to the kibbutz and 'got' a family, this family left the kibbutz 4 years later without her (at the onset of her adolescence) and they did not really compensate for the long and severe deprivation she had suffered.

She remained empty from emotions, creating merely functional relationships with her husband, children and grandchildren, all of which without any expression of real affection or need for intimacy. For example, she spent abroad some enjoyable weeks when her son was in a combat role during the 1982 war in Lebanon, insisting that she had no fears or worries because of this separation. She spends time with her grandchildren, but the only comments she has made in the AAI regarding her relationships with them were: *'Grandchildren are a nice thing. You are not responsible for them. The best thing with them is that they come with their parents'*. When probed for it, she could not think about a wish for their future.

Zina's daughter was classified on the AAI as showing a dismissing state of mind (Ds3), and her grandchild was classified in the Ainsworth Strange Situation as avoidant (A type).

Summary of Berta and Zina experiences

The most salient feature in both Berta and Zina's history is the pervasive lack of solid attachment figures toward whom they could display attachment behaviors after they lost their parents as very young children. We know that they spent their first 5 years of life with both parents and although we know nothing about the nature of their

experiences with them, we still have no grounded reason to assume, based on the premise of attachment theory, that they were not attached to them. Is early exposure to normal family life sufficient to protect the emotional fabric of young children from catastrophic events experienced later in their childhood and adulthood? We do know that almost all the women in our sample were readily classifiable according to the AAI classification system, including those who lost both their parents at a very young age (33% Autonomous, 44% dismissive, 8% preoccupied and 10% cannot classify). It can be assumed therefore that the combined effect of losing both parents at a very young age (less than 6) and of lack of substitute attachment figures throughout later development might have severely distorted the attachment system of Berta and Zina, namely, their ability to construct and maintain a vital mental representation with regard to attachment experiences and relationships.

Both women were not fortunate to obtain specified figures that could serve for them as alternate significant persons for support and comfort at time of need and who could offer them feelings of belonging. Such need for attachment relations does not terminate in infancy or early childhood. Indeed, as children grow into adolescence they may not necessarily need daily physical proximity to their attachment figures, and yet a secure home remains a central core for optimal functioning as well as mental health (Bowlby, 1988). It is possible therefore that the emptiness that both Berta and Zina experienced after the loss of their parents so early in their life transformed into a more permanent state that was characterized by incapacity to feel closeness and neediness. Our interpretation is consistent with Bowlby's contention that severe maternal deprivation might disable the capacity to establish basic emotional relationships (1982). Some support for such a proposition comes from the findings reported by Tizard and Tizard (1971) showing that former institutionalized children were less likely to use peers as a source for emotional support when compared with children without institutionalized background.

Classifying Berta and Zina's state of mind with regard to attachment concerns

Some scholars might argue for possibly dismissing markers here, but against the above background we will argue in the following analysis that this option could not be used as a possible attachment strategy for Berta and Zina, and instead an alternative (new) attachment representation will be entertained. In doing so we will rely upon the major parameters that are central in coding the AAI, namely, appraising their inferred experiences as well as their state of mind with regard to attachment concerns.

The initial impression that both Berta and Zina's transcripts give may correspond to the dismissing category. They insist on lack of memories from childhood, they minimize the significance of pain, they make strong claim about their personal strength, and they speak in a somewhat remote affect about their childhood experiences. A thorough examination of their transcripts though reveals that their state of mind is not really concordant with the dismissing domain as described by Main and Goldwyn (see Table 1 for AAI scoring). In describing the dismissing category Main and Goldwyn (1998) wrote: "This category is assigned to individuals whose state of mind as assessed in the interview indicates a current attempt to limit the influence of attachment relationships and experiences in thoughts, in feelings, or in daily life... There is implicit claim to strength, normalcy and/or independence. This is implied in the dismissal of the import of attachment relationships or experiences, through dismissing possible imperfections in the parent in the face of

Table 1 AAI scoring of childhood experiences and current state of mind with regard to attachment issues

	<i>Berta</i>		<i>Zina</i>	
	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Father</i>
<i>Scales for experiences</i>				
Loving	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
Rejecting	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
Involving	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
Pressure to achieve	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
Neglecting	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
<i>Scales for state of mind for parents</i>				
Idealizing	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
Involving anger	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
Derogation	C-R	C-R	C-R	C-R
<i>Scales for overall state of mind</i>				
Insistence of lack of recall	7		9	
Metacognitive processes	1		1	
Passivity of thoughts processes	1		1	
Fear of loss	1		1	
Unresolved loss	C-R		C-R	
Unresolved trauma	C-R		C-R	
Coherency of transcript	2		3	
Coherency of mind	2		3	

contradictory or unsupportive evidence, dismissing any potential negative effects of parenting or other untoward experiences upon the self' (p. 151, version 6.3).

