

*Book Review*

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**Eszter Hamori (2015): The Perspectives of Attachment Theory – From Classical to Today's [A kotodeselmelet perspektivai - A klasszikusoktól napjainkig]. Budapest: Animula.**

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### **When a practising professional writes about theory**

Eszter Hamori's book fills a gap. A book which is plain, easy to read and also scientific is hard to find in modern literature. This is no coincidence: the author has been studying her field for 15 years and published several papers and studies. Her book was just a curriculum before and became a scientific study later. About professionalism: the fact that Eszter Hamori is a clinical psychologist and a psychotherapist implies that she can support her extensive theoretical knowledge with a vast amount of practical experience. Therefore the book is recommended to professionals and laymen as well. Helpers and workers of the social sphere can benefit from it as they inevitably bond with the children they work with. Others experience attachment in every social group at work and in their private life so it's rewarding to get information about this topic for everyone.

#### ***1. The relevance of attachment theory for professionals of the social sphere***

The writing discusses the main points of the development of attachment theory in a logical and chronological order. The historical overview is relevant as the development of the theory is similar to the development of the individual. Not only age-specific characteristics but also personal ontogenesis must be considered in order to adjust the pedagogic method to the child's needs.

Moreover, children are connected to their town, to institutions, to classmates and teachers, not only to their nuclear families. These factors can help or ruin the children's educational performance depending on the quality of internalization: depending whether the social norms were fully or partially internalized, what attitudes were

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connected to them and whether they were generalized or not. The individual's norms can often dissolve and become fluid (in a way that Le Bon described concerning crowd psychology) in a community which also infers moral plasticity. If a child is insecurely attached to his parents and this becomes his fundamental schema then this child could easily look for a surrogate in a community to satisfy this basic need of attachment. There are two extreme attitudes towards teachers and education: emotional or even attachment difficulties can cause resistance in the child or the extreme drive to meet every requirement and the fear of failure can be caused by a perfectionist parental attitude. These behaviours must be attempted to be analysed within the classroom. However, it is reasonable to ask for professional help if psychosomatic symptoms appear beside the mentioned extreme behaviours.

This allows us to see how different scientists approached the same topic. The author stays objective and uses a scientific point of view as she mentions strengths and shortcomings of theories. Integration is one of the greatest qualities of this book: we can see the attempt to simplify the current approaches which are in need of constant synthesizing. As mentioned before, it is vital for helpers and educators to get acquainted with the concept of attachment. This knowledge provides a deeper understanding of the students/clients and helps to correctly interpret their behaviour. From a psychopathologic point of view, all this is relevant as children who have to grow up in difficult circumstances need at least one „significant other” in order to bear the early difficulties with a relative resilience. This significant other can be a warm-hearted grandparent, a protecting aunt or even a teacher who is in the child's life for at least 4 years. The adult provides protection towards the child with an internalized pattern which includes that there is no useful and practical learning without happiness and satisfying the clinging instinct (described by Imre Hermann). It is possible to provide knowledge and lexical information but this is only „book learning” which is available in a few minutes with the help of our electronic devices. However certain principals, behaviour patterns, morals and „life learning” can only be successfully adapted by a young adult only if a positive emotional bond is formed between him and the model.

## ***2. Bowlby's contribution to today's educational-psychological practice***

Hamori starts with analysing Bowlby's work. As he was the first to suggest that a child's emotional disorder can be caused by issues connected to the caregivers. Not only transgenerational influences were assumed by him (as early as the 1940s!) but he also emphasized that a child's emotional disease must never be separately examined, without considering the atmosphere the child's in. These beliefs were not only defying the era's psychoanalytical theories but made him a pioneer as they emphasized the importance of systems approach.

Bowlby realized that children do not only interact with their nuclear family and carry on attachment patterns from there but every human interaction (i. e. living with foster parents, being educated for years by teachers or a boss-employee relationship) shapes

the individual's own internal work model. This model creates internal mental representations based on the individual's experiences which store information of interaction observed during the development. These collected experiences can interfere, influence or exclude each other. However, a lot of negative impact can hardly or just partially be modified by a few positive ones.

Bowlby's vision had an outstanding role among the attachment theories and various others were based on it. One more important aspect is that one of the today's major areas of research, the trauma theory research has the following goal: how does being traumatized by an important person we're attached to appears as a physical symptom through the mechanism of dissociation. The foundation of all this (as to use Orwell's concept: the „doublethink”) can be found in a shredded work model regarding the relationship with a person i. e. in cases of abuse. In addition, Bowlby's findings influenced cognitive psychology also, as the negative filtering as a cognitive distortion is about a person's rigid conception (like a working model) and not perceiving or devolving the information which disproves the mentioned conception. Recognizing these mechanisms is inevitable for those who work with people every day.

