

## **ATTACHMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SYSTEMIC PARADIGMS: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the development of attachment within systemic paradigms, offering a multidisciplinary perspective on the complexity of attachment processes. While classical attachment theory focuses primarily on the relationship between child and caregiver, this article expands the understanding by including familial, social and cultural systems. Based on an extensive literature review that integrates studies from developmental psychology, family therapy and comparative cultural psychology, this paper highlights how systemic and cultural influences shape attachment styles and practices. The findings highlight the need to consider attachment theory within a broader social and cultural context and point to the importance of a multidisciplinary approach for a comprehensive understanding of human attachment processes. These findings offer important implications for research and practice by emphasising the complexity of factors that influence the development of attachment.*

**Keywords:** *Attachment Theory, Systemic Paradigms, Multidisciplinary Perspective, Cultural Influences, Family Structures*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Attachment theory, pioneered by John Bowlby in the late 1950s and early 1960s, has become a central concept in developmental psychology. Bowlby's postulate that the need for closeness to an attachment figure is a fundamental biological need that is crucial for survival and psychological development forms the basis of attachment theory (Bowlby 1991). The continuation and empirical underpinning of this theory by Mary Ainsworth, particularly through the development of the "Strange Situation" procedure, has contributed significantly to the understanding of different attachment styles (Ainsworth et al. 1979).

In recent decades, however, research has increasingly recognised the limitations of a purely dyadic perspective on attachment. The growing recognition of systemic and cultural factors shaping attachment development has necessitated an extension of classical attachment theory (Minuchin 2018). Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, which emphasises the multi-layered nature of environmental influences on human development, provides a framework for integrating these broader perspectives (Bronfenbrenner 1979). This model underscores the interaction between different environmental systems, from the immediate family to broader cultural and societal influences.

In addition, comparative cultural studies have shown that attachment patterns and practices can vary considerably depending on cultural norms and values (Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg 1988). These findings shed light on the variability of attachment processes and challenge the assumption of universal attachment patterns. Recognising this diversity requires a multidisciplinary approach that combines psychological, sociological, anthropological and cultural perspectives in order to paint a comprehensive picture of the factors that shape attachment relationships. The work of Patricia Crittenden (2013) and Hildenbrand (2014) makes a decisive contribution to this expansion. Crittenden (2013) develops the understanding of attachment theory further by emphasising the role of socio-economic factors, family structures and social support networks. Bruno Hildenbrand expands on attachment theory with his genogram work, which involves analysing three generations (Hildenbrand 2018). This approach enables a

deeper understanding of family decision-making processes and their influence on attachment patterns by reconstructing life practices individually and collectively across generations. Hildenbrand's methodology thus offers new insights into the complexity of attachment constructs within familial and socio-cultural contexts (Hildenbrand 2014).

This thesis aims to examine the concept of attachment within a systemic framework by looking at these multi-layered influences that go beyond the immediate relationship between child and caregiver. By integrating insights from different disciplines, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of attachment development that reflects the complexity of human relationships within a broader social and cultural context.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This thesis employs a comprehensive literature review. This method identifies the current state of knowledge, highlights research gaps, and proposes directions for future research. The primary aim of the thesis is to achieve a convergent synthesis of multidisciplinary perspectives on attachment theory. This systematic investigation was carried out with the aim of bringing together the interdisciplinary strands of research that deal with attachment theory in the context of systemic and cultural paradigms. The focus here was particularly on studies that deal explicitly with the interactions between systemic approaches and cultural factors influencing attachment processes. The methodological approach to identifying relevant literature included a targeted and structured search in leading academic databases. This search was guided by the use of specific key terms such as 'attachment', 'systemic theory', 'family structures' and 'cultural influences on attachment' to ensure that the studies searched were relevant in content and aligned with the specific questions posed in this article. The careful selection of literature included both classic works that laid the foundations of attachment theory and more recent research that explores innovative systemic and cultural perspectives on attachment phenomena.

