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Can a measure of disrupted caregiver behavior discriminate infant disorganized attachment from insecure-organized attachment?

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To examine if a measure of disrupted caregiver behavior is equally effective in differentiating children with disorganized attachment from children with secure and insecure-organized attachment.

Method: One hundred and eighty-four low-risk mother-infant dyads participated in this study. Mother-infant attachment relationships were assessed using the Strange Situation procedure and disrupted caregiver behavior was assessed at 12 and 18 months using the AMBIANCE measure.

Results: Disrupted caregiver behavior distinguished children with disorganized attachment from children with secure attachment but not from children with resistant attachment.

INTRODUCTION

■ Main and Hesse (1990) have suggested that mothers in disorganized attachment relationships display disrupted caregiver interactive behavior that is frightening to the infant.

■ Based on this account, Lyons-Ruth, Bronfman, and Parsons (1999) developed the Atypical Maternal Behavior Instrument for Assessment and Classification (AMBIANCE) which measures a broad spectrum of disrupted caregiver behavior.

■ A recent meta-analysis by Madigan, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Moran, Pederson, and Benoit (2006) revealed that when attachment is dichotomized into “organized” versus “disorganized” attachment, there is a significant association between caregiver displays of disrupted behavior and the development of disorganized attachment relationships ($r=.34$).

■ However, there is little evidence that measures of disrupted behavior are successful in differentiating disorganized attachment from the three patterns of organized attachment, namely, secure, avoidant, and resistant (Grienenberger, Kelly, & Slade, 2005).

HYPOTHESIS:

The AMBIANCE measures will be effective in differentiating children with disorganized attachment, not only from children with secure attachment, but also from the various types of organized-insecure attachment.

METHOD

Participants

- 184 low-risk mother-infant dyads
- $M_{age} = 30.58$ years ($SD = 4.00$)
- $M_{education} = 15.56$ years ($SD = 3.06$)

Measures

1) Atypical Maternal Behavior Instrument for Assessment and Classification (AMBIANCE; Lyons-Ruth et al, 1999)

■ The AMBIANCE yielded the following measures for each mother:

- (a) 7-point rating of global level of disrupted communication
- (b) frequency counts for affective communication errors, role/boundary confusion, fearful/disorientation, intrusive behavior and withdrawal

2) Strange Situation Procedure (SSP; Ainsworth et al, 1978)

- Administered when infants were 12 months of age
- 56% were classified as Secure, 11% as Avoidant, 9% as Resistant, and 23% as Disorganized