Berta and Zina do not seem to dismiss the importance of attachment relations. They (apparently) had a normal family life during their first years and they both say that they wanted some one to take care of them but there was no one around ready to fulfill their wish. Such circumstances had led to a break, to a total collapse of their already established attachment infrastructure, without any new opportunity to fill the emptiness. They definitely do not describe these experiences as positively contributing to their development, as is often the case with dismissing individuals. On the contrary they gave the impression that they view children as being in need of having their parents near by. In no place in the interviews did they express negative attitudes regarding close emotional ties as a motive. Hence, we may conclude that Berta and Zina *do not devalue* the need for attachment relations.

Although Berta claimed personal strength and normalcy, which might be indicative of dismissingness, it should be at the same time noted that she described herself as a healthy woman 'with a broken heart', an emotional expression which is not typical of dismissing interviewees. She told us about her waiting for her parents to return and about years of longing for them, coupled with her fears, anxieties and difficulties. Similarly, Zina did not insist on her willingness to be independent during her childhood – a sign of overall dismissal regarding attachment – and instead, she simply said that she had to become independent merely because of survival necessity.

Following such remarks we may conclude that both women do not view close relations as insignificant to the individual's well being, and in this respect they do not qualify to be classified into one of the typical dismissing categories as described by Main and Goldwyn (1998).

With regards to dismissing interviewees' personal history, Main and Goldwyn (1998) noted that it is often easy for the reader to infer a pervasive lack of love, closeness or support *from the attachment figure(s)*, and also to identify direct experiences of rejection from the caregiver(s). As can be seen in Table 1 we could not infer anything regarding the childhood experiences of Berta and Zina with their parents, but at the same time nothing could be identified in their transcripts that suggested lack of love, rejection or neglect.

Moving to the level of representations, what dismissing adults share in common is an organization of thought, which permits attachment to remain de-activated. One-way of keeping attachment de-activated is by imagining that the parents would be almost ideally responsive should emergencies or feelings of need arise. When such notion is in strong contradiction with autobiography, then the mechanism of insisting upon lack of memories becomes rather useful. In other cases there might be less idealization, with some recounting of mildly negative experience, but attachment is still not readily activated since the self is considered largely unaffected by malignant experiences and is relatively not distressed by them (p. 152).

Neither Berta nor Zina portrays an idealized picture of their past experiences; nor do they claim to be unaffected by these experiences. Both describe difficulties in various aspects of their life, including those stemming from the feelings of not belonging to anyone. Hence, the core issue of the dismissing pattern, namely, to defend oneself against the painful memories of early rejection by attachment figure(s) through mechanisms such as lack of memories, idealization and perception of the self as invulnerable do not hold for these cases. Although they do not remember their childhood, we must note at the same time that both of them had lived with their parents only until the age of 5 or 6 years; this is the age period around which interviewees' memories begin in many normative samples. In fact, many interviewees, regardless of their AAI classification, insist on not remembering experiences from below age 5–6, but they are able to elicit satisfactory memories from later periods of their childhood.

According to the AAI scoring and classification system (Main & Goldwyn, 1998) high scores on the insistence upon lack of memories (as is the case in Berta's and Zina's transcripts, see Table 1) should lead to a Dismissing classification but 'only in cases in which it serves to block discourse and block further queries' (p. 66). However, there are still other cases where subjects cannot remember details from their childhood, and are notably troubled by this, for instance, because of traumatic loss of memory. Traumatic loss of memory includes, according to Main and Goldwyn (1998), complete absence of memory for some significant period of life, or for a particular overwhelmingly frightening period. However, interviewees with traumatic loss of memory are often highly troubled and upset by the loss of memory and they worry about their absence of memories. Berta and Zina were not troubled by their lack of memories. They willingly described episodes from their time at the camp or at the kibbutz later on, but these memories did not include episodes of personal relations, and neither of them expressed inconvenience associated with this absence.