## **RESULTS**

The integration of systemic perspectives into the study of attachment processes requires a detailed consideration of the multi-layered environmental factors that influence the development of attachments. Within this framework, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model offers a robust theoretical basis for understanding the intricate interactions between individuals and their environments. Bronfenbrenner's model articulates the existence of multiple interconnected system levels, ranging from direct interactions in the immediate environment to more abstract, overall societal influences. The microsystem includes immediate environments such as family and school, which are essential for the formation of emotional bonds (Berk 2003). The mesosystem refers to the interactions between these microsystems and their influence on attachment quality (Bronfenbrenner/Morris 2007). The exosystem, including parental working conditions and legal frameworks, has an indirect effect on development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2007). The macrosystem includes cultural norms that shape attachment practices (Keller 2022), while the chronosystem considers temporal changes and their effects (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2007). Applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to attachment theory provides a multidimensional understanding of how different levels of the environment, from family interaction to cultural norms, interact to reciprocally influence the development of attachment relationships.

In addition to Bronfenbrenner's systems model, comparative cultural studies also emphasise the importance of cultural influences on attachment patterns. The groundbreaking meta-analysis by Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988) marks a significant turning point in attachment research by revealing profound cross-cultural differences in the prevalence of attachment styles. Their systematic investigation of attachment behaviour in different cultural contexts makes it clear that cultural characteristics have a considerable influence on the development of attachment styles and patterns. The authors found that the distribution of secure, avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles differs significantly between cultures, indicating the formative role of cultural practices and social norms in the development of attachment relationships. These findings express the critical need to take cultural contexts into account when analysing attachment processes and point to the limitations of universal assumptions in attachment theory (Van

IJzendoorn/Kroonenberg 1988).

Since then, numerous studies have further differentiated and deepened the findings of Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg. In particular, the work of Keller (2022) has shown how culturally specific parenting practices, values and beliefs influence expectations of attachment relationships and actual attachment behaviour. Keller postulates that cultural contexts not only shape the interactions between parent and child, but also influence the interpretation and evaluation of attachment behaviour. For example, in some cultures, independence-promoting practices may prevail that favour the development of an avoidant attachment style, while in other cultures closer physical proximity and greater dependence are seen as an expression of secure attachment (Keller 2022).

Cultural variations in attachment expression and evaluation underscore the necessity of examining attachment processes within their specific cultural contexts. Instead, they require a differentiated approach that takes culturally specific practices, norms and values into account.

The consideration also includes sociological and anthropological perspectives by highlighting the role of social structures and institutions. For example, research shows that socio-economic factors, family structures and social support networks are important determinants of the quality and security of attachment relationships (Crittenden 2013). Patricia Crittenden's work in the field of attachment theory is well known for her developments and adaptations of the original attachment model, particularly through her dynamic maturational model (DMM) of attachment and adjustment. Crittenden's research emphasises how individuals from early childhood develop adaptive strategies to cope with stress and danger in their environment, and how these strategies are influenced by socioeconomic conditions, family structures and the availability of social support networks (Crittenden 2013). Crittenden's work expands the understanding of how children and adults process and respond to information in dangerous or unsafe situations, and how these processing and response patterns develop into complex behavioural strategies over time. These strategies can affect the quality and security of attachment relationships by impacting how individuals regulate closeness and distance in relationships.

In addition, Crittenden (2013) stresses the importance of the socio-cultural context for the development of attachment strategies. She argues that the cultural and social environment in which an individual grows up has a decisive influence on which types of adaptive strategies are considered acceptable or useful (cf. Crittenden 2013). This implies that socioeconomic factors and family structures not only affect the availability of attachment figures and the quality of attachment, but also the types of adaptive strategies that individuals develop to deal with stress and uncertainty.

The sociological perspective on attachment emphasises the role of social structures and institutions. It examines how social agreements and conflicts, such as the distribution of resources and opportunities, influence the living conditions and experiences of individuals (Thompson 2016). Sociological approaches, such as functionalism and Marxism, offer different perspectives on these dynamics and their impact on attachment relationships.

