

**Cultural Attachment Theory:  
How children form relationships in three cultural  
contexts in Costa Rica**

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## Abstract

Attachment theory originates in a unique historical and cultural context, yet its assumptions are considered universal. A Euro-American middle-class pattern of caregiving and early relationship formation has quickly been regarded the single pathway for optimal development and the only conceptual lens to study relationships worldwide, increasingly being applied in non-Western contexts and to cultural minorities in Western immigration states. The purpose of this study is to revise and expand the monocultural assumptions of attachment theory by examining early attachment development in three cultural contexts in Costa Rica: Urban middle-class San José, rural Guanacaste, and rural indigenous Bribri Talamanca. Using an ethnographic and culture-conscious approach, semi-structured caregiver interviews, ethnographic observations, and recording of videos and photographs were conducted with 30 families per sample with a child between 6 and 28 months of age. Results revealed profound differences in the size of caregiver and attachment networks, the roles and conceptions of caregivers and attachment figures, type and context of caregiver-infant interactions, and the ways and modes through which children form attachments. While the San José sample resembled Western middle-class families in their caregiving networks and beliefs, children in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca showed larger networks, however differently composed. In both rural samples, the mother did not necessarily function as the primary caregiver, and children learned to form close relationships with multiple caregivers and the extended family from an early age. Further, there is evidence that not only sensitive caregiving is the main entry to attachment, but primary care, such as feeding, can also serve as an important attachment mechanism. These findings suggest that there is more variety in attachment patterns than attachment theory implies and promotes. It is argued that attachment has not only the function of providing security, but also serves as a platform for cultural learning and is therefore culturally specific in nature. The study highlights the need for culturally conscious attachment research and a shift in practice toward more inclusive and less normative approaches to cultural differences in attachment development and caregiving.

## Zusammenfassung

Die Bindungstheorie hat ihren Ursprung in einem einzigartigen historischen und kulturellen Kontext, jedoch gelten ihre Annahmen als universell. Ein euroamerikanisches Mittelklassenmuster der Kinderbetreuung und des frühen Beziehungsaufbaus ist mittlerweile scheinbar der einzige optimale Entwicklungspfad und das einzige konzeptuelle Modell zur Untersuchung von Beziehungen weltweit. So wird es zunehmend auch in nichtwestlichen Kontexten und bei kulturellen Minderheiten in westlichen Einwanderungsstaaten angewendet. Ziel dieser Studie ist es, die monokulturellen Annahmen der Bindungstheorie zu überprüfen und die Theorie zu erweitern, indem die frühe Bindungsentwicklung in drei kulturellen Kontexten in Costa Rica untersucht wird: Mittelklassefamilien in San José, ländlich lebende Familien in Guanacaste und ländlich lebende indigene Familien in Bribri Talamanca. Mit einem ethnografischen, kultur-bewussten Ansatz wurden halbstrukturierte Interviews, ethnografische Beobachtungen und Video- und Fotoaufnahmen mit 30 Familien pro Stichprobe durchgeführt, deren Kinder zwischen 6 und 28 Monaten alt waren. Die Ergebnisse zeigten grundlegende Unterschiede in der Größe der Betreuungs- und Bindungsnetzwerke, den Rollen und Überzeugungen der Bezugspersonen der Kinder, der Art und dem Kontext der Interaktionen zwischen Bezugspersonen und Kindern sowie der Art und Weise, wie Kinder Bindungen aufbauen. Während Familien in San José in ihren Betreuungsnetzwerken und Überzeugungen westlichen Mittelklassefamilien ähnelten, wiesen die Kinder in Guanacaste und Bribri Talamanca größere, jeweils unterschiedlich zusammengesetzte Netzwerke auf. In beiden ländlichen Stichproben war die Mutter nicht zwingend Hauptbezugsperson und die Kinder lernten früh, enge Beziehungen zu mehreren Personen und zur Großfamilie aufzubauen. Außerdem scheint nicht nur das einfühlsame Eingehen auf kindliche Signale (sensitive parenting) der Ausgangspunkt für Bindung zu sein, sondern auch die Versorgung primärer Bedürfnisse, wie z. B. Füttern. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass es eine größere Vielfalt an Bindungsmustern gibt, als die Bindungstheorie impliziert und propagiert. Es wird argumentiert, dass Bindung nicht nur die Funktion hat, Sicherheit zu bieten, sondern auch als Plattform für kulturelles Lernen dient und daher von Grund auf kulturspezifisch ist. Die Studie unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit einer kultursensiblen Forschung und eines Wandels in der Praxis hin zu

einem inklusiveren und weniger normativen Umgang mit kulturellen Unterschieden in der Bindungsentwicklung und Versorgung von Kindern.

## Resumen

La teoría del apego tiene sus raíces en un contexto histórico y cultural único; sin embargo, sus principios se consideran universales. El modelo euroamericano de clase media de cuidado y desarrollo de relaciones tempranas ha sido adoptado rápidamente como la única vía de desarrollo óptimo y la única perspectiva conceptual aceptada para su estudio alrededor del mundo, extendiéndose paulatinamente tanto al trabajo en contextos no occidentales, como en la investigación de minorías culturales con trasfondo migratorio que residen en países occidentales. El propósito de este estudio es revisar y ampliar los supuestos monoculturales de la teoría del apego a través del escrutinio del desarrollo del apego en tres contextos culturales de Costa Rica: familias de clase media urbanas residentes de la capital San José, familias rurales de la provincia de Guanacaste y familias de la reserva indígena Bribri en Talamanca. Utilizando un enfoque etnográfico y culturalmente consciente, se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas con las personas cuidadoras, observaciones etnográficas y grabación de vídeos y fotografías con 90 familias (30 familias por muestra) niños o niñas de entre 6 y 28 meses de edad. Los resultados revelaron profundas diferencias en el tamaño de las redes de personas cuidadoras y de apego, los roles y las concepciones de las personas cuidadoras y de las figuras de apego, el tipo y el contexto de las interacciones entre personas cuidadoras y los niños y niñas, y las formas y los modos a través de los cuales los niños y niñas desarrollan apegos. Mientras que la muestra de San José se parecía a las familias de clase media occidental en sus redes de cuidado y creencias, los niños y niñas de Guanacaste y Bribri mostraban redes más amplias, aunque de composición diferente. En ambas muestras rurales, la madre no funcionaba necesariamente como cuidadora principal, y los niños y niñas formaban relaciones estrechas con múltiples personas y con la familia extensa desde una edad temprana. Además, parece que no sólo el “cuidado sensible” (sensitive parenting) es la base principal para el apego, sino que el cuidado primario, como la alimentación, también puede servir como un importante mecanismo de apego. Estos resultados sugieren que hay más variedad en los modelos de apego de lo que implica y promueve la teoría del apego. Se argumenta que el apego no sólo tiene la función de dar seguridad, sino que también sirve de plataforma para el aprendizaje cultural y, por tanto, es culturalmente específico por naturaleza. El estudio destaca la necesidad de una

investigación culturalmente consciente sobre el apego y un cambio en la práctica hacia enfoques más inclusivos y menos normativos de las diferencias culturales en el desarrollo del apego y el cuidado.

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# CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It has become evident in recent years that culture is a core dimension that cannot be neglected in the study of child development. However, there is still a lack of acknowledging culture adequately, such as the systematic inclusion and investigation in developmental studies and psychological research in general. Using attachment theory as an example, I will illustrate the crucial influence of cultural context on child development and how to capture children's relationships in a culturally conscious and appropriate way.

Attachment, one of the most prominent areas in child development for the past decades, is regarded mainly with a universalistic stance without taking the context into account, in which the children live. In this study, I will argue that attachment theory represents the lived realities and norms of only a small portion of the world's population, namely Western middle-class<sup>1</sup> families, yet makes claims about a singular optimal form of how children worldwide should develop relationships. Given the inherent ethnocentric bias and the judgmental evaluation of many attachment patterns and parenting strategies, the universal appraisal of attachment theory in its current form is not only unfounded and invalid, but unethical. To date, there is no integrated and among attachment researchers acknowledged theoretical framework on attachment development that adequately accounts for the dimension of culture and is able to explain inter- and intracultural variation of attachment. Thus, important questions about the formation of relationships in early childhood under different ecocultural conditions remain unanswered.

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<sup>1</sup> With Western middle class I refer to highly formally educated, middle- to high-class, (post-) industrialized populations living in typically as Western categorized countries (USA, Canada, West Europe, Australia, New Zealand).

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A cooperation between the University of Osnabrück and the Universidad de Costa Rica provided the opportunity to investigate the importance of the cultural context for attachment development in more detail and thus to contribute to answering some of the unanswered questions. Costa Rica has proven to be a particularly suitable country for this research because of the variety of cultural contexts within a relatively small area, with marked differences in socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, and childcare arrangements. I will show how these different contextual conditions can facilitate different parental strategies, socialization goals, and attachment patterns, and thus have the potential to expand and redefine attachment theory.

In this dissertation, I will first present the historical perspective and main assumptions of attachment theory and call into question its monocultural definitions implicit in most mainstream attachment research and application. I will then describe the project in Costa Rica in which the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted and what research questions it was designed to answer. The main body of this dissertation consists of four published empirical articles, each addressing different aspects of the relationship between caregivers and children in the cultural contexts studied. In the discussion, I will critically reflect on the contribution of the findings to the further development of attachment theory, as well as discuss their practical implications and limitations.

### **1.1 Attachment theory**

Attachment theory is one of the most influential theories of child development for more than 50 years. Focusing on the importance of enduring relationships in early childhood for a healthy social-emotional development, attachment theory is applied in numerous professional fields worldwide, including psychological research as well as real-

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life applications like public policy, family court decisions, therapy, childcare advice, and institutional childcare practices (Bretherton, 1992; Keller, 2021; Morelli et al., 2017; Rosabal-Coto et al., 2017). To better understand the formation of the theory and its enormous impact until today, we have to take a closer look at the historical context in which it originated.

### **1.1.1 Historical formation**

The British psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist John Bowlby began formulating the antecedents of attachment theory in the 1940s. According to the gender roles of that time, raising children was women's domain, while men were responsible for earning a living (Georgas, 2006). During the turmoil of war, it was not unusual that children were separated from their families for long periods of time, whether through evacuations of children from cities to the countryside, residential nurseries for children who had lost their parents, or strict visiting rules in hospitals to prevent infection, with parents allowed to see their children only once a week or less (Van der Horst, 2011).

In this context, Bowlby noted that especially young children under the age of three can suffer lasting psychological damage from maternal separations. He was not convinced with psychoanalytic attempts to explain the child's need for proximity to the mother, which attributed the child's motivation for attachment to the gratification of hunger or libidinal drives. Instead, he argued that the mother-infant bond is a psychological need independent of the satisfaction of primary needs (e.g., hunger, suckling), shaped by children's experiences in their social and socioeconomic environment (Bowlby, 1958b). Bowlby's views were revolutionary in that he shifted the focus of attachment development from internal drives, and thus psychoanalytic theory, to external environmental factors (Van der Horst, 2011).

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In search of a theoretical foundation, Bowlby increasingly turned to ethology, arguing that primates have an inborn need to establish close, long-lasting relationships to primary caregivers during the first year of life to ensure survival. Therefore, they are equipped with an infant's attachment system and a complementary caregiving system (Bowlby, 1961; Vicedo, 2017). Renowned ethologists such as Harlow (1961) and Hinde (1969) provided him with empirical evidence from animal experiments to support his new theoretical framework. Vicedo (2013) later argued that this "biologization" of attachment based on animal studies was critical to the success of attachment theory, arguing that attachment is all natural and hardwired. In any case, with the growing recognition of attachment theory, Bowlby was able to improve the lives of many children in hospitals and other public institutions by moving professionals from focusing only on children's physical well-being to taking seriously their psychological well-being and need for stable relationships (Bowlby, 1958b; Bretherton, 1992).

The Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth contributed immensely to the applicability and popularity of the theory with her methodological assessment of attachment (Bretherton, 1992; Van der Horst, 2011; Vicedo, 2017). While Bowlby was primarily concerned with long-lasting separations between mother and child, Ainsworth developed the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) to examine brief maternal separations in a standardized laboratory setting. Based on these studies, she argued that there are interindividual differences regarding secure and insecure attachment qualities and that maternal sensitivity, i.e., responding promptly and adequately to infant signals, is the determining factor for secure attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

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### 1.1.2 Main assumptions

Since the first formulation of attachment theory, the following four central assumptions have been established with the claim of universal validity (Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016; Van Ijzendoorn, 1990; Van Ijzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008).