3) Free Play

- 5-minute free play sessions were conducted when the infant was 12 or 18 months

RESULTS

1) 7-point Level of Disrupted Communication

a. During the SSP

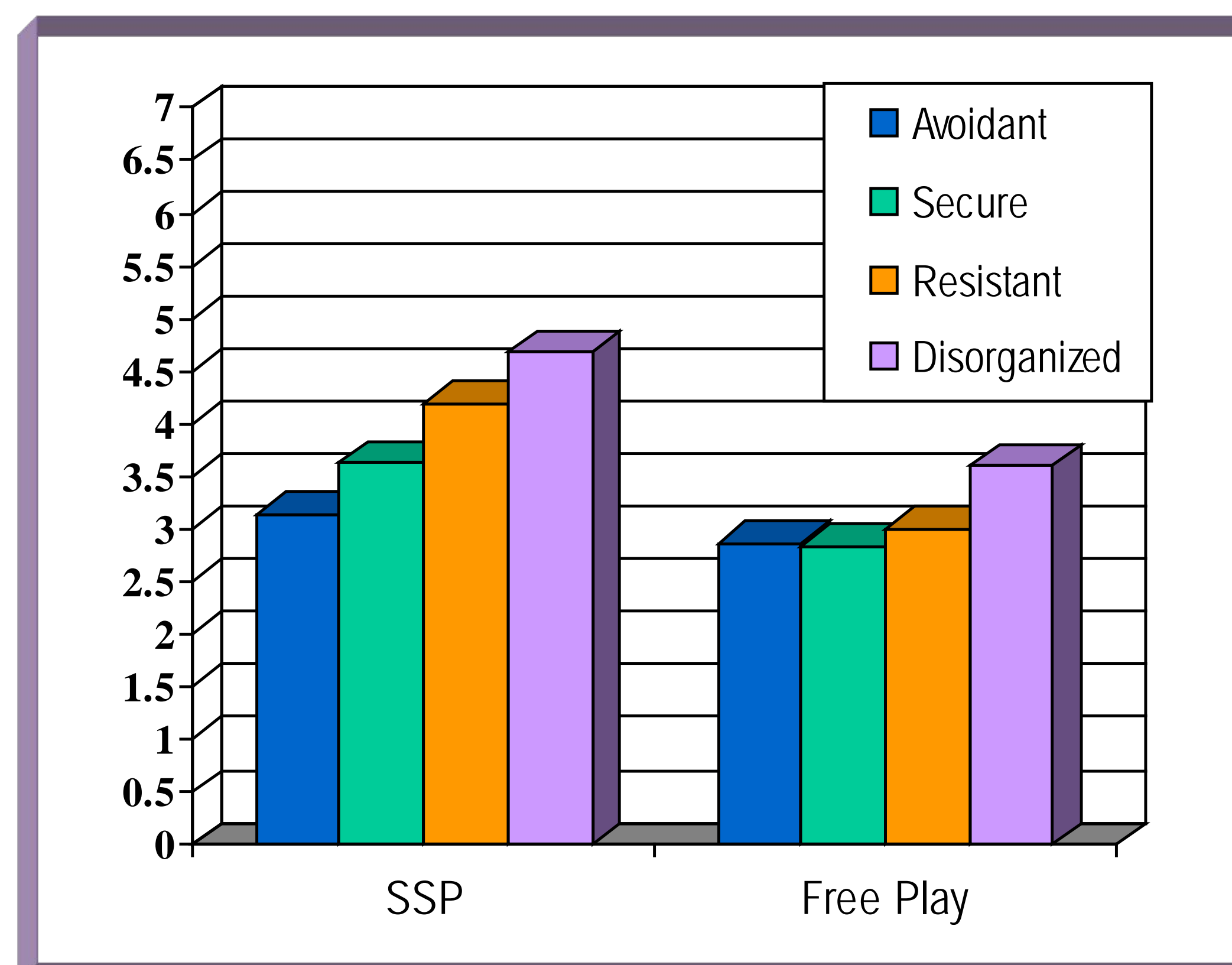
➤ ANOVA: level of disrupted communication was significantly associated with infant attachment ($F(3, 180) = 9.37, p < .001$).

➤ Post hoc test: mothers of infants with secure and avoidant attachment displayed significantly lower levels of disrupted communication than mothers of infants with resistant and disorganized attachment.

b. During the free-play

➤ ANOVA: level of disrupted communication was significantly associated with infant attachment ($F(3, 180) = 3.10, p < .05$).

➤ Post hoc tests: mothers of infants with secure attachment displayed significantly lower levels of disrupted behavior than mothers of infants with disorganized attachment.

