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Unifying Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology

A review of

Attachment and Sexuality

by Diana Diamond, Sidney J. Blatt, and Joseph D. Lichtenberg (Eds.)

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In this case you can judge the book by its cover. The essays are as beautiful in their own way as the Klimt paintings of mother and child and of lovers one sees before opening the book. The book tackles two of the most important topics in psychology and psychoanalysis. Unlike some psychoanalytic books that ignore research findings, this edited volume incorporates empirical data with clinical material.

Attachment and Sexuality comes at a much-needed time for psychoanalytic theory. In order for psychoanalysis to survive as an influential theory in the field of psychology, psychoanalytic theoreticians

must incorporate empirical data. The contributors pull together evidence from various sources, including neuroscience; social, cognitive, and developmental research; and clinical case material to understand the relationship between the two concepts. Before now, attachment researchers rarely addressed the role of sexuality in mental life. The book focuses on how the attachment system and the sexual system interact with each other. Nonpsychoanalysts may be surprised to learn that, at the outset, attachment theory was considered by Anna Freud and other classical analysts to be irrelevant to psychoanalysis because it does not deal with oedipal issues. Attachment motives are related to the infant's need to be protected from danger, whereas the sexual system has a different purpose—the passing on of genes. In Freudian theory, the infant's attachment to the mother was secondary to the role she played in reduction of the hunger drive.

This book handles one of the most dearly held, enduring, and influential beliefs of psychoanalysis—namely, the assertion that early parent–child relationships leave long-lasting traces on our adult lives. Specifically, our early experiences influence both our sexuality and our attachment systems. However, rather than emphasizing data that support the enduring impact of our early experiences on these systems, the book seems to take this premise as a given and focuses on how the attachment system and the sexual system interact with each other. The book is written by psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically oriented researchers. The intended audiences are psychoanalysts as well as academic, clinical, and developmental researchers who think from a psychodynamic perspective. The book would be a useful tool for any graduate-level developmental psychology class that appreciates psychoanalytic contributions to contemporary developmental psychology.

This ambitious undertaking is a valuable contribution to the field of psychology and psychoanalysis. Before this point, attachment researchers did not often directly address the role of sexuality in mental life. The various approaches are creative and thought-provoking, some more successful than others in their integrative attempts. The introduction by Diamond and Blatt explains that Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980, 1988) believed that the two systems, attachment and sexuality,

were “separate but overlapping behavioral systems” and that the “unifying thread that runs through this volume is the idea that the attachment system” (and the security of attachment) “forms a scaffold for the developmental unfolding of sexuality in all its manifestations” (p. 1). The introduction alerts the reader to think about the extent to which attachment theory can be extended to be a comprehensive theory of personality if it successfully integrates aspects of sexuality and aggression into the attachment system.

After the introduction, the chapter by Eagle is a tour de force. Eagle argues that there is “little direct good evidence for the existence of universal incestuous wishes” (p. 30). He states that Freud's argument for the existence of such wishes is akin to arguing that the near-universal taboo against suicide “constitutes adequate evidence for universal suicide wishes” (p. 3). He concludes by saying that the sexual attraction for novelty is balanced with feelings of comfort, safety, and familiarity. Eagle uses findings from neuroscience to argue convincingly that the attachment and sexual systems are physically, functionally, and psychologically distinct systems in men. He says that his formulations are more applicable to men and that a separate chapter would be required to address female sexuality.

Subsequent chapters counter Eagle's provocative separate system argument compellingly. For example Weinstein asserts the more integrative position, suggesting that “both infantile sexuality and the attachment system can be understand as attempts to regulate and pattern the excitements and needs of the body” (p. 112), the underlying inference being that they are not actually separate systems, nor do they serve separate functions. Furthermore, Weinstein holds that reducing psychology to physiology ignores the realms of fantasy and cognition, which are crucial for a practical and clinical understanding of the nature of attachment and sexuality.

In addition to covering theoretical debates (e.g., Eagle and Weinstein), this book contains chapters that provide interesting case studies in order to demonstrate that attachment research and Freudian constructs about sexuality can be integrated to improve therapeutic outcomes. These chapters, along with that by Diamond and Yeoman, demonstrate the rich clinical information revealed by the adult

attachment interview (AAI). Most psychoanalysts who get a thorough history of relationships in the tradition of Sullivan's (1954) detailed inquiry are likely getting this information already, however. Hopefully, other clinicians will see the value of such knowledge from these chapters.

In addition to case studies, this book contains systematic research on psychotherapy outcome that combines attachment research and psychodynamic theory. Diamond and Yeoman collected data from the patient–therapist adult attachment interview (PT-AAI) over a one-year period on patients with a borderline personality disorder diagnosis who were undergoing transference-focused psychotherapy (TFP). Interestingly, the authors found that whereas the interview was designed to assess mental states about attachment, patient and therapist narratives were rife with sexual and oedipal themes. This suggests that attachment and oedipal/sexual issues are intertwined in mental states about attachment. Furthermore, the authors found that these patients improved their capacity for mentalization—"the capacity to imagine and reflect on one's own and others' thoughts, desires, wishes, and motivations" (p. 201) after one year of TFP. This study, along with others they cite, offers interesting new directions for psychotherapy research comparing psychoanalytic with other types of therapy.

In the superb summary and discussion of the eight essays in the final chapter, Lichtenberg compares and contrasts the disparate ideas of the authors, so that the reader is left with a clear view of their similarities and differences, and then relates them to his own view of motivation. Lichtenberg provides his own cogent critiques of the chapters—many of which are worth repeating here. He notes that Eagle, Mikulincer, and Shaver have more positive views than what would be drawn from the picture of inevitable conflicts that Freudian theory suggests. Mikulincer and Shaver conclude (as does Eagle) that for securely attached people, conflict (related to oedipal issues) is not inevitable. Pointing out that fewer and fewer psychoanalysts are holding on to Freud's energic concept of libidinal and aggressive drives, Lichtenberg states that both Freudian theory and attachment theory contribute "to our understanding of love in its enigmatic myriad

forms" (p. 259). Lichtenberg's discussion of the eight essays is impressive, as is his reworking of psychoanalytic theory in general to fit with existing empirical as well as clinical knowledge.

The various approaches are creative and thought provoking. Particularly interesting are the attempts at integrating at different developmental stages—infancy, adolescence, and adulthood. This ambitious undertaking leaves one with a sense of hope that the extensive and deep clinical insights that psychoanalysts have gleaned from thousands of hours of listening to people speak about their irrational fantasies and behaviors—their ways of being unique and deviant from the prototypes of disorders based on a disease model of problems in living—can be incorporated into psychological science in a way that is enriched by clinical understandings.

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