The renowned clinical sociologist Bruno Hildenbrand (2014) also sets himself apart from conventional approaches, particularly in systemic (family) therapy, in three key respects with his modern concept of genogram work. Firstly, the nuclear family and its internal relationship triangles are regarded as the central unit of analysis. Secondly, Hildenbrand emphasises the consideration of family structures by analysing 'objective' data such as birth, marriage and occupational data over at least three generations. Thirdly, illness is seen as an attempt to solve problems in crisis situations, which makes it necessary to analyse the genogram data sequentially. For almost two decades, the author has been intensively involved with genogram work in order to explore its fundamentals in greater depth than before. In 2018, this led to the publication of a book that presents advanced techniques of genogram work and emphasises a view of humanity that highlights the individual's creative possibilities within a given framework (Hildenbrand 2018). In this way, genogram work implies attachment patterns, as it offers insights into the emergence and transmission of attachment behaviour through the in-depth analysis of family histories and structures across generations. By recognising recurring patterns in family relationships, behaviour and attachment styles that are deeply rooted in the family history become visible, which could contribute to the clarification and possible treatment of attachment problems.

## CONCLUSION

The extensive study of attachment theory, initiated by John Bowlby's and Mary Ainsworth's groundbreaking work (Ainsworth et al. 1979; Bowlby 1991) has been significantly expanded through the integration of systemic and cultural perspectives, illustrating the complexity of attachment development beyond the dyadic relationship between child and caregiver. By applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner 1979), it becomes clear how the fusion of different environmental levels, from intimate family interactions to far-reaching cultural influences, characterises the shaping of attachment relationships. The meta-analysis by Van IJzendoorn and Kroonenberg (1988), complemented by Keller's comparative cultural work (Keller 2022), emphasises the need to consider the diverse cultural influences and their effects on attachment styles, which calls into question the universal validity of attachment patterns. This provides fresh insights into the ongoing debate on independence and interdependence within modern societies, revealing the profound impact of cultural values and practices on individual and collective perceptions of autonomy and connectedness (Johnson 2021). The inclusion of sociological and anthropological insights, as presented in the work of Crittenden (Crittenden 2013) and Hildenbrand (2018), further emphasises the role of social structures and belief systems in shaping attachment relationships, creating a multifaceted picture of the determinants of attachment, while also providing a valuable tool for holistic consideration with the work of Hildenbrand (2014/2018). In view of this multidisciplinary perspective, it is clear that future research should shed further light on the dynamic interactions between the various levels of influence in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the processes of attachment development. It is also important to explore the effects of modern developments such as digitalisation on attachment relationships. In practical terms, this comprehensive analysis emphasises the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in educational and therapeutic contexts in order to meet the diverse needs of individuals in a global context and thus promote the well-being of families worldwide.

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## **ПРИВЪРЗАНОСТ В КОНТЕКСТА НА СИСТЕМНИТЕ ПАРАДИГМИ: МУЛТИДИСЦИПЛИНАРНА ПЕРСПЕКТИВА**

***Резюме:** Тази статия разглежда развитието на привързаността в рамките на системните парадигми, като предлага мултидисциплинарна перспектива за сложността на процесите на привързаност. Докато класическата теория на привързаността се фокусира предимно върху връзката между детето и грижещия се за него, тази статия разширява разбирането, като включва семейните, социалните и културните системи. Въз основа на обширен литературен преглед, който интегрира изследвания от психологията на развитието, семейната терапия и сравнителната културна психология, тази статия подчертава как системните и културните влияния оформят стиловете и практиките на привързаност. Констатациите подчертават необходимостта от разглеждане на теорията за привързаността в по-широк социален и културен контекст и посочват значението на мултидисциплинарния подход за цялостно разбиране на процесите на човешката привързаност. Тези констатации предлагат важни последици за научните изследвания и практиката, като подчертават сложността на факторите, които влияят върху развитието на привързаността.*

***Ключови думи:** Теория на привързаността, системни парадигми, мултидисциплинарна перспектива, културни влияния, семейни структури*

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