Based on the evolutionary framework (Bowlby, 1961), the *universality assumption* states that all children develop attachments to at least one close caregiver, provided they are given the opportunity and do not suffer severe neurophysiological impairments (Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016). While Bowlby (1958, 1969) argued the infant's main attachment relationship is instinctually centered on a single figure, usually the biological mother, attachment researchers nowadays acknowledge the existence of multiple attachment figures (e.g., Forslund et al., 2022). However, attachments are seen as hierarchically structured, typically with the mother as primary attachment figure, supplemented by the care of fathers and other caregivers (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017).

The *normativity assumption* states that the majority of children are securely attached, based on the distribution of securely and insecurely attached children in Ainsworth's original study in Baltimore (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Secure attachment is assumed the "most adapted" attachment quality, at least as long as the child's health and safety are not fundamentally threatened by harsh living conditions. Accordingly, only in environments characterized by poverty, illness, or other socioeconomic stressors can it be more adaptive to develop an insecure attachment style (Belsky et al., 1991).

The *sensitivity assumption* states that the attachment quality is determined by the child's interactional experiences with caregivers, namely the sensitivity with which

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caregivers respond to infant signals. If caregivers consistently respond to infant signals promptly and adequately, prioritize their children's needs over their own, and maintain a positive emotional tone in interactions (i.e., high sensitivity), children are more likely to develop secure attachments. If caregivers are guided by their own needs and desires, misinterpret or fail to respond (promptly) to infant signals, or display controlling behavior toward the infant instead of letting him or her take the lead (i.e., low sensitivity), children are more likely to develop insecure attachments (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mesman et al., 2016; Van Ijzendoorn, 1990).

Based on the assumption that secure attachments are most adaptive to the child's environment under normal circumstances (normativity assumption), the *competence assumption* states that secure attachments lead to a variety of positive developmental outcomes in later childhood (Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016). For example, secure attachment is associated with academic success (Jacobsen & Hofmann, 1997), social skills (Yuniar, 2021), earlier language development (Van Ijzendoorn et al., 1995), and emotion competence (Colle & Del Giudice, 2011).

### **1.1.3 Monocultural definition of attachment**

Attachment theory originated in a particular historical and sociocultural context, namely the Euro-American and British middle class of the second half of the twentieth century. The theory's fundamental assumptions are thus linked to the living conditions and implicit values of this context. These include nuclear families with few children living in a democratic and industrialized society (Keller & Kärtner, 2013; Lancy, 2015). Parents already had a comparatively high level of formal education. The normative childcare arrangements consisted of stay-at-home mothers as primary caregivers who are fully



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dedicated to ensuring that children's needs take precedence in all aspects of family life (Choate et al., 2020; Keller & Chaudhary, 2017; Quinn & Mageo, 2013a; Ribbens McCarthy & Gillies, 2018). Moreover, childhood was and still is generally considered a protected time free of worries and responsibilities (Lancy, 2015), in which children are encouraged to learn central developmental goals like autonomy and self-determination (Keller & Kärtner, 2013).

Before formulating attachment theory, Bowlby did not review cross-cultural data, yet he postulated universal validity (Vicedo, 2017). After being increasingly criticized by anthropologists and cultural psychologists who pointed out that findings from other cultural contexts were not always compatible with attachment theory (e.g., Harwood et al., 1995; Lamb et al., 1984; Mead, 1954, 1961; Rothbaum et al., 2000), Bowlby has not deviated from his assumptions or validated the applicability in other contexts, and neither have most attachment researchers to this day (Choate et al., 2020; Keller, 2021; Vicedo, 2013; White et al., 2020). This ethnocentric and class-centric bias, which characterizes many areas of psychological research, got later more attention from a provocative article by Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010), demonstrating that 96% of psychological studies are conducted in so-called WEIRD contexts (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) and often claim universal validity, even though these contexts only account for 12% of the world's population.

From its beginning, psychological research has had the goal of discovering universals in human experience and behavior. Cross-cultural research has set itself the task of testing the differences and similarities between people from different cultures (Berry et al., 2011). In doing so, cross-cultural psychology has similar universalistic and

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positivistic basic assumptions as psychology in general, such as the assumption that basic psychological functions and processes are the same in all humans and that there is an objective truth about what these processes look like (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). Culture is considered an external factor that affects human experience and behavior (Berry et al., 2011).

Cultural psychology, on the other hand, takes a relativistic approach: It assumes that the psychological processes themselves are culture specific. Culture is understood not as something external, but as something internal, which cannot be separated from the human psyche. This goes hand in hand with the assumption that there is no objective truth, but that research and knowledge are always influenced by values and developed from a certain perspective, which has to be carefully considered in the research process (Berry et al., 2011; Greenfield, 1997).

The comparatively few psychological developmental studies conducted outside of WEIRD contexts, including attachment studies, can largely be categorized under the cross-cultural approach. For example, it will become clear in the following sections that the goal of attachment theory from the beginning has been to prove that attachment (as discovered and described in Europe and the U.S.) is an innate human phenomenon and that cultural differences exist only in the different quantitative distribution of universal attachment types (Vicedo, 2013). Cultural psychologists and anthropologists criticize mainstream attachment research for taking an ethnocentric approach and argue that there are fundamental *qualitative* differences in how children from different cultural groups form attachment relationships (e.g., Keller, 2021; Otto & Keller, 2014; Quinn & Mageo, 2013a; Rothbaum et al., 2000).

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Identifying with the cultural psychology approach, I will outline below the main issues in which attachment theory is compromised by ethnocentric and class-centric bias, and how studying attachment in diverse sociocultural contexts has the potential to extend and refine the theory.

**I. The centrality of the mother as primary attachment figure.** According to the original formulation of attachment theory, the infant's main attachment relationship is instinctually centered on a single figure, usually the biological mother. This postulated exclusivity of dyadic relationships was described as the child's need for monotropy, namely the attachment to a single person (Bowlby, 1958b). Although caregiving was never claimed to be restricted to the mother, she was considered biologically prepared and thus the most adequate to care for the child (in normal circumstances), qualifying the care of nonmaternal caregivers as supplementary (Ainsworth, 1962; Bowlby, 1969). Concerning the father's involvement in childcare, Bowlby explained that "little will be said of the father-child relation; his value as the economic and emotional support of the mother will be assumed" (Bowlby, 1953, p. 15). Consequently, Bowlby was against daycare and urged mothers not to engage in work outside the home during the child's first three years, arguing that "this 'clinging stage' should be respected whenever possible. By all means let a mother take a half-day off, or even an occasional whole day, but anything longer needs careful management" (Bowlby, 1958a, p. 13). In support of his argument, Bowlby included results of studies with rhesus monkeys. In this species of monkey, the mother serves as main caregiver and the child is almost constantly clinging to her (Hinde, 1969). However, the more than 300 primate species show a wide range of different caregiving systems, many of which include shared caregiving. As Suomi (2008, p. 177)

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pointed out: “One wonders how Bowlby’s attachment theory would have looked like if Hinde had been studying capuchin rather than rhesus monkeys!”

Today, it is widely acknowledged among attachment researchers that children form attachments to multiple caregivers (Forslund et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2022; Van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2021). Indeed, research in different contexts has shown that, from a global perspective, the conception of the mother as essential for attachment development is the exception rather than the norm (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). It has been convincingly argued that growing up in small, nuclear families with all-round attention in dyadic relationships is a privilege of WEIRD contexts (Henrich et al., 2010) and that if only mothers without the help of other caregivers would have been responsible for child rearing, the human population would most likely not have survived (Hrdy, 2009). Accordingly, Sear and Mace (2008) reasoned that kin support in childcare is a human universal. In the vast majority of cultures, siblings, grandparents, fathers and other related and unrelated members of the social group take part in it and can become significant attachment figures (e.g., Keller & Bard, 2017; Lancy, 2015; Otto & Keller, 2014; Quinn & Mageo, 2013; Weisner, 2005).

Despite the general recognition of multiple attachment figures, at least three issues of concern regarding the centrality of the mother in attachment theory persist to this day. (1) It is a common assumption that children show a hierarchy of attachment relationships in which the mother is the most important attachment figure, (2) attachment research and practical applications remain focused almost exclusively on the mother, and (3) consequently, basic concepts of the theory (e.g., internal working model, sensitive

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caregiving) are not adapted to the case of multiple attachment figures (Keller, 2021; Quinn & Mageo, 2013a).

Even when multiple childcare arrangements are recognized, the central role of the mother is not questioned and other caregivers are ranked below her in the hierarchy of relationships (Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016). In doing so, contemporary attachment research follows Bowlby's original thoughts, emphasizing the uniqueness of the mother-infant bond (Bowlby, 1969; Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). However, empirical evidence shows that the mother's role varies tremendously across cultural contexts and there is no evidence that the mother-child relationship is always the most important one (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). In fact, children in multiple caregiving contexts are often discouraged to exclusively attach to their mothers and actively encouraged to build strong bonds to several caregivers. For example, it is common practice in Baatombu villages in Benin that a child is sent to live with grandparents or other extended family members to build stronger bonds and strengthen mutual-help networks. Having close relationships with many caregivers is considered beneficial for children. This assumption is so common that among more than 150 older people interviewed, only two had stayed with their biological parents during their whole childhood (Alber, 2004). In North India, exclusive dyadic relationships are considered detrimental to both mother and child, so that children are nursed briefly and intermittently, rarely in a dyadic setting and without much maternal empathic attention (Seymour, 2013). Similarly, children who are considered too close to the mothers are playfully teased and urged to engage with other caregivers in a Northern Indian city (Chaudhary, 2015). Also, there is evidence from the Nigerian Hausa (Marvin et al., 1977) and the central African

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Aka (Hewlett, 1991) that the mother may not be the primary attachment figure at all and that multiple equally close attachment relationships can develop (Morelli, 2015).

Despite this evidence, mainstream attachment research remains almost exclusively focused on the mother-child relationship (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, 2016).

Consequently, also practical application of attachment theory addresses almost exclusively mothers, leaving aside grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings, and other related or unrelated caregivers as important social actors in children's early development (Choate et al., 2020; Forslund et al., 2022; White et al., 2020). This fails to reflect not only the realities of children's lives in the majority world, but also in Western middle-class families. Feminist scholars from the U.S. and Europe have therefore described attachment theory as "a politically conservative research programme, smuggling social norms under the cover of claims to scientific objectivity" (Duschinsky et al., 2015, p. 174). They argue that attachment theory contributes to the idealization of motherhood and construction of mothers as solely responsible for childcare, thereby maintaining gender inequality (Burman, 2007; Solomon, 2002).

Furthermore, the lack of research on multiple relationship networks contributes to a gap in theorizing about the integration of multiple attachment figures into attachment theory (Quinn & Mageo, 2013b). Fundamental questions such as 'How do the functions and roles of multiple attachment figures differ?', 'What makes a caregiver an attachment figure in different cultural contexts?', and 'How do children develop trust in themselves and others in multiple caregiver settings?' are yet to be answered. Attachment researchers and their critics agree that further research is needed to investigate multiple attachments

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in different cultural contexts (Keller, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022). This requires a radical shift away from a dyadic to a network approach (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017).

### **II. Sensitive caregiving in dyadic interactions as primary attachment**

**mechanism.** The main determinant of attachment security, namely sensitive caregiving in dyadic interactions (Ainsworth et al., 1978), is centered in the distal parenting style prevalent in Western middle-class families. Distal parenting is characterized by face-to-face interactions with frequent eye contact, extensive verbalizations, emotional expressiveness, and object stimulations (Keller et al., 2009). The concept of maternal sensitivity is based on the conception of infants as independent agents with individual mental states from birth on who express their needs and preferences to their caregivers, who in turn respond to these signals in an appropriate manner (Ainsworth et al., 1974; Keller, 2021). Thus, the infant is viewed as a quasi-equal communication partner who is expected to take the lead in interactions, promoting the child's sense of autonomy (Lancy, 2015). If the child disagrees with something, the issue will be negotiated and the child will be explained why he or she should or should not do something. Moreover, early caregiver-child interactions are usually characterized by a positive emotional tone, with caregivers using motherese and exaggerated facial expressions (Lavelli et al., 2019).

