

## Hildegard Piepenburg at UPF Bonn, Germany: Positive Social Relationship

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Bonn, Germany -- Attachment, the deep emotional bond that underlies the parent-child relationship, was the topic of a talk organized by UPF.

Psychologist Hildegard Piepenburg gave a presentation in the UPF-Bonn offices on June 3, 2018, titled "Positive Social Relationship -- Harmonious Cooperation -- Fulfilling Love?" based on psychology's attachment theory.

Mrs. Piepenburg presented important defining realizations from attachment theory, which often are neglected in today's political and social scene.

She spoke about the physical and emotional needs of children, especially young children; the significance of reliable primary caregivers; and 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.

Mrs. Piepenburg already was a mother of four children when she began to study psychology and thus was able to see the topic from a special viewpoint. In her talk she tackled the life and scientific work of development psychologists 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 human emotional development (from birth and even before).

Attachment has nothing to do with captivity or the withdrawal of freedom, Mrs. Piepenburg said. 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 or she can fulfill the need for exploration, testing the world and his or her own abilities, she said. "Parenting schools," of which there are too few, empower parents with a greater ability to deal with their own self-development and the development of their child.

The description of various attachment models or types made the listeners aware of much that corresponded to their own experiences.

Mrs. Piepenburg referred to scientific studies of Romanian orphans at the end of the communist regime. The findings of these studies are especially shocking: Children whose physical needs are taken care of but who receive no or little affection are severely damaged emotionally.

The attendees were internally engaged with and concentrated seriously on Mrs. Piepenburg's presentation. Special mention must be made of her humorous incidental remarks -- supported sometimes by short video clips -- with which she reached the hearts of her listeners, encouraging them to deal well with the self and with 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 cure-all can never be the answer in today's society, with so many different family situations. But unilateral support for non-parental childcare, starting with infants, and with it a tendency toward "estrangement" of children from their natural carers, may generate types of attachment that deter positive social relationships and fulfilling love, thus causing considerable problems for the individual and society, Mrs. Piepenburg said.

Mothers and fathers must be protected from financial disadvantage and have real choices in how their own children are cared for, the speaker said. Furthermore, they must receive more information through a wide range of sources and varied opportunities to discuss the conditions and chances for a child to develop successfully.

The expectations of the approximately 40 participants were more than fulfilled, as evidenced by the reflections they wrote afterward, some of which are:

"The speaker broached many points that 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."

(Translated from German by Catriona Valenta.)