### ***3. Ainsworth and the experiment of the strange situation***

The name Mary Ainsworth is not to be left out of Hamori's book. As a result of Ainsworth's studies and the experiment of the strange situation, attachment behavior became commensurable. The findings of this experiment proved Bowlby's theories and three attachment groups were invented (B: safely attached, A: anxious avoidant, C: anxious ambivalent). Later these were expanded by a significant fourth type due to Main: D: disorganised. It's not an overstatement that these four types and proving them with data are a milestone regarding educational and psychological studies. Not only several books, papers and quotes mark the importance of this theory but also the fact that it's widely known in other areas as well.

Although some tried to disprove these findings from a cultural aspect, they only partially succeeded. Despite the universality, it's a valid point of the criticism (or rather amendment) that in some countries or areas safe attachment can't always be considered as adaptive. In some situations (as living in a war zone or being permanently carried due to a wandering lifestyle) maintaining a constant dependent relationship with the nurturer helps surviving or assimilation.

Apart from these Ainsworth and her coworker's results became the standard which ensured a great base for developing this area. Therefore the next relevant theoretical stage was answering the following question: how stable is the predisposition of the attachment type detected at the age of 12-18 months in regards of the following stages of life.

#### **4. Attachment in early childhood**

Before answering the question above we need to make a side note. None of the relevant scientists stated that the quality of attachment types is unequivocally inheritable and as a result of that cannot be influenced or changed. It is emphasized that a child can be attached differently to his mother and to his father due to evolutionary effects. The mother was always a safe, secure and protecting base as the father was meant to be a base for exploring the world, offering possibilities to gain control. Attachment theorist proclaimed that a child is born with a need of attachment – which Imre Hermann called the clinging instinct and Harlow's experiments with Rhesus monkeys also demonstrated among primates – and that instinct demands an „object”. This is where the environment, the surroundings of the child become significant: if the „goodness of fit” is missing between the child's features such as temperament and the response of the environment than the early experiences will be negative. As a result, a mutual feedback can be detected between the mother and her infant: this finding influenced educational and psychological science radically, just think of Stern's infant competence studies.

A baby can detect if for various reasons the mother doesn't respond adequately to his negative emotional states (such as crying or boredom) or reacts unpredictably (random responses influenced by her own mood or doesn't respond) as early as a few months old. So the infant is forced to use primitive defence which is proven scientifically by a „face to face” experiment. In this situation mother and baby are face to face and after a few minutes of connecting a frustration appears: the mother is asked not to react to the child's feedback in any way for a few minutes. In this case, some infants don't panic – those who regularly receive positive feedback at home – as they know (and „knowing” is not an overstatement in this situation) that this is only temporary. But babies who often receive such unpleasant, unmanageable negative feedback under other circumstances as well start to ignore their mother after a few seconds. They don't look at her, don't try to make eye contact to find relief, sometimes they even forget to cry. It seems like these infants are in apathy, showing that they are „used to this, they acquiesce”. Obviously, these early childhood experiences are vital, just consider Erikson's psychosocial development theory and the relevant stage of this age: trust or mistrust. These babies will experience the latter and mistrust will become general and a part of their worldview.

Answering the question above, no child's attachment style can be detected separately on its own but if an infant experiences avoidant and traumatizing situations constantly during the early years these patterns can be dominant for him during his development and these will be fundamental regardless of the environmental inputs. As a result, these ingrained patterns can sometimes be modified only by long years of psychotherapy in adulthood.

### ***5. Perspectives on the future***

What's in store for the future? Hamori finishes her book with a brief exposition of a new and interesting field: the topic of adult attachment. Several attempts were made to discover this issue; however, Hazan and Shaver also Bartholomew and Horowitz made the soundest points. The essence of these models that the stimuli received in the sensitive period during childhood get imprinted (just like in the ethological experiments made by Lorenz) and can be very rigid and hard to change. More than one psychotherapeutic trend finds this fundamental, i. e. Young's schema therapy which is based on the early childhood experiences, organising them in schemas and clusters and analysing their influence on adult behaviour patterns.

Measuring adult attachment raises difficulties as even the trickiest self-filling questionnaires can bear the distortion of the observer and monitoring people in a „natural situation” is more challenging with adults than with children. In addition, a new and significant type of adult attachment studies appeared: the couple attachment theory. This type of attachment definitely differs from parental attachment patterns and it inspires scientists to approach the topic differently, from a new point of view. So experiments are continuous and interesting fields of research are reserved for the future. Some theorists like Mercer even suppose that the greatest question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is how the quality and quantity of human relationships alter in our changing world.