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BOOK REVIEW

Developments in Attachment Research, by Robbie Duschinsky, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025, 672 pp., £143/Open Access (Hardback), ISBN 9780192882158

This book represents the culmination of more than a decade of Robbie Duschinsky's sustained engagement with attachment as a scientific paradigm (preceded by his two other books *Cornerstones of Attachment Research* and *Mentalising and Epistemic Trust*). His thoroughgoing approach to scholarship is evident in the way he tracks not only the main lines of argumentation but also the points of dissent, the peripheral data, and the conceptual divergences that have emerged both within and at the margins of the field. Duschinsky is a master observer of the mechanisms that underlie the production of scientific claims—the internal tensions that drive the discipline forward, and the slippages that occur when ideas migrate into popular discourse or professional practice. One of the book's greatest strengths, therefore, lies in its clarifying power. Its integration of historical, sociological, and psychological perspectives allows readers to see the theory of attachment as a fascinating yet uneven territory—one that is best understood through a comprehensive and nuanced analysis.

As Duschinsky himself notes, the book invites readers to meet diversity and disagreement through a 'wild reading'—to register complexity, to trace connections at their own rhythm, and to make the work personally meaningful. In doing so, he models a scholarly attitude that values curiosity and self-reflection as much as theoretical precision. This reflective stance imbues the entire volume, offering practitioners and researchers alike not only a survey of the field but a template for how to think critically about it. It is worth noting that the book can be freely downloaded from the Oxford University Press website—an accessibility that many readers will value.

The opening chapter of *Developments in Attachment Research* revisits the foundational ideas of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, exploring how these were received—and sometimes contested—by the next generation of attachment scholars during the 1980s and 1990s. Duschinsky pays particular attention to those who, while deeply indebted to Bowlby and Ainsworth, also identified the limits of their formulations. He also discusses important tensions (with important implications for research as well as intervention). For instance, he outlines a central dilemma surrounding the concept of attachment *security* between Mary Main and Everett Waters. Main, drawing on a more psychoanalytic orientation, understood security in terms of 'states of mind with respect to attachment', assessed through the absence of distortions in autobiographical memory—as in the Adult Attachment Interview. Waters, contrastingly, argued that this focus shifted attention away from the core of attachment theory: the individual's expectations regarding the caregiver's availability as a safe haven and secure base. This divergence carries significant implications for psychosocial intervention: Main's view tends to orient practitioners towards enhancing narrative coherence, and reflective functioning, while Waters' approach emphasises enhancing real-time caregiving responsiveness and the individual's capacity to use relationships as sources of regulation and support.

The second chapter traces the groundbreaking contributions of Karlen Lyons-Ruth, situating her work within both her clinical practice and her enduring sensitivity to the complexities of attachment under conditions of risk. Duschinsky focuses on Lyons-Ruth's *Harvard Family Pathways Study*, one of the most influential longitudinal projects in the

history of attachment research. Drawing on the framework of developmental psychopathology, Lyons-Ruth investigated the origins and trajectories of mental distress as they arise within attachment relationships. Where earlier research tended to conceptualise trauma as acute, discrete, and verbally accessible, Lyons-Ruth revealed another dimension—chronic, procedural emotional injuries that occur when caregivers fail to provide regulatory responses, leaving the child alone with escalating and disorganising affect. Her clinical and theoretical insights, informed by her involvement with the Boston Change Process Study Group and intersubjective psychoanalysis, reframed our understanding of the pathways from relational disruption to psychopathology. Duschinsky captures this synthesis with remarkable clarity, showing how Lyons-Ruth combined clinical intuition, research rigour, and attention to both neuroendocrine and affective regulation to develop a nuanced account of adaptation under cumulative risk.

Chapter 3 turns to Jay Belsky and his decisive role in shaping the empirical and conceptual direction of attachment research from the 1980s onwards. Duschinsky traces how Belsky's early training under Urie Bronfenbrenner inspired an ecological understanding of attachment as embedded within family and social systems, and how Belsky's process model reframed parenting as a transactional process influenced by multiple contextual factors. Duschinsky's discussion of the *Pennsylvania Child and Family Development Project* and the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development* exemplifies his analytical precision. He documents how Belsky's inclusion of fathers, marital dynamics, and social support expanded the methodological horizons of attachment research, while also highlighting the field's enduring tension between ecological ambition and the neglect of structural and cultural determinants. His treatment of Belsky's later formulations, notably *psychosocial acceleration*, is both sympathetic and critical, recognising their theoretical ambition while questioning their tendency to link a diversity of attachment-relevant phenomena to evolutionary causes.