Proximal parenting, on the other hand, is characterized by body contact and body stimulation. This parenting style is most pronounced in rural farmer families with less formal education (Keller, 2007; Keller et al., 2009). Interactions with infants are usually structured by caregivers and not guided by the infant, as children are believed not to know yet what they need and what is best for them, in line with the conception of 'delayed personhood' described by Lancy (2014). Children are in almost constant physical contact,

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which is also the main communication channel (Keller, 2007; Lavelli et al., 2019). Face-to-face contact is unusual and eye contact is sometimes even inhibited by caregivers, reflecting the hierarchical structure and socialization goals of obedience and respect (Lavelli et al., 2019; LeVine et al., 1994). Moreover, there is some evidence for rural non-Western villagers, where desirable child development is thought to be based on a calm and balanced emotional state and control of emotional expressions, hereby reinforcing social harmony (Bader & Fouts, 2018; Keller, 2021; Otto, 2014). These findings contrast sharply with the emphasis on positive emotions expected in interactions in Western middle-class families, where the overt expression of (positive) emotions serves as a medium of self-expression and emphasizes uniqueness (Keller, 2018; Mesquita, 2001).

Distal and proximal parenting styles can be considered as two alternative parenting strategies linked to particular socio-ecological contexts and serving different socialization goals (Keller et al., 2009; Keller & Kärtner, 2013): Distal parenting supports the development of independence and autonomy, while proximal parenting supports the development of interdependence and relatedness. While in Western middle class, sensitive caregiving is seen as good parenting, with responsive behavior to the child's signals, distal communication with face-to-face contact, and stimulation with objects (e.g., toys), in other contexts this behavior would be considered poor parenting behavior (Keller & Kärtner, 2013; Lancy, 2015). In these contexts, in turn, proactive and often highly directive parenting behavior is considered good parenting, in which caregivers meet the child's needs before they are expressed, and the child experiences care and affection through body contact and stimulation rather than through object play and verbalization (Gottlieb & DeLoache, 2016; Keller et al., 2002). This proactive parenting



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behavior, in turn, is labeled by Western middle-class child care professionals as controlling and insensitive (Keller, 2021).

Different norms for good parenting go hand in hand with different norms for infant attachment behavior (LeVine & Norman, 2001; Weisner, 2005): Child behavior in interactions and relationships is also classified either as normal and desirable or unusual and pathological depending on the locally prevalent socialization goals. Consequently, in some contexts, children are taught from the beginning to express their wishes and preferences and to rely on the response of one primary caregiver. In contexts with proximal and shared caregiving, on the other hand, children are accustomed to stay calm while different caregivers meet their needs proactively, which in some cases makes them trust even strangers (Otto, 2014). While some societies consider clinging and constant body contact desirable (Takahashi, 1990), it is considered a lack of independence in other places of the world (Grossmann et al., 1985; Rothbaum et al., 2000). Accordingly, the exclusive focus on the Western middle-class concept of good parenting, namely maternal sensitivity, attests to the ethnocentricity of attachment theory (LeVine & Norman, 2001). The problematic nature of this focus for the methodological approach in attachment research will be addressed in the next section.

**III. Ethnocentric operationalization of attachment.** As illustrated in the last two sections, attachment research has tended to take a reductionist approach from its earliest days to the present (Mead, 1954; Vicedo, 2017): The influence of a single relationship characteristic, namely sensitive caregiving, is studied within a single relationship, namely the mother-child relationship. Moreover, this reductionist approach was developed in a few cultural contexts which can be categorized as belonging to the

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Western middle class (Vicedo, 2013). Standardized procedures are used almost exclusively and seen as the ‘gold standard’ in attachment research (Bernier & Meins, 2008), such as the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) or the Q-Sort-Method. This goes hand in hand with a deep confounding of theory and methods, since only what has been assessed with these methods counts as attachment research (Gaskins, 2013; Keller, 2021). As Bretherton (1992, p. 767) commented: “It often seemed as if attachment and the Strange Situation had become synonymous.”

The SSP is a 20-minute assessment in which a 12- to 24-months-old child is in several successive episodes either alone, with the mother, and/or with a stranger in a standardized room equipped with toys. The child’s reaction to being separated from and reunited with the mother is critical for determining the attachment quality, which was initially divided into secure, insecure-ambivalent and insecure-avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978), and then supplemented by a disorganized category (Main & Solomon, 1990). The Q-Sort-Method is a modified and unobtrusive adaptation, in which a child is observed in the familiar environment and then assigned to an attachment quality using predefined behavioral descriptions of child responses to observed separation and reunion situations (Waters & Deane, 1985).

The SSP and the Q-Sort-Method are based on deeply culturally specific assumptions about children’s normative responses to the observed independent variables, namely responses to maternal separations and strangers (Keller, 2021; LeVine & Miller, 1990). In contexts where the proximal caregiving style is prevalent, children are almost constantly in body contact with caregivers and rarely experience separations (Keller, 2007). While maternal separation in the SSP is supposed to induce ‘mild stress’ in the

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child to activate the attachment system (Ainsworth et al., 1978), children who are not used to being left alone, much less in an unfamiliar laboratory environment, become excessively stressed. For example, a study in Japan found that children's reactions to separation in the form of crying were so severe that implementation of the 'child alone' condition had to be interrupted or modified for 90% of the sample, leading to an unusually high prevalence of the insecure-ambivalent category in Japanese children (Takahashi, 1990). Rothbaum et al. (2000, 2007) later argued that the extensive clinging and dependency reflect the normative 'amae' relationship – an indigenous Japanese concept describing positively valued expectations of indulgence and interdependence. In a study from Bielefeld, northern Germany, children reacted in the opposite way to the SSP (Grossmann et al., 1985): Since early independence is valued and children are accustomed from early on to being alone in a room for short moments (LeVine & Miller, 1990), many children did not mind the separation from their mothers very much. Consequently, an unusually large number of children were categorized as insecure-avoidant. In contexts where neutral emotional states are valued, children are taught from early on to suppress emotional reactions when adults are present. While in SSP the stranger is expected to cause the child mistrust and hereby mild stress (Ainsworth et al., 1974), children in other contexts are cared for by a variety of caregivers and stranger anxiety is virtually unknown (Keller, 2021). For example, in a study among the Nso in Cameroon, the majority of children stayed calm and expressionless when being approached and picked up by an unfamiliar female person. This behavior was desired by the mothers, since the common conception is that "a calm child is a good child" (Otto, 2014, p. 224). From an attachment

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theory's perspective, however, not showing any distress when picked up by a stranger would likely be interpreted as attachment disorder.

Instead of taking this empirical evidence as an impulse to question the validity and appropriateness of the applied methods and theory, deviant results are explained in retrospect conforming to attachment theory. Other attachment strategies are labeled 'less adapted' or even pathological and traced back to unfavorable living conditions and inadequate parenting (Keller, 2021; Vicedo, 2017). The reality is that the methods used in mainstream attachment research are not validated in the majority of the world. Transferring research instruments from the context in which they were developed and validated to other cultural contexts is part of the "transport and test" methodology typical of cross-cultural research (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). However, "as a rule tools developed for a group will show a better cultural fit than a transferred tool" (Berry et al., 2011, p. 291), underscoring the importance of carefully checking the necessity and cultural applicability of transferred instruments. When research tools are not validated in a cultural contexts this can lead to biased results (Choate et al., 2020). Results from culturally biased study designs, in turn, tend to confirm the theory, instead of challenging and testing it (Keller, 2021).

For example, Mesman, van IJzendoorn, and Sagi-Schwartz (2016) analyzed 36 studies on child-caregiver attachment in non-Western contexts and concluded that the four central assumption of attachment theory (see 1.1.2 Main assumptions) hold universal validity. The problem is that 31 of these studies used standardized instruments (e.g., SSP or Attachment Q-Sort) and were therefore neither able to identify culturally relevant conceptions of attachment nor to seriously test the assumptions on which attachment

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theory is based. No less problematic is that 26 of the studies are conducted with samples from urban contexts, often metropolitan cities, which are well-known to share similar caregiving strategies and practices as Western middle-class families (Gaskins et al., 2017). Later, Mesman (2021) modified her statement, acknowledging that some universal assumptions of attachment theory are questionable and need to be studied more critically.

It may be worth noting how ironic it is that Bowlby was the one who emphasized the role of the child's social context when studying attachment, yet attachment is now assumed to be studied best in isolation from the social context in a standardized laboratory procedure. Ainsworth was not pleased about this development, regretting "[...] that so many attachment researchers have gone on to do research with the Strange Situation rather than looking at what happens in the home or in other natural settings . . . it marks a turning away from 'field work,' and I do not think it's wise" (Ainsworth, 1995, p. 12).

Anthropologist and cultural psychologist argue that attachment research started testing hypotheses across cultures prematurely and needs to first investigate and understand socialization goals, parenting strategies, and the usefulness of different attachment behaviors in specific contexts before it can make universal statements about attachment development (Choate et al., 2020; Keller, 2021; Quinn & Mageo, 2013a; Weisner, 2005; White et al., 2020). To this purpose, and in line with Ainsworth, the use of ethnographic methods is crucial as it allows the investigation of beliefs and concepts of childcare in a culture-conscious way in the children's natural environment, resulting in rich qualitative data about the families' lived experiences and subjective perspectives (Weisner, 2014). In this line, Choate et al. (2020, p. 41) call for more valid research tools to be developed and tested from an emic perspective by local experts from the relevant

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contexts, including indigenous contexts, and legitimately ask “When trying to prove something, why is the dominant Eurocentric culture the one to decide the validity of that research?” In this context, attention should also be paid to the power relations in psychological research and application (Burman, 2007), which in its central questions continue to be guided primarily by the interests of white researchers from the U.S. and Europe who have historically dominated the discipline (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997, p. 200): “They have been the researchers and the subjects, they have posed the questions and provided the answers, they have reported the findings and taken up the applications.”

**IV. Application of attachment theory in child welfare programs.** Attachment theory has evolved in recent years into a ‘master theory’ that not only informs, but provides a foundation for social policy, parenting classes, professional training of teachers or social workers, family court decisions, and best practice for institutional care (Bjerre et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2017; White et al., 2020). Thus, the problems associated with ethnocentrism and class-centrism highlighted in the last sections do not remain theoretical but are translated into practice, sometimes leading to disastrous consequences in real life (Keller, 2021).

The goal of these interventions is always to develop secure attachment relationships that are seen as universally desirable and promoting healthy child development. For example, Cassidy et al. (2013, p. 1415) call for research to be translated into public policies that “reduce the occurrence and maintenance of insecure attachment during infancy and beyond”. Assuming that only a particular parenting style will produce securely attached children, attachment theory provides a moral basis for assessing and improving parenting behaviors (Bowlby, 1988; White et al., 2020). The evidence showing

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that secure attachment and the corresponding sensitive caregiving are culturally specific adaptations of Western middle-class families and not necessarily the most adaptive or desirable form of attachment in other contexts, is ignored (Keller, 2021; Keller & Bard, 2017). Also, what becomes clear is that part of the problem lies in the terminology (Quinn & Mageo, 2013a): Rather than insecurely attached, which inevitably has a negative connotation, we should be talking about differently attached children.

Even more problematic than insecure attachment is disorganized attachment in child welfare programs, leading to numerous and far-reaching misapplications, as illustrated by Granqvist et al. (2017). Because disorganized attachment has been disproportionately found in neglected or abused children, some attachment researchers suggest that the classification of disorganized attachment serves as an indication of child maltreatment (e.g., Corby et al., 2012; Shemmings & Shemmings, 2011; Wilkins, 2012). Moreover, programs have been established to train social workers to identify disorganized attachment as possibly indicating child maltreatment, for example with the Assessment of Disorganized Attachment and Maltreatment (ADAM; Wilkins, 2012). The consequences of these misapplications (e.g., custody decisions, removal of the child from the family) disproportionately affect families from other than Western middle-class backgrounds, for example, migrant families or indigenous families, who are more prone to be disadvantaged in society anyway (Choate et al., 2020; Keller, 2021). It is important to note that there are, of course, families in which neglect and abuse occur, but that this is never the norm in any cultural context (Korbin, 1981).

Choate et al. (2020) argue that the practical applications of attachment theory represent a form of ongoing colonization and structural racism in the context of

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indigenous communities, systematically neglecting the needs and rights of indigenous families. In the same line, Solomon (2002) points out that accepted theories and models of practice are always produced within socio-political and economic power relations and that attachment theory is rooted in and supportive of white middle-class families and pathologizes families that engage in alternative models of care.

However, the responsibility for minimizing misapplications and ensuring culturally sensitive and appropriate public policy for child well-being in the context of attachment does not lie primarily with social workers, courts, and other practitioners. White et al. (2020) argue that the dominance of attachment theory in social work promotes a 'diagnostic mindset' in practitioners and offers a psychological vocabulary with clear descriptions, making it a handy tool in difficult decision processes. A study with social workers in Denmark showed that attachment theory provides them with clear norms of good and morally correct parenting, and that this is essential to meet today's demands for documentation and accountability (Bjerre et al., 2021).

