

Book Review for Morris Eagle's Attachment and Psychoanalysis: Theory, Research and Clinical Implications (Guilford Press, 2013)

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As recently as 2001, well known attachment theory researcher and author, Peter Fonagy, noted that there has been a tradition of “bad blood” between the disciplines of psychoanalysis and attachment theory. This unfortunate feud appears to stem back to at least the early 1960s and the now famous dismissal of John Bowlby’s emerging views about infant-caregiver attachment by Anna Freud. As a result, until comparatively recently there has been surprisingly little interaction between the psychoanalytic and attachment theory movements despite their shared interest in the influence of early relationships on both typical and atypical human development.

It is this divide that pre-eminent psychoanalytic researcher and scholar, Morris Eagle, attempts to bridge in his 2013 text, *Attachment and Psychoanalysis: Theory, Research and Clinical Implications*, published by Guilford Press. As both a counsellor with a keen interest in psychodynamic approaches to therapy, and an educational psychologist whose Master’s degree included a significant focus on attachment theory, I found myself approaching Eagle’s work with considerable interest.

The first two chapters, co-authored by attachment theory specialist, Everett Waters provided succinct and accessible overviews of the history of the relationship between the psychoanalytic and attachment theory schools and the core tenets of attachment theory respectively. By the time I was half way through the third chapter however, “Key Research Findings”, something was becoming abundantly clear: this was going to be no easy read, offering a simplistic rapprochement between psychoanalysis and attachment theory. Rather, Morris has produced a very-well researched and robust work that defies a simplistic reduction to a few readily digestible points. Although I have what I believe to be a reasonably well-informed appreciation of both psychoanalysis and attachment theory, I frequently found myself feeling out of depth as Eagle first mapped the divergences and then the similarities between the two schools.

Eagle’s unwillingness to treat the immense empirical and theoretical bases of either psychoanalysis or attachment theory simplistically, or to attempt to provide easy answers to difficult questions regarding the relationship between the two movements, is undoubtedly the book’s greatest strength.

For example, in chapter five, “Divergences between Attachment Theory and Early Psychoanalytic Theories”, Eagle openly confronts the seemingly irreconcilable differences between attachment theory and classic psychoanalysis in terms of their respective positioning as “two-person” and “one-person” psychologies, as well as their significantly different approaches to epistemology. Eagle then goes on in chapter six to identify greater potential possibilities for mutually beneficial interdisciplinary cooperation between attachment theory and more recent examples of psychodynamic approaches, including Kohutian self-psychology and Fairbairn’s object-relations school.

From there Eagle moves on in chapters seven to ten to discuss in turn four specific areas of shared interest between psychoanalysis and attachment theory: infantile sexuality, adult sexuality, aggression and psychopathology. Again Eagle identifies what often amount to apparently unbridgeable differences between the views of more traditional psychoanalysis and attachment theory in each of these areas, followed by an exploration of what he perceives to be the much richer possibilities for cross-fertilisation involving more recent psychodynamic perspectives.

In many ways, however, it was the 11th chapter of *Attachment and Psychoanalysis, Implications of Attachment Research and Theory for Clinical Interventions*, that was simultaneously the most anticipated and least satisfying of the whole book for me. As a counsellor with almost 20 years of clinical experience who has also recently completed postgraduate training in educational and developmental psychology, I was very keen to learn what Eagle had to say about the potential for attachment theory and research to inform my therapeutic practice. However, true to his strong commitment to not go beyond where the current research evidence allows, the author does not attempt to offer any more than introductory glimpses of what “attachment-informed” psychotherapy might look like. Although Eagle does acknowledge that the therapist may serve as a healthy attachment figure (i.e., a secure base and a safe haven) for his or her clients, and that attachment theory has the potential to “inform psychotherapy by alerting and sensitizing the therapist to certain central aspects of the patient’s life” (2013, p. 162), the reader is left with the clear understanding that the steadily growing interaction between the two movements has not yet reached a stage where attachment theory has significantly impacted the practice of psychodynamic psychotherapy.

How then would I assess *Attachment and Psychoanalysis* as a whole? As a psychologist who works extensively with children and young people I could not help but be impressed by Eagle’s ability to identify and explore both the considerable divergences and convergences between attachment theory and psychoanalysis in terms of their respective approaches to explaining both typical and atypical human development. For me this was, unquestionably, the book’s most significant contribution. As a counsellor, although I was disappointed that Eagle does not go further in his exploration of how attachment theory could potentially inform our practice as therapists, I could not help but respect his commitment to not posit suggestions that go beyond the research evidence. Perhaps, though, a section on areas that warrant further investigation in this very significant area of interdisciplinary dialogue would have enhanced the book’s overall appeal to practitioners.

Having said this Eagle has clearly produced a very well-researched, balanced, worthwhile and substantial text. *Attachment and Psychoanalysis* succeeds in its aim of beginning to bridge the divide between two important movements with a shared interest in the contribution of early relationships on human development, that for far too long have developed in parallel.

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