Chapter 4 offers a detailed portrait of the research trajectories of Marinus van IJzendoorn and Marian Bakermans-Kranenburg, whose work at the Leiden Centre for Child and Family Studies contributed, in highly important ways, to transforming attachment research into a generative, collaborative, and policy-relevant scientific endeavour. Duschinsky provides a nuanced reading of the Leiden group's methodological innovations—meta-analytic synthesis, cross-cultural research, and the development of brief attachment-based interventions using video-feedback. He clarifies how their empirical rigour and statistical sophistication helped consolidate attachment theory as a central paradigm in developmental science, while also exposing its internal tensions. The Leiden programme's emphasis on behavioural sensitivity, cross-national replication, and 'differential susceptibility' positioned it at the crossroads between biology, culture, and intervention.

In Duschinsky's reading, van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg emerge not simply as prolific scientists, but as figures emblematic of the discipline's ambitions and contradictions. The chapter illuminates how the work of attachment research, at its most powerful, intertwines biography, philosophy, and praxis in the pursuit of understanding human development.

Chapter 5 turns to Sheri Madigan and the emergence of a 'third generation' of attachment researchers. Duschinsky presents Madigan's trajectory as emblematic of the tensions and inheritances shaping contemporary developmental science—between the clinical sensitivity of Lyons-Ruth and the meta-analytic empiricism of van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg. Her work bridges these traditions with a distinctive focus on vulnerability, risk, and resilience, while also confronting the institutional and intellectual challenges of sustaining the attachment paradigm in an era increasingly defined by data aggregation and translational

outcomes. Madigan's meta-analyses on child maltreatment, intergenerational transmission of attachment (in)security, and the reliability of attachment assessments demonstrate a rigorous empirical approach that nonetheless resists determinism. By questioning the automatic use of self-reported adverse childhood experiences as screening tools and highlighting the role of current contextual factors such as poverty and social support, Madigan's work reinvestigates an ecological and ethically grounded dimension to attachment research. For practitioners, these insights underscore that vulnerability is relational and dynamic, not an intrinsic trait—a perspective that resonates deeply with the values of social work and clinical intervention.

I consider the great value of this volume to lie in its capacity to open up the field of attachment as a scientific discipline with a level of precision and transparency that has not been achieved before. As the author notes at the outset, the book works to *defamiliarise* the reader—to unsettle the myths, clichés, and oversimplifications that have accumulated over the years in teaching, research, publication, and in the translation of attachment concepts into professional and public discourse. It is, in this sense, a necessary book for exposing one of developmental psychology's most influential domains to fresh (intellectual) air, which is significant given it is a field that has far-reaching implications for our understanding of human development, psychopathology, trauma prevention, and psychological intervention.

From this extensive volume, practitioners can also draw important insights. I believe reading the book should strengthen their capacity to observe and interpret phenomena relevant to attachment that may have been marginalised or obscured in mainstream theory and its applications. Moreover, this work may enhance practitioners' ability to plan interventions that remain centred on what truly matters, and to navigate the relational dimensions of therapeutic work with greater depth and flexibility. Yet, as a professional reader, one must also acknowledge that this is a demanding text. It does not provide direct practical advice, and any such guidance must be distilled gradually by the reader through reflective engagement. Nonetheless, *Developments in Attachment Research* remains a source of genuine fascination and illumination—indispensable for theorists and researchers, and a significant secondary resource for educators and practitioners.

Notes on contributor

Carlos Pitillas (Madrid, 1982) holds a PhD in Psychology and works as a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Psychology and the University Institute for the Family at Comillas Pontifical University (Madrid, Spain), where he also directs the Master's Program in Contemporary Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. In addition, since 2006, Dr. Pitillas has maintained a private practice in individual psychotherapy with children, adolescents, and adults. Dr. Pitillas's teaching and research interests focus on early socioemotional development and attachment relationships, relational trauma and its intergenerational transmission, interpersonal psychoanalytic psychotherapy, family interventions in contexts of social exclusion, and the intersections between psychology and popular culture, with a particular emphasis on film. Since 2011, Dr. Pitillas has co-founded and coordinated the project *Primera Alianza: Mejorando los Vínculos Tempranos* (*First Alliance: Strengthening Early Attachment*), which aims to protect children and promote resilience through the reinforcement of early attachment relationships in vulnerable families. Several of these interests are reflected in Dr. Pitillas's scholarly and outreach work, which includes the books *Caminar sobre las huellas: Vínculos, trauma y desarrollo humano* (*Walking in the Footsteps: Attachment, Trauma, and Human Development*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2025), *El daño que se hereda: Comprender y abordar la transmisión intergeneracional del trauma* (*Inherited Wounds: Understanding and Addressing the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2021), as well as co-authored works such as *Aprender seguros: principios y estrategias para crear escuelas que cuidan* (*Learning Safely: Principles and Strategies for Creating Caring Schools*, Narcea, 2022), *Primera Alianza: mejorando los*

vínculos tempranos (*First Alliance: Strengthening Early Attachment*, Gedisa, 2018), and *The Psychodynamics of Trauma and Modern Horror Cinema: I Am What Haunts Me* (Routledge, 2025).

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