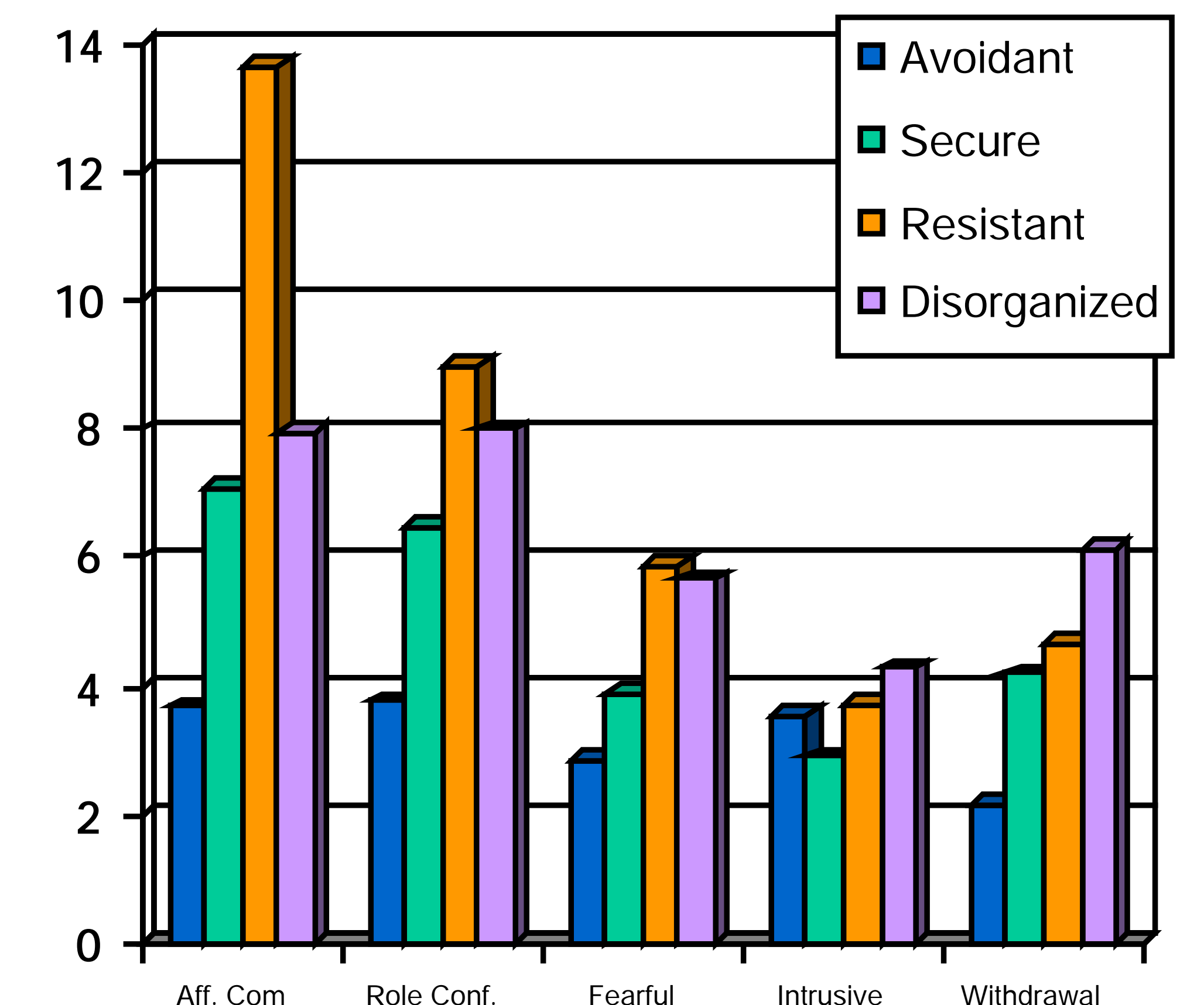


2) Frequency Counts for the Dimensions of the AMBIANCE

a. During the SSP

➤ A 4 (attachment) x 5 (AMBIANCE dimension) MANOVA produced a significant group effect ($F(5, 178) = 8.27, p < .001$).

➤ Post hoc tests: significant differences on affective communication errors, role boundary confusion, fearful/disorientation, and withdrawal.



b. During the free-play

➤ A 4 (attachment) x 5 (AMBIANCE dimension) MANOVA did not produce a significant group effect.

CONCLUSIONS

■ Results reveal that the AMBIANCE may lack discriminative validity in distinguishing between disorganized and resistant attachment relationships.

■ Results suggest that the interactional origins of disorganization may overlap, at least to some extent with those of insecure-organized patterns, particularly insecure-resistant attachment.

■ These results originate from a low-risk sample; therefore future research should examine the discriminative validity of the AMBIANCE in high-risk samples.