In such cases subjects would receive a high score on the 'insistence upon lack of memories' scale without necessarily deliberating blocking the development of the

interview, and therefore they would not qualify to the dismissing pattern associated with this scale (Main & Goldwyn, 1998, p. 69). Thus, the question regarding the classification that such scoring profile invites remained open, with a possible consideration of a new classification that is proposed in this paper, namely Absence of Attachment Representation (AAR). We believe that the new classification may shed some light on conditions under which there is a profound lack of memory, and yet not connected to the dismissing category.

After drastic separation from their parents at a very young age, both Berta and Zina were taken to various places where one caregiver was responsible for many children without any capability to provide the nurturance that they needed in order to (maybe) overcome the atrocities they had experienced. We learn from adoption and fostering studies that children who were placed in settings where the emotional climate necessary for overcoming past neglect or abuse was lacking, failed to attach to their foster parents. However, when children were placed with foster families that provided responsive care, they did attach to the new alternate caregivers (e.g. Shaw & Benham, 1997). We do not know much about the 'adoptive families' that took care of the two women in our study when they arrived to the kibbutz after the Holocaust, but recall that Zina's family left the kibbutz without taking her with them, as one might expect from an adoptive family. We do know that both women did not develop representations of members of these families as significant or as emotionally close figures. The developmental pathways model (Bowlby, 1988) suggests that at every moment a selected pathway is determined by the existing interaction between the individual and his/her environment. Hypothetically, becoming a kibbutz-child and gaining an 'adoptive family' might have become a favorable turning point for some of the Holocaust child survivors, but this was not observed to be the case with Berta or Zina.

Although not clearly documented, perhaps other surviving women in our sample were exposed to more affectionate or more dedicated 'adoptive families' who compensated for the terminal and brutal separation from their parents, hence facilitating the rebuilding of their trust in other caring adults. It might be the case that both Berta and Zina were exposed to families who merely 'paid their dues' to the kibbutz system at a very superficial level without the provision of an emotional climate that the two girls so desperately needed, namely to be wanted and to belong to a caring family. Such favorable experiences might have ameliorated feelings of profound pain and of abandonment and might have as a result helped them learn to relate again. It is also possible that Berta and Zina were too mentally deficient upon their arrival at the kibbutz to the extent that they were not capable of making a fruitful use of the new relations that were offered to them, and instead they could only establish superficial relationships with their 'adoptive families'. According to attachment theory, individuals impose on new situation models of relationships that they experienced before with their parental figures. Perhaps it was too painful for Berta and Zina to reactivate models that were so brutally cut-off, hence as an act of self-defense they chose to impose on the new relations their most recent models of no-relations and emptiness. Despite the profound pain of not establishing real new affectionate bonds, such a psychological strategy acted as a defense against the fear of losing again attachment figures.

Differently from dismissing individuals who defend themselves from the pain associated with rejection on the part of the attachment figure, by means of paradoxically idealizing the rejecting figure, in the case of Berta and Zina we might

see even more radical and extreme utilization of defense from the pain caused by unrecoverable termination of the attachment relations. That is, these women in fact *erased* attachment figures from their arsenal of representations, so that their AAI transcripts were lacking any indication of the existence of attachment representations. The absence of representations became the dominant facet of their childhood: absence of parents and absence of substitute parental figures. Subsequently, 'absence' has become a main motive in their narrative in adulthood: Absence of emotions, absence of episodic memories, and absence of reflection regarding these difficulties. This type of AAI narrative is new in that it cannot be connected to existing internalized attachment representations but rather it stems from absence of existing representations.