Attachment research informs theory, which in turn informs public policy. It has been convincingly shown how the recursive influence of theory and practice, and the resulting reinforcement of theory, can give the appearance of objective truth (Solomon, 2002; White et al., 2020). It is therefore in the hands of attachment researchers (1) to acknowledge the limitations of current attachment research as a basis for practical application, (2) to name the current misapplications (e.g., Forslund et al., 2022), and (3) to conduct culturally inclusive research that enables more appropriate practical application. Until today, the few changes that have been achieved in theory (e.g., acknowledgement of multiple attachment figures), do not filter through to research, social



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policy, parenting classes, or professional training of teachers or social workers (Ribbens McCarthy & Gillies, 2018). Along with other scholars (e.g., Choate et al., 2020; Keller, 2021; LeVine & Norman, 2001; Quinn & Mageo, 2013), I argue that the necessary shift will not come until culture is recognized as central in attachment development.

### **1.2 Cultural conceptions of attachment in Costa Rica**

Attachment researchers and their critics agree that further research is needed in different cultural contexts to refine and extend the theory (Keller, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022). To this end, further studies applying overused standardized methods are pointless; instead, new methods sensitive to cultural differences must be developed. It is crucial to understand at a fundamental level how cultures beyond the Western middle class differ in their models of care and relationships, and how these are influenced by prevailing social, environmental, and economic factors. This requires long-term and close collaboration with local experts and scholars. Such conditions were met in the research project ‘Cultural Conceptions of Attachment in Costa Rica’ conducted by Prof. Dr. Mariano Rosabal-Coto (Universidad de Costa Rica) and Prof. em. Dr. Heidi Keller (Universität Osnabrück): Costa Rica is a small Central American country that provides a variety of cultures with marked differences in socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, and childcare arrangements, which makes it an ideal location for studying attachment relationships. Furthermore, the Universidad de Costa Rica offers the academic infrastructure and resources to establish a large-scale research project. In the following, I will first describe the project’s operational steps and methodological approach. Next, I will define the concept of culture and describe the cultural samples studied in the project.

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Finally, I will present the research questions and how the enclosed articles contribute to answering these questions.

### **1.2.1 Research project**

The project “Cultural Conceptions of Attachment in Costa Rica” was established in July 2017 at the Universidad de Costa Rica and officially terminated in December 2021. During this period, it was funded by the Sievert Foundation for Science and Culture, with additional support from the Universidad de Costa Rica and the Costa Rica Zentrum at the Universität Osnabrück. The local research team consisted of a group of 15 student researchers led by Prof. Dr. Mariano Rosabal-Coto, complemented by the co-direction of Prof. em. Dr. Heidi Keller and the collaboration of several German research interns from the Universität Osnabrück. I started working in the project in January 2019 as part of my master’s thesis in cross-cultural psychology and have since spent a total of 23 months working in the project on site during three research stays.

The aim of the project was to compare three different cultural contexts within Costa Rica regarding models of care and relationships in early childhood. The project implemented an exploratory, descriptive investigation with a qualitative, ethnographic approach. A multi-method design was applied, relying on different methodological tools, such as semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, and the taking of photographs and videos. Qualitative methods have been found to be appropriate for studying family relationships (Ganong & Coleman, 2014), particularly to account for culturally relevant parenting beliefs and ethnotheories (Weisner, 2014). Qualitative ethnographic methods aim to explore and understand the lived experiences of families,

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including the locally relevant meanings associated with the experiences of caring for children and how caregiver-child relationships are perceived and valued.

The data collection required several field trips, each lasting several days, over several years. Following the protocol for culturally inclusive assessments of attachment outlined by Gaskins et al. (2017a), the first step was to assess the shared cultural beliefs about caregiving and attachment with thematic qualitative interviews with cultural key informants in the three groups (e.g., pediatricians, parental counselors, spiritual leaders). This facilitated the development of the semi-structured interview guide needed for data collection from families, providing prior knowledge of everyday family life and childcare as well as basic cultural courtesies and advice on how to contact families. The next step was to visit the homes of thirty families in each cultural group to conduct interviews with all caregivers, ethnographic observations, and taking videos and pictures. I carried out the data analysis with the help of student assistants (e.g., to assess intercoder agreement) and under the supervision of Prof. em. Dr. Heidi Keller and Prof. Mariano Rosabal-Coto using the analysis programs Atlas.ti and SPSS. Further information on the methodology can be found in the individual articles in Chapter 2.

### **1.2.2 Definition of culture**

Culture is defined as activities and meanings that are shared in specific social milieus and transmitted from one generation to the next (Berry et al., 2011). These social milieus are composed of contextual and sociodemographic conditions, including the level of formal education, income, professions, and household composition (Keller & Kärtner, 2013; Lavelli et al., 2019). Members of a culture share and co-construct beliefs, values,

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behaviors, every-day routines, and institutions; thus, culture can also be defined as “the shared way of life of a group of people” (Berry et al., 2011, p. 5).

In the cross-cultural developmental psychology literature, it is a common practice to compare different countries as representing different cultures (e.g., Mesman et al., 2016). This is a questionable practice, as it often implies cultural homogeneity within each country. In reality, however, there are usually a variety of different cultures within a country, mainly due to social class differences and/or different sociohistorical backgrounds (Keller & Kärtner, 2013). In addition, increasing globalization and transnationalization, as well as refugee movements, are leading to an increase in the proportion of migrants all over the world. Closely related to this, cultures are not stable constructs, but are inherently dynamic and can change over time due to internal and external influences (Berry et al., 2011).

### **1.2.3 Description of study populations**

Three cultural groups are compared in this study, living in different parts of Costa Rica: Rural traditionally living families in Guanacaste in the North-Western part of the country, urban middle-class families in the capital of San José located in the central valley, and rural indigenous families in Bribri Talamanca in the South-Eastern part of the country. The project represents the first comparative study on child development to focus exclusively on Costa Rica. Previous studies have compared Costa Rican samples with samples from other countries. Thus, this sampling aimed to show, among other things, that culture cannot be equated with country.

The three cultural groups were chosen because they represent distinct sociocultural milieus, including the level of formal education, economic resources,

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ecological conditions, historical heritage, and family structures. Some of the samples are more similar than others to the Western middle class, which is overrepresented in the literature and represents the basis of global development programs and professional advice (Rosabal-Coto et al., 2017). Thus, another goal of the study was to challenge the universality assumption of attachment theory in cultural contexts different from the Western middle class. In the following, the three study populations will be described shortly. More detailed information on the respective contexts is provided in the individual articles.

Guanacaste is a rural province characterized by an overall dry climate that allows for year-round livestock production and agriculture during the rainy season. The inhabitants often live together as large families in simple houses and childcare is shared among multiple caregivers (Chant, 2002). Besides a few bigger towns (e.g., Liberia, Santa Cruz), there are many small villages that are loosely connected (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011). The Pacific coast has become one of the country's most popular tourism hotspots in recent decades, and its luxury hotels contrast sharply with the simple living conditions of the locals. Although this has created more jobs in Guanacaste in addition to agriculture as the main economic sector, the owners of the tourist resorts are mostly foreigners, and the locals earn poorly. Overall, unemployment, emigration, and poverty are widespread in Guanacaste (Chant, 2002; Svedberg Gyllenpistol, 2007). Nevertheless, the locals are known for their humor and vitality, and many of Costa Rica's typical traditions and festivals originated here (e.g., music, dances, bullfighting; Rosabal-Coto, 2012).

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San José and its metropolitan area are the economic and academic center of the country, with a higher average standard of living and more occupational opportunities (Rosabal-Coto, 2012). Here, the Western influence, especially the US influence, is clearly noticeable, e.g., through fast-food chains or large shopping malls where families like to spend their free time on weekends. As in all large cities, there are great differences in social classes, which is why we have focused on middle-class families. Middle-class families in San José usually live as nuclear families with few children in apartments or houses with several rooms. In addition to their parents, children are often taken care of in kindergarten or by grandparents or other relatives who often live nearby. The mother is usually the main caregiver of her children. Parents have access to a wide range of professional help around child rearing and development (Fallas Gamboa & Solís Guillén, 2020). Thus, this study population shares some core characteristics with Western middle-class families.

Bribri Talamanca is a mountainous region with little infrastructure, characterized by a year-round humid and rainy climate. The Bribri people is the largest self-identified indigenous group in Costa Rica today, with a population of about 13,000 of which around 8,000 live in the Talamanca region (Castillo, 2009; Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011). Most people work in subsistence agriculture (e.g., corn, beans), cattle-breeding, and fishing/hunting, or are employed as day laborers in banana farms (Castillo, 2009). The average level of formal education and alphabetization is lower, and unemployment and poverty are higher in comparison with the rest of the country (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2011). Traditional Bribri culture is organized around a matrilineal and matrilocal clan system with particular kinship terms, and the extended

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family plays an important role in raising children, especially the maternal side of the family (Castillo, 2009). The traditional culture is strongly affected by acculturation with Costa Rican mainstream culture and its health, education, and legal system. Consequently, the clan system is becoming less important and some institutional standards conflict with traditional childcare practices (Guerrero Cerda, 2020).

### 1.2.4 Research questions

In the following, I will briefly present the fundamental research questions and objectives of this study. The articles each contain more specific research questions related to the respective topic.

As described earlier, contemporary attachment research does still heavily rely on studies with mother-infant dyads, neglecting the critical role of nonmaternal caregivers (Forslund et al., 2022; Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). A shift from the dyadic to the network approach is needed, which leads to the first research question:

*1.) Which persons are part of the caregiving and attachment networks in the three samples? Namely, who is involved in childcare and with whom do the children form attachment relationships?*

In the mainstream attachment literature, there is one main determinant of secure attachment and desirable development, which is sensitive caregiving in the distal parenting mode (Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, there is evidence indicating that ‘good parenting’ as well as ‘desirable development’ must always be defined in culturally specific ways (e.g., Gottlieb & DeLoache, 2016; Lancy, 2015). Therefore, the second research question is the following:

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2.) *How do caregivers interact with children? What does caregiving look like? What are local socialization goals?*

The definition of sensitive parenting and different qualities of attachment implies that children worldwide develop attachments only in a certain way according to attachment theory (e.g., in distal dyadic settings). However, there is evidence that different attachment mechanisms exist, meaning that children are able to form attachment relationships following different pathways (Keller & Kärtner, 2013). Moreover, it is questionable whether attachment itself as well as attachment figures are defined the same across contexts. The third research question is therefore:

3.) *How do relationships develop? What are attachment mechanisms? What makes a caregiver an attachment figure?*

### **1.2.5 Contributions of the articles: A culture-conscious perspective on attachment**

Table 1 shows an overview of the four articles that make up the core of this dissertation. As can be seen, I wrote all the articles as first author and they are published in different peer-reviewed journals. Not all articles compare all three samples. This is because in some study populations additional, more specific data were collected that were not collected in others. Moreover, data collection could not be continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, so that missing data could not be gathered, and we had to settle with the data we had available at the time of the pandemic's onset. The data from the interviews with cultural key informants are fundamental and integral to all four articles.

*Article 1* is the most comprehensive article and compares the size and type of caregiving and attachment networks in the three samples, answering the first research question. Further, it examines how the roles and care responsibilities differ among



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**Table 1**  
*Overview of the four published articles*

Article	Authors	Data	Publication
<i>Article 1: Development in context: What we need to know to assess children's attachment relationships</i>	Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., & Rosabal-Coto, M.	Caregiver interviews from Guanacaste, San José and Bribri Talamanca	Published in <i>Developmental Psychology</i> (Dec 2021)
<i>Article 2: The cultural specificity of parent-infant interaction: Perspectives of urban middle-class and rural indigenous families in Costa Rica</i>	Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., & Rosabal-Coto, M.	Caregiver interviews and videos of interactions from San José and Bribri Talamanca	Published in <i>Infant Behavior and Development</i> (Jan 2023)
<i>Article 3: The influence of ecocultural contexts on grandmaternal caregiving and grandmother-grandchild relationships</i>	Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., & Rosabal-Coto, M.	Caregiver interviews with grandmothers from Guanacaste	Published in <i>Personal Relationships</i> (Sep 2022)
<i>Article 4: Feeding, food, and attachment: An underestimated relationship?</i>	Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., Rosabal-Coto, M., Fallas-Gamboa, K., Solís-Guillén, C., & Durán-Delgado, E.	Caregiver interviews with families from San José; interviews with cultural key informants (member checking)	Published in <i>Ethos</i> (Jan 2023)

attachment figures in the three groups and what makes a caregiver an attachment figure, thus addressing the third research question. Moreover, the article provides the results of a systematic literature analysis on which relationships (e.g., mother, nonmaternal caregivers) are taken into account in contemporary attachment studies in non-Western contexts. The first article also discusses the challenges of culturally conscious attachment research and why this approach is necessary for valid new insights in attachment research despite the extra effort.

