

UPF Bonn: Presentation about positive social relationships

On June 3 2018, on the invitation of UPF-Bonn, **Hildegard Piepenburg** gave a presentation in their premises on the topic: **positive social relationships - harmonious cooperation - fulfilling love? Pressing contemporary problems as seen from insights from the attachment theory.**

The expectations of the around 40 participants were more than fulfilled, as evidenced by reactions such as: „The speaker broached many points which affected me and members of my family, without our being aware of them at the time.“ „The presentation was the best that I have heard in recent years.“ „It is encouraging that even mistakes made way back in the past can be corrected when our understanding is awakened and appropriate help is offered.“



Hildegard Piepenburg presented important defining understandings from the attachment theory, which are often neglected in today's political and social scene. She was already a mother of four children when she began to study psychology and thus able to see the topic from a special viewpoint. She tackled the life and scientific work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (and others), who carried out landmark work in the last century at a time when there was little interest in the universities in man's emotional development (from birth and even before).

Mrs. Piepenburg spoke about the physical and emotional needs of (young) children, about the significance of reliable primary care-givers, the necessity of primary and secondary attachment figures, who ideally should provide the stable



sensitivity of a mother and the game-playing sensitivity of a father. Attachment has nothing to do with captivity or withdrawal of freedom. The English word 'attachment' rather means affection or dependency. This 'attachment' emanates from the child and not from the mother or father. The child needs a safe harbor from which he can fulfill his need for exploration, and to test the world and his own abilities. 'Parent schools', of which there are too few, empower parents with better capability to deal with their own self-development as well as that of their child.

The description of various forms of attachment models or types made the listeners aware of much which corresponded to their own experiences. The scientific studies carried out on Romanian orphans at the end of the Communist regime are especially shocking: children whose physical needs are taken care of but who receive no or little affection are severely damaged emotionally.

Amongst other key-phrases mentioned were: „dependency paradox“; education built on relationship; attachment comes before education; the brain as a biosocial organ; intelligence is inborn but must be developed; the attachment hormone oxytocin.

The audience were internally engaged with and concentrated seriously on Hildegard Piepenburg's presentation. Special mention must be made of her humorous incidental remarks - supported sometimes by short video clips - with which she repeatedly reached the hearts of her listeners with encouragement to deal well with the self and others.

In closing the speaker stressed that if love is to be fulfilling and successful, it cannot be seen as a single, separate emotion. Much more than that, it encompasses all the basic emotions of human life. It is based on attachment, exploration and care and naturally also contains will and reason.

Of course, a universal-one-cure-for-all can never be the answer in today's society with so many different family situations. But unilateral support for non-parental child care, starting with infants, and with it a tendency to „estrangement“ of children from their natural carers, may generate types of attachment which deter positive social relationships and fulfilling love, thus causing considerable problems for the individual and society. Mothers and fathers must be protected from financial disadvantage and have real choices in how their own children are cared for. Furthermore, they must receive more information through a wide range of information and varied opportunities to discuss the conditions and chances for a child to develop successfully.

Mrs. Piepenburg recommended several books including: „*Die erste Bindung. Wie Eltern die Entwicklung des kindlichen Gehirns prägen*“ (*the First Attachment – how parents can influence the development of the child's brain*), 2016, by Nicole Strüber (not available in English), and „*Love Sense – The Revolutionary Science of Romantic Relationships*“, 2013, by Sue Johnson.

(English-Catriona Valenta)