

Introduction to the special issue: Current perspectives on assessment and treatment of attachment disorders

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The aim of this special issue was to bring together a range of hypotheses and clinical impressions concerning the current state of knowledge of the attachment disorders, particularly its assessment and treatment. This is no easy task given the wide range of opinions that have been expressed in the scientific, clinical, and popular media. On the one hand, there are some who doubt the very existence of the concept; on the other hand, some have developed a specialty in the treatment of attachment disorder. Unfortunately, the limited existing empirical database and store of clinical experiences has done little to settle what are now long-standing controversies. Compounding the inadequate store of information to enlighten and lead the debate is an apparently intractable schism between those working in this area.

In developing this special issue we approached a wide array of clinicians, clinical-researchers, and basic researchers who had written about attachment disorders (positively or negatively) and solicited their interest in contributing to a special issue that would focus particularly on assessment and intervention – these being the two most controversial features of the attachment disorders. Responses were accepted from all authors who were able to provide a commentary on the target article. Commentators were free to agree with or reject the proposals set out in the target article and could add issues of their own. Only in some cases were minor editorial changes suggested. We are grateful to authors for offering commentaries and we are especially thankful to the editor of *Attachment and Human Development*, Howard Steele, for assisting in this project.

We obtained commentaries from a diverse set of professionals. The mixture of commentators deserves brief comment. Disciplines of developmental and clinical psychology are represented in this special issue, as are child psychiatry and social work. All of those contributing to this special issue have direct clinical contact with children who have been (or could be) classified as having an attachment disorder. Nevertheless, contributors base their commentaries on different clinical experiences and orientations, notably conventional attachment theory and cognitive-behavioural approaches; purposively, we solicited commentaries from those who are actively engaged in alternative therapeutic treatment models, from parent-training to holding therapy. Finally, the list of contributors is international, reflecting the cross-national

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clinical dilemmas these issues raise. In sum, our 'sampling strategy' for commentaries was devised to ascertain a range of opinions. The take-up of the invitation to provide a commentary was not 100%, but we were able to assemble a wide array of thought and experience. Obtaining responses from a diverse set of commentators was important if we were to expose the contrast among alternative views that have been expressed.

The format of a target article with commentaries was adopted because we were especially interested in getting different authors to respond to the same set of proposals. In addition to generating genuinely useful feedback on what we think are debatable proposals, this approach would also increase the likelihood of exposing what similarities and differences there are in how specific issues are tackled according to alternative perspectives.

It may be that this special issue provides a baseline assessment against which to judge the progress of future work in this area. So, for example, in 5 years' time, will there be any progress in addressing the many questions raised in the target article and commentaries? Will the assessment and treatment of attachment disorders be more strongly linked with clinical and scientific knowledge? Will there be any sign of a detente among the various professionals working in this area? These are the ultimate aims of this special issue.