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The second research question on caregiving styles and socialization goals is addressed in *Article 2*, in which we investigate how caregivers in San José and Bribri Talamanca interact with children in daily life, based on video-recorded observations and caregiver interviews.

In *Article 3*, we focus on the grandmaternal role in Guanacaste and examine the extent to which grandmothers are involved in daily caregiving, what responsibilities they assume, how they describe their relationship with their grandchildren, and how their role is affected by whether or not they live with the grandchild in the same household. Thus, the first two research questions are addressed.

Finally, *Article 4* sheds new light on the role of feeding and sharing food on attachment formation. Feeding has been considered incidental in attachment theory because Bowlby initially insisted on distancing himself from psychoanalytic theories which considered feeding and sucking basic motivational drives in early childhood (Bowlby, 1958b). We explored the relationship between feeding and attachment in San José middle-class families, hereby addressing the third research question on different attachment mechanisms.

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### Chapter 2: Published articles

#### **2.1 Development in context: What we need to know to assess children's attachment relationships**

Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., & Rosabal-Coto, M. (2021). Development in context: What we need to know to assess children's attachment relationships. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(12), 2206–2219. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001262>

**Abstract:** Attachment studies mostly follow the Western middle-class model in theory and methods. To demonstrate that the assessment of children's caregiving context is an often neglected, but crucial prerequisite for attachment studies, we (a) conducted a literature analysis of attachment research in non-Western contexts and (b) empirically investigated the caregiving arrangements and cultural concepts of attachment figures in three cultural groups in Costa Rica: rural Guanacaste, urban San José, and rural indigenous Bribri. All persons involved in caring for 65 infants (7–20 months) participated in the study, resulting in a total of 179 semistructured interviews. The samples showed differences in caregiving practices, with the urban sample resembling Western middle-class contexts emphasizing the maternal importance; the two rural samples showing extensive caregiving networks; however, differently composed. Moreover, the three samples revealed culturally specific concepts of potential attachment figures. The study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive conceptual and methodological approaches in attachment research.

*Keywords:* attachment research, caregiving network, concept of attachment figure, non-Western, ethnographic approach

## 2.2 The cultural specificity of parent-infant interaction: Perspectives of urban middle-class and rural indigenous families in Costa Rica

Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., & Rosabal-Coto, M. (2023). The cultural specificity of parent-infant interaction: Perspectives of urban middle-class and rural indigenous families in Costa Rica. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 70, 101796. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2022.101796>

**Abstract:** Caregiver-infant interactions in Western middle class often take place in dyadic play settings, engaged in infant-initiated object stimulation, and surrounded by a positive emotional tone, reflecting a distal parenting style. With this study we aim to investigate whether the same conception of caregiver-infant interaction is embodied in the proximal parenting style. For this purpose, we compare the context and pattern of caregiver-infant interactions in two cultural groups in Costa Rica: Urban middle-class families in San José and rural indigenous Bribri families. Naturalistic observations and caregiver interviews revealed significant differences between the groups, with San José families resembling the Western middle-class interaction pattern. Among the Bribri, adult-child play is uncommon so that children interact with adults in primary care settings and with older siblings in play settings. Bribri interactions are further characterized by emotional neutrality. The groups did not differ in terms of body contact. Also, caregivers in both samples took the lead in interactions more often than infants. The results are discussed in the context of an autonomous-relational style as combining psychological autonomy and hierarchical relatedness. We argue that early childhood theories and intervention programs need to abandon the assumption that Western middle-class strategies are universal and recognize locally relevant patterns of caregiver-infant interaction.

*Keywords:* caregiver-infant interaction; distal parenting style; proximal parenting style; ethnographic; non-Western

### 2.3 The influence of ecocultural contexts on grandmaternal caregiving and grandmother-grandchild relationships

Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., & Rosabal-Coto, M. (2022). The influence of ecocultural contexts on grandmaternal caregiving and grandmother-grandchild relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12454>

**Abstract:** This study examines the cultural concept of grandmothers as caregivers and potential attachment figures for their grandchildren in Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Specifically, we examined the influence of the grandmaternal co-residence with grandchildren on their caregiving involvement and on the dyad's relationship formation. Semi-structured interviews with 19 grandmothers of 14–28 months old infants were conducted. Findings revealed close grandmother–grandchild relationships and high grandmaternal involvement in childcare, ranging from regular babysitting to functional parent roles. Co-residing grandmothers shared most caregiving responsibilities with mothers and can represent important attachment figures for their grandchildren. Non-co-residing grandmothers were less involved and reported distributed responsibilities between grandmother and parents with clearly defined caregiving tasks and times. The results demonstrate the importance of the context when defining children's caregiving and attachment networks.

*Keywords:* attachment, caregiving, culture, families, qualitative methods

### 2.4 Feeding, food, and attachment: An underestimated relationship?

Schmidt, W. J., Keller, H., Rosabal-Coto, M., Fallas Gamboa, K., Solís Guillén, C., & Durán Delgado, E. (2023). Feeding, food, and attachment: An underestimated relationship? *Ethos*, 51(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12380>

**Abstract:** According to attachment theory, feeding, including breastfeeding, plays only a marginal role in relationship formation. However, studies—especially in rural traditional non-Western contexts—repeatedly demonstrate that feeding can be an important attachment mechanism. We interviewed 30 urban, middle-class families with 6-to-19-month-old infants in the surrounding greater metropolitan area of San José, Costa Rica, to investigate if they consider feeding relevant for attachment formation. Qualitative content analysis revealed that breastfeeding is a key factor in specifying whether caregivers believed feeding to be relevant for attachment formation. The study found that breastfeeding families considered feeding relevant for attachment, and bottle-feeding families associated feeding with mainly alimentary and no attachment-related functions. Furthermore, breastfeeding seems to foster exclusive maternal attachment, while multiple feeding seems to foster multiple attachments. Consequently, the feeding network seems to regulate a child’s attachment network in urban middle-class families in San José. A triangulation of caregiver interviews, interviews with key informants, and member checking with key informants support the validity of the findings.

*Keywords:* feeding, breastfeeding, attachment, non-Western urban middle class

# CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

## Chapter 3: General discussion

### 3.1 Theoretical implications

In the following I discuss how each article addresses the research questions, provides contributions to the existing literature, and has the potential to correct and expand the monocultural approach of attachment theory.

#### 3.1.1 Multiple attachment figures

All four articles support the assumption that, contrary to common practice in attachment research and application, multiple attachment figures can be part of the care network in early childhood. A systematic literature analysis in *Article 1* demonstrates that contemporary attachment research still focuses almost exclusively on the mother and neglects the wider attachment network. The literature research was done to prove wrong those attachment researchers who claim that the exclusive focus on the mother has been overcome in attachment research (e.g., Duschinsky et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2022). Furthermore, *Article 1* shows fundamental differences in the scope of caregiving and attachment networks in Guanacaste, San José and Bribri Talamanca. It becomes clear that multiple nonmaternal caregivers are involved in all childcare responsibilities, and that the mother is one among several and not necessarily the most important attachment figure in the two rural samples (Bribri Talamanca and Guanacaste). Moreover, many caregivers from these two contexts report that their children do not differentiate between different caregivers and do not have preferences, which argues against the hypothesis of a hierarchy of relationships. Only breastfeeding was mentioned as an activity exclusively performed by mothers – though one grandmother in Bribri Talamanca did report having breastfed her daughter's child when the daughter was at work and the grandmother was taking care of her granddaughter and her own infant son. It can be speculated whether

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shared breastfeeding was more common among the Bribri in the past due to their strong matrilineal bonds and interchangeable caregiver roles. It has been reported from other non-Western contexts that breastfeeding non-biological children and shared breastfeeding can be normative under specific circumstances and assumedly leads to a particularly close bond or even kinship between the breastfeeding woman and the child, regardless of whether they are biologically related or not ('milk kinship', Altorki, 1980; Carsten, 1995; Everett, 2014; Hewlett & Winn, 2014; Kerlogue, 2007).

In middle-class families from San José, the mother is usually the main caregiver of the children, as described in *Article 1* and *Article 4*. While mothers usually feel most responsible for childcare, they are supplemented by nonmaternal caregivers, like fathers, grandparents, and institutional childcare. This childcare arrangement reminds of the maternal role of the Western middle class who share similar sociodemographic backgrounds (e.g., high levels of formal education, stable income, nuclear families; Keller et al., 2009; Keller & Kärtner, 2013). Further, in *Article 2*, we show that children in San José have mainly dyadic interactions, whereas children in Bribri Talamanca have more interactions with multiple persons simultaneously in their daily lives. This shows that the dyadic assessment of caregiving relationships, which is the standard approach in standardized attachment instruments, only reflects the lived realities of children from certain cultural contexts (Vicedo, 2013).

*Article 3* addresses the grandmother role in Guanacaste to convincingly illustrate how nonmaternal caregivers are involved in the caregiving and attachment network. Grandmothers in Guanacaste, especially when they co-reside with their grandchildren, often assume the role of primary caregivers together with the mother. They see it as their



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responsibility to care for, feed, educate and discipline their grandchildren. The high grandmaternal involvement in childcare is normative and socially expected in Guanacaste, even though grandmothers may work or care for other relatives at the same time. These findings contribute to the developmental literature that family and care models are culturally specific and that attachment figures can only be identified as a part of these models.

The assumption that the mother does not necessarily take a special position among the caregivers is also illustrated by the fact that several families in the two rural samples reported their children calling not only the mother, but also grandmothers, aunts, and other female caregivers “Mamá” (engl. “Mom”). While San José mothers told us that they would (amusedly) correct their children when, for example, they call their grandmother “Mamá”, the mothers in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca were proud that their children could obviously count on many close caregivers, that they had many “Mamás”. The phenomenon of no linguistic distinction between mother and other female caregivers can be found also in other contexts. Among the Mosuo in China (Xiao et al., 2022), there is no concept of maternal aunt, stepmother, or foster mother, who are all referred to as “Ami” along with the mother. Similarly, among many Aboriginal communities in Australia (Yeo, 2003), there are no distinct linguistic labels for mothers and aunts. These communities have in common that nonmaternal caregivers are equally important as mothers and that caregivers are interchangeable.

It is plausible that children with multiple caregivers and attachment relationships have had an evolutionary advantage because the reliance on a single person – the mother – was likely to lower the survival chances in potentially harmful environments (e.g.,

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Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2021; Sear & Mace, 2008). It is easy to imagine that, for example, a Bribri child can adapt relatively well to the situation when the mother is physically or emotionally not available, easily finding care and trust in a grandmother, aunt, or older sibling. Accordingly, one might argue that not only multiple caregiving (Hrdy, 2009; Sear & Mace, 2008), but also multiple attachments may be a human universal.

From a feminist and sociological perspective, the strong focus on the mother in the attachment literature and in social policies is also criticized for ‘victim blaming’. This refers to the assumption that every undesirable development of a child can be attributed to the mother and her ‘inadequate’ parenting, although societal shortcomings and economic hardship are often the real reasons behind the child’s ‘malfunctioning’ (Burman, 1997, 2007; Choate et al., 2020). For example, Bribri mothers are taught how to raise their children to provide them with a good developmental path (see 3.3 Practical implications), when what is really needed here are political solutions for poverty reduction that offer young people a good education and prospects for the future.

### **3.1.2 The diversity of attachment mechanisms**

Contrary to the conventional view in the developmental literature that sensitive caregiving in distal settings with face-to-face contact, object stimulation, a positive emotional tone, and infants having the lead promotes healthy emotional development (Lavelli et al., 2019), *Article 2* shows that caregiver-child interactions among the Bribri occur predominantly in primary care settings (e.g., bodily care, feeding) with caregivers having the lead. There is little face-to-face contact and neutral instead of positive emotions are considered ideal. Moreover, adult-child play, which is considered crucial in Western developmental theories (Black et al., 2017), is uncommon in Bribri culture due

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to social hierarchies and the conception that children should play and socialize with other children. These findings confirm the claim that early childhood theories and intervention programs need to abandon the assumption that Western middle-class strategies are universal and recognize locally relevant patterns of caregiving and attachment formation.