CONCLUSIONS

The classification of Absence of Attachment Representations is unlikely to be seen in most occasions around us, because often the interviewees seem to have enduring caregivers to whom they could attach, securely or insecurely. The attachment figure might be unresponsive, neglectful, and abusive or show even other types of maltreatment, and yet from the child's point of view, one can identify a specific figure that s/he could love, hate or derogate. This is the basic tenet of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), following which available attachment figures are likely to be relied upon when the attachment system is being activated in the child, and over the years the relationships which exist between the child and the attachment figures become internalized in the child's mind. It appears that only in severe and rare cases, when the child is left alone (during infancy or childhood) entirely without any particular attachment figure responsible for his/her safety and development, that we might witness the emergence of what we term Absence of Attachment Representations (AAR). In such cases when the child grows into adulthood, s/he displays emotional emptiness without the ability to reflect representations of any specific person who became internalized as a significant person across the life cycle. It is exactly this type of break of parental representations that we propose as reflecting the state of mind of both Berta and Zina, hence the observed difficulties in closeness and intimacy including unloving relations with their husbands as well as their lack of closeness with their offspring. Because these cases are drawn from a non-clinically based sample, more cases of this kind might be detected in clinical populations. The implications of being part of clinical versus non-clinical samples has been highlighted in a recent meta-analytic study on the effect of the Holocaust on second generation, showing that transmission of trauma was noticeable only in clinical but not in non clinical samples (van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2003).

At the present time we do not know what might be the implications for the next generation of being an adult with an AAR state of mind. Our research design, which included AAIs for both Holocaust child survivors (now grandmothers) and their daughters (now mothers) opens a small window for examining issues associated with intergenerational transmission of attachment, and may allow some speculations about a number of consequences with regard to parental behaviors. As was already mentioned, the daughters of both Berta and Zina were classified in the AAI (coded by raters who were blind to their mothers' classifications) as expressing insecure state of mind in the form of dismissingness regarding their own childhood attachment

experiences. It suggests that when adults like Berta and Zina become parents they are unable to provide a secure infrastructure for the second generation with regard to attachment concerns. Thus the absence of attachment representations in adulthood may generate parental deficits which are likely to be transmitted in such a way that the second generation also constructs insecure states of mind, as seen in the case of both Berta and Zina. The chain of (lack of) transmission to the third generation is already beyond the scope of this discussion.

A word of caution though is needed here. We do not know exactly what kind of actual mothering Berta and Zina exercised when their daughters were young and whether Berta and Zina were securely or insecurely attached to their mothers (and fathers) before the catastrophic crash in their early childhood. It remains as an open question whether prior secure relationships could be sufficiently functional in minimizing the risk for developing an AAR state of mind even without new future attachment replacements. As is always the case with AAI research, all we know refers to first generation's current state of mind as well as that of the current state of mind of their adult daughters. The bottom line however is that these adult daughters *were able* to establish attachment relationships with their mothers, which subsequently developed into an insecure dismissing state of mind.

In conclusion, in this paper we propose a new AAI classification, namely Absence of Attachment Representations (AAR), which characterizes interviewees who cannot refer to any significant attachment figure throughout their life, and subsequently such individuals seem to express emptiness in their reference to human relations – a state of mind that consists of no real emotional bonds with any person on earth, including siblings, spouse, children and grandchildren. Such individuals might make claims to normalcy in their relationships, which is typical to dismissing interviewees, but contrary to those fitting the dismissing category, these AAR individuals do not deny the importance of close and intimate relationships; they simply did not experience such closeness in their life after the loss of their parents in early childhood, and apparently their attachment relationship with their parents prior to their loss did not suffice for forming enduring meaning in their life to come.

The utility of the newly proposed AAR category is associated in this paper with some highly unusual childhood catastrophic experiences of two participants in our study with Holocaust child survivors. In order to shed further light on the issue, additional research is needed to examine whether the proposed experiences that might lead to absence of attachment representations state of mind can also be tracked in other samples in which children were terminally separated from their parents, without alternative new caring figures due to wars or other atrocities or catastrophic experiences.

Such further research is essential for it may provide additional insight regarding the protective role of early attachment relationships for later development, and it might help identify the circumstances under which an unrecoverable break in such foundations might emerge to an extent that the notion of attachment will no longer have further meaning in the life of such survivors. The two AAR cases we found in our Holocaust study may suggest that the existence of very early attachment relationships may not be sufficient to the development of a healthy personality in cases in which such early relationships terminated without new bonding opportunities that can be used as a base to which the child could turn in times of need.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Holocaust study was funded by the German-Israel Foundation for Research and Development (GIF #279) and by the Koehler Stiftung (Munich). We wish to thank the AAI interviewers: Sarit Alkalay, Noa Egoz-Mizrachi, Yael Goshen, Sarit Guttmann and Ran Navon. Special thanks are due to Erik Hesse, Karlen Lyons-Ruth, Mary Main, Miriam Steele, Howard Steele and Marinus van IJzendoorn, for their contributions, advice and helpful discussions.

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