



Clark Baim

DMM vs ABC+D

A Controversial Discussion, Now in Print

The public discussion has finally begun. Five recent published papers (and one under review) have opened a long-awaited public discussion about the different approaches to understanding and assessing attachment – in other words, a discussion about the relative merits of the DMM and the ABC+D models of attachment.

The discussion began with Granqvist et al. (2017) – with 43 authors, including many eminent scholars and researchers – published in *Attachment and Human Development*. In this landmark article, the authors set out the ways in which the concept of ‘disorganization’ has been misunderstood and misused and offered the view that ‘disorganization’ in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) is not suited for use in person-specific clinical and forensic cases.

Spieker and Crittenden (2018) responded with a paper published in the *Infant Mental Health Journal*,



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suggesting that the DMM model for interpreting the SSP, PAA and AAI are suitable for person-specific clinical and forensic cases. The paper includes an up-to-date description of the DMM and a summary of the research behind it.

This paper was followed by a response from van IJzendoorn et al (2018a), who seemed to take offence that the DMM was being offered as a potentially useful alternative model. Their main criticism of the DMM was that it did not reach a level of legal reliability ‘beyond a reasonable doubt,’ a standard suited to criminal courts, but not civil courts - where ‘a preponderance of the evidence’ is the required standard. The authors of this paper seem to have misinterpreted or distorted Spieker and Crittenden, who argued that the DMM can *contribute* to court decision-making. The authors implied that Spieker and Crittenden had over-stated their position, claiming incorrectly that Spieker and

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Crittenden had said that courts can treat DMM reports in isolation and as the final say in decision-making. The authors also criticize the DMM for having too many possible classifications (they counted 24) and for being too complex, too hard to learn, and being subject to modification based on research (this is, of course, one of its strengths).

Crittenden and Spieker (2018), in a further response, clarify the misunderstandings of van IJzendoorn et al (2018a) and offer the view that the complexity of the DMM classifications is a strength, because it treats people as individuals without forcing them into a few classifications that might be useful for large groups but not for service delivery to individuals. In turn, van IJzendoorn et al (2018b) offered a further response, moving the discussion on to focus on the need for short-term treatment to assess parents' potential for positive change.

So, the discussion is underway, after several decades of impasse. Strikingly, the data on the limitations of the ABC+D method are drawn from meta-analyses by ABC+D researchers themselves. However, we still see that there is a great deal of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the DMM.

Many people who study and use the DMM understand its elegance, integrity, nuance and practical usefulness. We also understand all too well how there are no short cuts to reliability. It's a model that takes years of study, ongoing refresher training and consistent inter-rater reliability checking. But DMM practitioners understand this to be a strength and a means by which the accuracy and utility of the model is improved. Research within the DMM community attempts to find a way of assessing and informing treatment that is more accurate and useful because it is focused on the

function of behaviour rather than labelling symptoms – which puts people into boxes.

The dialogue has opened, and additional papers are under review. Let's hope the discussion, once opened, can continue. Ultimately, as Crittenden and Spieker state, the central question is not 'who wins,' but how we can best help to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

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Further Reading:

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- Crittenden, P. M. and Spieker, S. J. (submitted for publication). A Historic Dialogue.





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DMM and ABC+D: A Dialogue Begun

The topic of this issue of DMM News is very important. The DMM is a powerful guide to the assessment of attachment and the planning of treatment of human problems, and the scientific evidence of its effectiveness is confirmed by a growing number of publications. Despite this, distrust of DMM is still very high among researchers trained in the ABC+D (Berkeley) Model, many of whom know DMM only superficially.

In the last two years something important has happened: some of the most authoritative scholars in the field of attachment (Crittenden, Bakermans, Fonagy, Granqvist, Spieker, Steele, van IJzendoorn) have agreed to discuss, albeit sometimes critically, the limitations of the

disorganization category and the effectiveness of the DMM compared with the ABC+D model. This debate has been published in prestigious journals and Clark Baim, expert psychotherapist trained in the DMM, summarizes it in these pages of the DMM News.

The crucial point of the debate is how we can facilitate a dialogue between these two different models of attachment.

It is now time to initiate shared projects to stimulate an informed scientific dialogue, considering, as Crittenden and Spieker wrote, that the core question is not 'who wins', but how to prevent and alleviate human suffering.

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