Furthermore, a unique contribution of *Article 1* is that the concept of attachment figures is not universal, namely that potential attachment figures in the three samples manifest themselves as such through very different roles and activities. For example, potential attachment figures in San José were only minimally involved in teaching children traditional values, manners, or cultural knowledge. In contrast, teaching children socially desirable behavior and transmitting their respective cultural knowledge was an important task for potential attachment figures in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca. In San José, male attachment figures were much more involved in primary care than in Guanacaste and Bribri. Among the Bribri, male attachment figures are not expected to participate in primary care at all, while female attachment figures are not expected to engage in play activities with children. These major cross-cultural differences in the roles of attachment figures suggest that the definition of attachment and attachment figure needs to be fundamentally revised.

Finally, *Article 4* sheds new light on the role of feeding and sharing food on the role of attachment formation. Feeding has been considered incidental in attachment theory because Bowlby initially insisted on distancing himself from psychoanalytic theories which considered feeding and sucking basic motivational drives in early attachment formation (Bowlby, 1958b). Our results suggest that feeding may well be considered an important attachment mechanism in San José middle class, especially when

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mothers are breastfeeding. Interestingly, while breastfeeding seems to foster exclusive maternal attachment, multiple feeding seems to foster multiple attachments. Consequently, the feeding network seems to regulate a child's attachment network in urban middle-class families in San José, indicating that it is not only sensitive caregiving that determines attachment formation, and that attachment theory must adopt a more open approach to other possible attachment mechanisms.

### **3.1.3 Culture-conscious attachment research**

All four articles as part of the project 'Cultural conceptions of attachment in Costa Rica' contribute to a better understanding of culturally conscious research on attachment. Thus, the entire approach, namely first interviewing cultural key informants and then visiting the families several times in their homes together with the multi-method data collection, contributes to the acknowledgement of local values and norms, to the assessment of cultural meaning systems and conceptions in childcare, and to the necessity that the families were able to participate in the study in a way that was ethically sound and comfortable for them, consistent with their understanding of establishing contact in a respectful manner and general rules of interaction and collaboration. It becomes clear that the combination of natural observation and caregiver interviews are crucial because the interviews provide us with the necessary cultural meaning systems, perceptions, and intentions in order to understand the observations. In particular, *Article 1* addresses the challenges of ethnographic attachment research and why, despite the extra effort, it is necessary for valid new insights in attachment research. The study is a valuable contribution to the literature, as attachment researchers who want to conduct culturally conscious research often lack alternatives to standard instruments (e.g., Strange Situation Procedure) or are even unaware that alternatives exist.

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In the peer review process, we were confronted with the claim that we did not assess attachment but just caregiving – a critique that cultural psychologists working in the field of attachment research without using the standard methods are often confronted with (e.g., Keller, 2021). I firmly reject this criticism because early attachment relationships always develop within caregiving relationships, and in order to understand them one must understand caregiving itself. Further, to investigate the basic assumptions underlying attachment theory it is necessary to leave the existing theoretical framework (Tu, 2021). For example, in order to know whom to investigate as attachment figures it is necessary to assess children's caregiving networks in the first place, including the relationships the child has with each caregiver and in which activities the caregivers are involved with the child in everyday life. Thus, although it has always been important to attachment research to consider the child perspective, the caregiver perspective must also be represented (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Gaskins et al., 2017a; Keller, 2021; Weisner, 2014).

This brings to light the problem that in mainstream attachment research, only those studies that use the standardized instruments such as SSP and the Q-Sort procedure are recognized as attachment research. Studies with a different methodological approach, including for example anthropological studies, which often contain highly relevant findings about the development of early close relationships, are ignored. This creates a dilemma of self-validating methodological appropriateness and the recognition of criticism only when it is based on the own reductionistic assumptions (Keller, 2021).

This study is a step in the right direction to develop research guidelines for culturally conscious research of attachment in dialogue with attachment researchers,

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anthropologists, cultural psychologists, and practitioners. Inherent is the problem of a knowledge gap between the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Attachment research, which is dominated by psychology, should start to learn from sociologists and anthropologists, who display extraordinary cultural sensitivity in theory and methods (Tu, 2021; Weisner, 2014). During this learning process, some sort of scientific acculturation is indispensable, so that other methodological and conceptual approaches should be met with an open mind and researchers from different Western and non-Western contexts are equal partners in an open democratic process of knowledge generation (Burman, 2007; Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). This is consistent with a long-standing call by cultural researchers, namely, that attachment research must take a step back to first examine its basic concepts and test them for cultural applicability (e.g., definitions of desirable attachment, attachment figures, and ‘healthy’ development) before universal generalizations can be made (e.g., Quinn & Mageo, 2013b).

### **3.2 Attachment theory’s central assumptions revisited**

This study contributes new theoretical implications for the central assumptions of attachment theory, namely, the universality hypothesis, the normativity hypothesis, the sensitivity hypothesis, and the competence hypothesis (see 1.1.2 Main assumptions). While attachment researchers commonly claim universal validity for these assumptions (e.g., Mesman et al., 2016), the findings of this dissertation call for caution and a more differentiated view.

#### **3.2.1 Universality hypothesis**

It is without doubt that all children need to develop intimate relationships in their first years to their primary caregivers (Keller, 2015). However, this study supports that there is more variety in the developmental pathways of this universal need for attachment

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than attachment theory implies (Keller & Kärtner, 2013) – both in the normative caregivers' behavior as well as the child's normative attachment behavior, resulting in more variety in the observed relationship dynamics between child and caregivers.

Attachment researchers base the universality hypothesis on survival benefits through the underlying function of establishing or maintaining safety (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Stern et al., 2021). I argue that attachment relationships provide children with much more than just safety, namely a socialization platform for fundamental social rules and expectations that are deeply embedded in cultural belief systems (Granqvist, 2021; LeVine & Norman, 2001; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). Children learn through early social relationships not only that they are protected and loved, but also how social relationships function in the first place, what other people expect of them, and what they can expect from others. This implicit and explicit knowledge is crucial to survival because humans are fundamentally social creatures. Moreover, this makes early attachment formation a socialization mechanism that is culture-specific in nature.

For example, the results of this study indicate that it is normative and socially desirable in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca that children form close relationships with multiple caregivers and do not necessarily differentiate between the caregivers. Children who grow up in multiple caregiver environments in which caregivers share most caregiving tasks might form qualitatively different attachment relationships than children who are cared for primarily by one person or by multiple persons but with highly differentiated caregiver roles. The simultaneous presence of various caregivers who equally take care of the child's need might result in an attachment development to the group as a whole rather than to individuals (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). Interestingly, the

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original definition of an attachment figure included specificity, namely that the person must not be interchangeable with anyone else (Ainsworth, 1989). However, multiple caregiving arrangements with interchangeable responsibilities – all depending on who is available or who is closest to the child at the moment – has been reported in various other contexts (De Villiers, 2011; Quinn & Mageo, 2013a; Xiao et al., 2022; Yeo, 2003) and offer no evidence to assume that these relationships provide the child with less security. Instead of a specific person who provides the child with a sense of security, the child might develop trust in a protective and reliable caregiving *environment* (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017; Tu, 2021). Thus, this dissertation contributes to a communal formulation of attachment in addition to the individualistic one that is prevalent until today.

This study also highlights differences between multiple caregiving settings. While children in San José have multiple caregivers, they are rarely all present at the same time. For example, a child is changed and dressed by the mother in the morning while the father prepares breakfast, then he goes to work and the mother is alone with the child until the grandmother arrives so the mother can go to work. This one-child-one-caregiver setting continues in a serial fashion through most of everyday life and is typical also for Western middle-class families (Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016). In contrast, multiple caregiving in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca follows a simultaneous mode, with multiple children and multiple caregivers being present most of the time.

### **3.2.2 Normativity hypothesis**

Most children form secure attachment relationships in the sense of organized, stable, and functional relationships. However, secure attachment needs to be defined in culturally specific way (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). When secure attachment is defined



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according to attachment theory (e.g., overt expression of emotions when mother leaves/reunites with child, mistrusting strangers), there are various studies from non-Western contexts revealing that the rates of securely attached children are substantially lower than the US norm, namely that less than half of the assessed children were securely attached (e.g., Fourment Sifuentes, 2022; Gernhardt et al., 2016; Gojman et al., 2012; Mooya et al., 2016). After reviewing 200 ethnographical and archeological studies, Lancy (2014, p. 90) concluded that “it is not at all certain that evolution would have favored the formation of strong bonds of attachment between children and their caregivers”. Instead, depending on the harshness of the environment (e.g., poverty, health risks, survival chances of infant/caregiver) and the availability of other caregivers, attachments that would be labeled as ‘insecure’ might be functionally superior (Lancy, 2014; Scheper-Hughes, 2014; Strand et al., 2019; Weisner, 2005).

Furthermore, a study published by Harwood and colleagues (1995) comparing Puerto Rican and Anglo-American mother-infant dyads demonstrates the culture specificity of the definition of attachment security. Their findings suggest that Anglo-Americans view secure attachment primarily as a balance between relatedness and autonomy, whereas Puerto Ricans view it primarily as a balance between emotional connectedness (e.g., showing affection, trust) and proper demeanor (e.g., being respectful, obedient). In the same line, caregivers in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca, and to some extent also in San José, emphasized socialization goals that can be summarized as proper demeanor. Thus, in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca, secure attachment might differ from the Western definition. Further research is needed to understand differences in the cultural concepts of secure and desirable attachments.

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### 3.2.3 Sensitivity hypothesis

Sensitive caregiving in the sense of perceiving and responding to children's needs in an appropriate and timely manner contributes to children feeling safe and loved. However, what is understood as sensitive caregiving varies across cultural contexts (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017; Neckoway et al., 2007). A common problem is that proactive caregiving (i.e., the caregiver anticipates the child's needs before the child expresses them, caregiver has the lead, directs and corrects the child) is seen as controlling and insensitive caregiving according to attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1974; Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Park & Kim, 2006; Stern et al., 2021; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). This proactive caregiving is common in non-Western, non-middle-class contexts where socialization goals such as group harmony, respect, and relatedness are emphasized over autonomy development (Keller, 2021). In Guanacaste and especially in Bribri Talamanca, where many caregivers reported interdependent socialization goals like respect and obedience, caregivers also tend to show proactive caregiving. In comparison in San José, children more often take the lead in interactions and are encouraged to express their own wishes and preferences from early on. There is evidence that parental control is considered desirable and a sign of warmth and good care in some non-Western contexts (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Chao & Tseng, 2002; Kim & Choi, 2014). Conversely, the absence of parental control is interpreted as rejecting behavior or lack of warmth (Trommsdorff, 1985, 1995). While controlling parenting is associated with insecure attachments according to attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1974), Puerto Rican infants who experienced high parental control during their first year showed secure attachments at 12 months (Carlson & Harwood, 2003). Thus, there are different cultural conceptions

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of sensitivity consistent with the prevalent socialization goals (Keller, 2021; Neckoway et al., 2007).

When taking multiple care networks into account, another problem with the sensitivity hypothesis emerges (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017; Mesman, Van Ijzendoorn, Behrens, et al., 2016): More important than the sensitive behavior of a particular caregiver is the totality of sensitive behavior that a child receives from all caregivers present. When experiencing shared, interchangeable caregiving, children learn that they do not need to actively seek attention or express their needs because they are always closely monitored by multiple caregivers who ensure the child's comfort and well-being (Gaskins, 2013; Yeo, 2003).

Inherent in the sensitivity hypothesis is the reductionist approach of attachment theory, namely that a single parental behavioral quality is seen as the single most important precursor of secure attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1974; Bowlby, 1969). In fact, it is most likely – also from an evolutionary perspective – that there are several alternative attachment mechanisms in the human developmental repertoire (Granqvist, 2021; Keller & Kärtner, 2013; Tu, 2021). While Western middle-class children usually form relationships through psychological and emotional intimacy in line with the concept of sensitivity (Morris et al., 2018), evidence from non-Western contexts suggests that primary care, such as feeding, carrying, and bodily care, is seen as a major communication channel and central to the formation of attachment (Keller, 2021; Keller et al., 2009; Lavelli et al., 2019). Our findings from interviews with caregivers in San José on the role of feeding in attachment development are in line with this assumption, as well as the interactions observed in primary care settings in Bribri Talamanca.

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### 3.2.4 Competence hypothesis

The final desired outcome of attachment is psychological health according to attachment theory, which is achieved through secure attachment. Insecure attachments, on the other hand, are associated with psychological problems (Duschinsky et al., 2021; Keller, 2021; Tu, 2021). However, attachment research defines psychological health the same universally just like physical health, which does not reflect reality (Bass et al., 2007; Wang, 2022). Psychological health can be translated into the smooth functioning in the social, economic, and ecological context of a person, which obviously depends on the context itself and cannot be defined universally. When children feel secure and loved, they are more likely to show positive developmental outcomes. However, positive developmental outcomes need to be defined in a culturally specific way (Keller, 2021; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003).

In San José, positive developmental outcomes for children are learning to be independent at an early age in order to later cope in an increasingly individualized and achievement-oriented society. Caregivers promote the children's self-confidence and assertiveness by perceiving them as individuals with their own will and interests and encouraging them to develop these. At the same time, traditional values such as *familismo* still play a role, so that children learn to rely on their extended family and to ask them for advice and help later in life. The strong family bonds are also evident in the fact that it is common in San José to live with the parents or extended family until into one's thirties and often care for the parents when they are old. In Guanacaste, on the other hand, a well-adjusted person is defined to a greater extent by interdependent values, namely a person who integrates into and supports the social community with its norms and traditions and assumes responsibility for the family. Additionally, in Bribri Talamanca, it is important

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to live in harmony with the clan structure, maintaining a special closeness to the maternal family and respecting and passing on the indigenous heritage. Here children learn through close bonds to the extended family the social rules of coexistence, to respect others, to know their roles in society, and their respective cultural traditions. Togetherness and interdependence are emphasized more than autonomy and independence. Thus, it can be assumed that, for example, a child raised in Guanacaste would be more competent in Guanacaste than in San José or Bribri Talamanca, and a child raised in San José would be more competent in San José than in the two rural contexts.

The ability of attachment relationships to function as socialization platforms for desired developmental outcomes has been shown in several studies. For example, Park & Kim (2006) have convincingly shown how the high academic achievement orientation among Korean young adults arises from the close social bond between children and parents, in which feelings of relational dependence, gratitude, respect, and indebtedness lead children to adopt their parents' values as their own. Riiany et al. (2017) describe how Indonesian children, through a relationship of obedience and respect with their father combined with a close, permissive, and affective relationship with their mother, are well prepared for a hierarchical society in which politeness, discipline, and sociable behavior are fundamental. While U.S. mothers believe that a secure attachment leads to desirable characteristics such as self-confidence, self-expression, and self-reliance, for Puerto Rican mothers the consequences of a secure attachment are calmness, respect, and obedience (Carlson & Harwood, 2003). According to Australian Aborigines, a person's competence is defined by how much that person supports the community, is a good role model, cares for others, and shares with others (Yeo, 2003). Thus, the final desired

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outcome of early caregiving relationships is – besides survival – a good fit with the cultural context (Keller, 2021; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). As a consequence, attachment research must recognize attachment as functional for socialization and cultural learning (Gaskins et al., 2017a; Granqvist, 2021). This implies that the investigation of attachment relationships must always include the assessment of cultural socialization goals and meaning systems guiding the observed behavior.

### **3.3 Practical implications**

This study shows that attachment has many different manifestations across cultural contexts – more than attachment theory implies. This variety needs to be incorporated in the practical application of the theory, among others social policy, parenting classes, professional training of teachers and social workers, family court decisions, and best practice for institutional care (Bjerre et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2017; White et al., 2020). Middle-class families in San José seem to increasingly integrate and internalize attachment-theory-based recommendations provided by their pediatricians, parenting guides, and classes, which is associated with increasing parental stress to meet demands to supposedly facilitate a healthy development (Fallas Gamboa & Solís Guillén, 2020). Even more problematic, the acculturation with Western values, institutions, and developmental theories have far-reaching consequences in Bribri Talamanca (Guerrero Cerda, 2020). For example, community leaders and social welfare staff have reported that policy-makers consider it child labor when children help out around the house or accompany other family members to work in the fields – which is a normative and important tradition among the Bribri to prepare children for later life (Rosabal-Coto et al., 2017). It was also reported that children are sometimes taken away from their parents and placed in foster care, even though the extended family could have cared for the child

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consistent with the view that the entire extended family is responsible for the child's well-being. The practice of removing children based on attachment-related arguments not only from their family, but from their cultural community and thus their cultural identity, has also been described for other Indigenous communities worldwide (e.g., Choate et al., 2020; Yeo, 2003). Another consequence of the adoption of Western developmental theories in Bribri Talamanca concerns the issue of teenage pregnancies. Among the Bribri, violence in parenting is traditionally frowned upon, yet an authoritarian parenting style is practiced in which elders are strict, make important decisions and children are expected to be respectful and obedient. Parenting programs provided by the Costa Rican government teach Bribri parents that this authoritarian parenting style is not right, often causing teenagers to disrespect parental decisions, and parents, in turn, to not know how to handle them. According to some community leaders, the number of teenage pregnancies has increased tremendously in recent years as teenagers as young as 11 years engage in sexual relationships without listening to their parents. Bribri parents have been reported to be often deeply insecure because they are suddenly criticized for caregiving practices that have been passed down from generation to generation over centuries and are considered positive and normative in their community.

There have long been calls to stop the discriminating and depriving applications of attachment theory that both families in non-Western contexts and minorities in multicultural societies in Western contexts suffer from. Demands to 'decolonize' attachment theory are growing louder (e.g., Choate et al., 2020; Stern et al., 2021). The following suggestions show ways in which decolonizing attachment theory might succeed.

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(1) Multiple caregivers instead of only mothers or parents need to be targeted.

There is a broad and clear evidence that children in non-Western, non-middle-class contexts usually have several often equally important close caregivers (Keller & Chaudhary, 2017). This must be taken into account, for example, in custody decisions, removal from families, and parenting programs and guides (Rosabal-Coto et al., 2017).

(2) Local stakeholders need to be included in the process of developing policy and practice procedures (Choate et al., 2020; Gaskins et al., 2017b), in line with recommendations by Serpell & Nsamenang (2014) for childcare initiatives. To understand locally relevant caregiving practices, people from the community must be allowed to have a say or, better, take leading roles in the development of social policy and practice procedures.

(3) Attachment assessments need to be adapted to cultural norms in order to be valid and ethically sound (Gaskins et al., 2017a). One of the biggest misapplications of attachment theory is the use of the SSP around the world. Not only is it not validated in most contexts and thus of questionable scientific value, but it is ethically highly doubtful in that it is often incompatible with children's everyday experiences and therefore overwhelming (Keller, 2021). Moreover, the SSP and other standardized procedures have been designed for research purposes only and have yet to be tested for their predictive power for individuals in practical applications (Forslund et al., 2022; Main et al., 2011).

(4) Different attachment mechanisms need to be recognized as different strategies adaptive to specific ecocultural contexts, instead of 'secure' and 'insecure' or 'healthy' and 'pathological' attachments (Keller & Kärtner, 2013). Critical parenting behavior needs to be understood in its contexts based on its functions (Gaskins et al., 2017b;



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Rosabal-Coto et al., 2017). For example, one cannot deny the Bribri their authoritarian parenting style without also considering the consequences of its absence. Seeking expertise from local stakeholders is essential for this purpose.

(5) Finally, practitioners need to be trained in cultural competence. Consequently, every person working with or making decisions about families from another cultural background than themselves, needs to know about normative caregiving practices and attachment manifestations and their functions with regard to the socialization goals in the specific context (Gaskins et al., 2017b; Keller, 2021). This implies that there needs to be considerably more research on so far understudied cultural groups.

### **3.4 Limitations**

This study also has limitations. Several limitations are due to time and organizational constraints that come along with the ethnographic approach and challenging conditions for data collection in Guanacaste and especially Bribri Talamanca, as well as the fact that it was not possible to continue data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, a limiting factor in the data analysis was the different average ages of the children across the three groups, which had to be corrected by not including all 30 families per sample in the comparison and thus have smaller and unequal sample sizes. The different average ages occurred because data collection in Guanacaste and Bribri Talamanca was more complicated and thus took longer than anticipated, so that some children were included in the sample when they were already older than when data collection began and it was difficult to find alternative families who could have potentially participated in their place. For similar reasons, there are sometimes unequal numbers of videos taken per child, and not all caregivers could always be interviewed.

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Also, some specific data were collected in some samples but not in others, for example, it would have been very interesting to have information on feeding practices and beliefs in Bribri Talamanca and Guanacaste. Plans to collect these missing or additional data (including interviewing more families to correct the age differences) could not be realized, as the COVID-19 pandemic put a sudden end to any field work. Therefore, I had to settle with the data available at the time of the pandemic's onset.

Another kind of limitation results from the nature of the data itself, namely ethnographic interview data. It is important to emphasize that an exploratory study mainly based on caregiver interviews primarily represents the caregivers' perspective, including underlying beliefs, goals, and strategies in childcare. Accordingly, the reality of the child's everyday life is also presented primarily from the caregivers' perspective. Since I understand attachment as a socialization platform, it seems only reasonable to first understand these underlying socialization goals and ethnotheories. Moreover, this is the best approach when ethical considerations are born in mind. Nevertheless, the focus on caregiver perspectives also comes along with limitations, which is why I consider this study as a first step and starting point for further research. Future studies should include more the child's perspective through, for example, naturalistic observations, following more concrete research questions to test hypotheses based on the knowledge obtained through this study. Also, the functionality and developmental outcomes of specific attachment patterns can be clarified conclusively only with longitudinal studies.

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## Chapter 4: Conclusion

This study aims to show that a key problem in attachment theory remains that culture has been given minor importance when it should be right in the center of the theory. Attachment is functional – as a socialization platform it allows children to be optimally prepared for their future life in their respective social worlds: Mothers who encourage dyadic exclusive relationships have more exclusively attached children; caregivers who encourage their children to attach to multiple caregivers will have children who trust in a wider net of relationships; caregivers who encourage their children to trust strangers will have children who are not afraid when the mother leaves and a stranger approaches the child (Bornstein, 2012). Further, the findings of this study show that it is not only emotionally attuned sensitive caregiving that informs attachment formation, but that attachments can also develop through primary care, including feeding; that emotional positivity is not necessarily a main driver of attachment, but that emotional neutrality may be desirable; and that attachment figures are not exclusively mothers or adults, but that older siblings and other children might represent important caregivers and social partners.

These different attachment patterns do not imply that children are ‘more’ or ‘less’ attached, or ‘securely’ or ‘insecurely’ attached – they are simply differently attached and able to learn from their early social experiences (Keller, 2021; Tu, 2021). That attachment fulfills several functions, namely protection as well as socialization, only confirms the system’s importance for human development (Granqvist, 2021).

This study does not seek simply to prove that attachment theory is wrong. Rather than a critique of the theory, it intends to be understood as an extension and enhancement of it and to contribute to a dialogue between attachment researchers and cultural

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psychologists and anthropologists. In recent years, attachment theory has become a massive movement with far-reaching implications for the lives of many children and families, turning a Euro-American middle-class cultural pattern of childcare into a moral guide and model for all humanity of all times (Keller, 2021; Quinn & Mageo, 2013a; Tu, 2021; Vicedo, 2017). Attachment research should reject the universalist model and with it the notion that attachment can be explained globally with a single theory and a single set of standardized methods. Both the methods and the interpretation of observed behavior are cultural products. Attachment and culture are inseparable, which makes a decontextualized understanding an impossibility. It is the responsibility of all involved in attachment research and application to strive for an accurate representation of attachment development, ensuring that it does not just represent the realities of life for a small proportion of all children worldwide. Research projects like this one and many more in other cultural contexts are needed to serve this mission.

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## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

### Appendix A: Interview guide for key informants in Bribri Talamanca

#### Entrevista a informantes clave

Entrevistador(a): \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

Ocupación: \_\_\_\_\_

Lugar de residencia: \_\_\_\_\_

Números de teléfono contacto: \_\_\_\_\_

Relación con comunidades indígenas: \_\_\_\_\_

¿Se identifica miembro de algún clan? ¿A cuál? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Preguntas control:

1. ¿A qué edad usualmente tienen las mujeres Bribri el primer hijo(a)? Posibles razones (Profundizar sobre maternidad adolescente)
2. ¿Cuántos niños tiene en promedio una mujer?
3. ¿Cómo se vive el embarazo en la mujer Bribri? Indagar sobre embarazo adolescente: motivos, quién asume el cuidado, etc
4. ¿Qué se dice del amamantamiento? ¿Por cuánto tiempo se acostumbra?
5. ¿Quién o quiénes son las principales personas responsables del cuidado y atención de un@ niñ@ durante el primer año? ¿Durante el segundo año de vida?
6. ¿De qué forma es que las madres Bribri muestran sus sentimientos a l@s niñ@s? Profundizar en formas de mostrar el afecto (si hay abrazos, besos, etc u otras formas – no occidentales-)

#### Preguntas sobre Cuido:

Pensando en **el ambiente en que usted ha crecido, su comunidad, su cultura:**

1. ¿Cómo describiría a una familia típica Bribri? (Composición, cantidad hijos, tipo unión)
2. ¿Qué diría que es lo que la caracteriza y diferencia de otras culturas en Costa Rica?
3. ¿Qué tan importante es la familia en la cultura Bribri?
4. Entonces, ¿Qué consideraría propio de su cultura/ambiente, que no tengan otros grupos o culturas, específicamente en relación a como se cuidan, atienden y educan a los niños durante el primer año?
5. Según su comunidad/cultura: ¿quiénes son las personas más importantes para un niño en los primeros años de vida? ¿Por qué estas personas? ¿Qué acostumbran hacer estas personas con el niño?

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

6. ¿Existen alguna o algunas creencias (o tradiciones) en particular respecto al cuidado, educación y desarrollo de los niños en general? ¿Durante el primer año de vida?  
**Ilustrar casos concretos con la mayor cantidad de ejemplos posibles.**
7. ¿Considera usted que la religión y/o creencias son importantes en su comunidad a la hora de criar a los niños?
8. ¿Considera que practicar la medicina tradicional en una familia tiene alguna consecuencia en la forma en que son educados los niños entre los Bribri?
9. ¿Cómo describiría usted la forma característica de los Bribri de criar a los niños (desde el nacimiento hasta el primer año, hasta el segundo año)?
10. ¿Cómo debería ser un niño criado en la cultura Bribri?
11. ¿Cómo **NO** debería ser un niño criado en la cultura Bribri?
12. ¿Cómo debería ser una niña criada en la cultura Bribri?
13. ¿Cómo **NO** debería ser una niña criada en la cultura Bribri?
14. ¿Qué lo diferenciaría de un niño de San José, por ejemplo? ¿De otros pueblos indígenas? **Ilustrar casos concretos con la mayor cantidad de ejemplos posibles.**
15. ¿Qué considera que para los Bribri es lo más importante que debe enseñársele a un niño durante los primeros dos años de vida? ¿Quién o quienes deben hacerlo? ¿Hay diferencia entre lo que se espera entre niñas y niños?
16. ¿Cuáles considera que serían las **mejores condiciones** que se necesitan para criar a los niños en el primer año de vida? Ejemplificar
17. ¿Cuáles considera que serían las **peores condiciones** que pueden haber en la crianza de los niños en el primer año de vida? Ejemplificar
18. ¿Han existido cambios en la forma en que se cuidan los niños a lo largo de los años? ¿Nos podría ejemplificar cuáles?
19. ¿Cuáles son los valores de mayor importancia que se busca enseñar a los hijos cuando están creciendo?
20. Si tuviéramos que escoger personas que conocen a fondo sobre la forma en que se crían a niños y niñas para entrevistarlas, ¿a quién(es) sugeriría? **DAR PRIORIDAD A PARTERAS, CHAMANES, PERSONAS QUE TRABAJEN CON MEDICINA TRADICIONAL**
21. Tiene alguna sugerencia respecto a la participación de la comunidad en el estudio, como hospedaje, el uso del idioma, firmar un consentimiento, conveniencia del uso de cámaras.
22. ¿Puede sugerirnos alguna fuente de datos actualizada?  
**Ya para finalizar: Posibles contactos para el estudio (niños en rango de 8 a 12 meses). Sugerencias específicas (localización, números teléfono).**

**¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración, ha sido muy valiosa!**



## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

### Appendix B: Interview guide for primary caregivers

#### Entrevistas sobre los contextos de cuidado en diferentes culturas (CUIDADORA PRINCIPAL)

<b>Lista control</b>	Caso No. _____
<b>Consentimiento</b>	Nombre de Comunidad/Pueblo: _____
<b>Localización GPS</b>	_____
<b>Audio</b>	Familia: _____
<b>Fotos casa</b>	Nombre niño o niña: _____
<b>Identificar otro cuidador</b>	Entrevistador(a): _____
<b>Spot Observation</b>	Fecha: _____

Buenos días, como ya le habíamos explicado, con nuestra investigación queremos conocer la forma en que niños y niñas de Costa Rica son criados durante el primer año de vida. Estamos entrevistando familias de diferentes zonas del país, y creemos que usted nos puede ayudar a conocer más de su comunidad. Para nuestras preguntas NO hay respuestas buenas o malas, o ideas mejores o peores. Sólo queremos aprender y agradecemos que nos comparta su experiencia .

#### 1. Niño/niña

**LA ENTREVISTA SE HACE EN TORNO AL NIÑO(A) DE INTERÉS, POR LO QUE DESDE EL INICIO DEBEMOS SABER SU NOMBRE Y UTILIZARLO**

- Edad exacta: \_\_\_\_\_ años \_\_\_\_\_ meses; Fecha de nacimiento: \_\_\_\_\_
- Género:  Masculino  Femenino
- ¿Pertenece a algún clan? ¿A cuál? \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Padres del niño/a de interés

- ¿Cuál es su estado civil y desde cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_ años  
 Casado/a  Soltero/a  Viudo/a  Divorciado/a

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

Unión libre, Desde cuando \_\_\_\_\_

b. Edad actual      Madre : \_\_\_\_\_      Padre: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Edad en el primer nacimiento      Madre: \_\_\_\_\_      Padre: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Religión      Madre: \_\_\_\_\_      Padre: \_\_\_\_\_

e. Años de estudio:

Madre: \_\_\_\_\_ (anotar años)

No hay      (    )      Técnico inc.      (    )

Primaria incomp..      (    )      Técnico comp.      (    )

Primaria comp.      (    )      Univ. Incomp.      (    )

Secundaria inc.      (    )      Univ. Comp.      (    )

Secundaria comp.      (    )      Otro: \_\_\_\_\_ duración \_\_\_\_\_      (    )

Padre: \_\_\_\_\_ (anotar años)

No hay      (    )      Técnico inc.      (    )

Primaria incomp..      (    )      Técnico comp.      (    )

Primaria comp.      (    )      Univ. Incomp.      (    )

Secundaria inc.      (    )      Univ. Comp.      (    )

Secundaria comp.      (    )      Otro: \_\_\_\_\_      (    )

f. ¿Cuántos hijos tiene? \_\_\_\_\_

g. Por favor indique la edad y el género de sus hijos/as

Género	Edad en años y meses

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

### 3. Composición familiar

a. ¿Quién vive en la casa del niño/a?

Parentesco con el niño/a de interés	Género	Edad en años

c. ¿Quién ayuda a los ingresos de la familia y con qué profesión/ocupación?

Persona	Ocupación

d. ¿Quién toma las decisiones (importantes) en su hogar (familia)?

---

e. ¿Qué idioma(s)/lengua hablan en casa? ¿Quiénes?

---

#### 1. Condiciones de la vivienda

- a. ¿Con qué materiales está construida su casa? Con  
 cemento  madera  hojas de palma  otro \_\_\_\_\_
- b. ¿Cuántos cuartos tiene su casa? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. ¿Qué usa para iluminar su casa?  Electricidad  Fuego  candela   
Lámpara de canfín  Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- d. ¿Cuál es la fuente del agua que usted toma?

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

- Tubería  Manantial  Pozo  Río  Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- e. ¿Cuentan con algún medio de transporte?  
No  Si   Auto  Motocicleta  Otro \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Indíqueme por favor, si cuenta con los siguientes artículos en su casa
- | Artículo      | Si  | No  | Quienes |
|---------------|-----|-----|---------|
| Teléfono fijo | ( ) | ( ) |         |
| Televisor     | ( ) | ( ) |         |
| Radio         | ( ) | ( ) |         |
| Celular       | ( ) | ( ) |         |
| Computadora   | ( ) | ( ) |         |
| Tableta       | ( ) | ( ) |         |
- g. ¿Tienen acceso a internet desde su casa (por medio de la computadora o tableta)?  
No \_\_\_\_\_ Sí \_\_\_\_\_. ¿Por cuál medio? \_\_\_\_\_
- h. ¿Algún miembro de la familia tiene servicio de internet en el celular? ¿Quiénes?
- | Si  | No  |                                     |
|-----|-----|-------------------------------------|
| ( ) | ( ) | Madre                               |
| ( ) | ( ) | Esposo /pareja de la madre          |
| ( ) | ( ) | Hijos(as) de la madre               |
| ( ) | ( ) | Otras personas que viven en la casa |
- i. ¿Tiene usted o algún miembro de la familia cuenta en las redes sociales (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc.)?
- | Si  | No  |           |
|-----|-----|-----------|
| ( ) | ( ) | Facebook  |
| ( ) | ( ) | Twitter   |
| ( ) | ( ) | WhatsApp  |
| ( ) | ( ) | Instagram |
| ( ) | ( ) | YouTube   |

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

( ) ( ) Snapchat

( ) ( ) Otros \_\_\_\_\_

j. Plano de la vivienda (DIBUJAR):

<p><b>Pedir permiso para tomar fotos de la casa, en especial los lugares que se reporten en que más tiempo pasa el niño o niña.</b></p>
---

### 5. Situaciones de cuidado

a. ¿En qué consiste la alimentación del niño(a)?

---

b. ¿Cuánto tiempo lo amamantó? (indagar criterio para introducir sólidos, edad, condiciones, razones)

---

c. A continuación le voy a pedir que me hable de quienes son los principales cuidadores de el/la niño/a en este momento.

Persona	Edad en años	Idioma/dialecto	Actividades que realiza con el/la niño/a de interés	Tiempo que comparte con el/la niño/a de interés por día (en horas)

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

d. ¿**Tiene** el/la niño/a un cuidador preferido?  sí  no

Si la respuesta es sí, quién? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Por qué?

---

e. Mientras los niños crecen, pueden haber varias personas haciéndose cargo de ellos. Ahora le voy a preguntar sobre las diferentes personas.

Persona	Edad en años	Actividades que realiza con el/la niño/a de interés	Tiempo que comparte con el/la niño/a de interés por día (en horas)
... cuando el/a niño/a acaba de nacer (primeros tres meses)			
... cuando el/la niño/a estaba apenas <b>gateando</b> , pero todavía no caminaba (primer año)			
... cuando el/la niño/a estaba apenas <b>caminando</b> , pero todavía no hablaba (segundo año) <b>HIPOTÉTICO</b>			
... cuando el/la niño/a ya estaba hablando (tercer año)? <b>HIPOTÉTICO</b>			

f. ¿De las anteriores, ha **tenido** el/la niño/a un cuidador preferido?  sí  no

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

Si la respuesta es sí, ¿quién? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Quién más? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

### **PREGUNTAS NUEVAS**

g. ¿Qué considera que para los Bribri es lo más importante que debe enseñársele a un niño durante los primeros dos años de vida? ¿Quién o quienes deben hacerlo? ¿Hay diferencia entre lo que se espera entre niñas y niños?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

h. ¿Cuáles considera que serían las mejores condiciones que se necesitan para criar a los niños en el primer año de vida? Ejemplificar

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

i. ¿Cuáles considera que serían las peores condiciones que pueden haber en la crianza de los niños en el primer año de vida? Ejemplificar

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

j. ¿Por último, dígame qué tradiciones propias de los Bribri le enseña y practica con el niño(a)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **6. Cambios en el hogar**

a. ¿Han habido cambios de casa o domicilio del niño(a) a lo largo del tiempo, o ha pasado la mayor parte del tiempo en otra casa (dormir, cuidado, etc.)?

sí       no

Si la respuesta es sí ¿Cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Adónde? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Por favor díganos quienes viven en esa otra casa y la relación que tienen con el niño o la niña

Relación con el/la niño/a de interés	Idioma/dialecto	Género	Edad en años

c. ¿El niño(a) volvió a su casa de origen?  sí  no

Si la respuesta es sí: ¿cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. ¿Hubo más cambios?  sí  no

Por favor describa cada cambio según la composición familiar y las razones y el momento en que sucedió el cambio.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración!**



## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

Appendix C: Interview guide for other caregivers

### **Entrevistas sobre los contextos de cuidado en diferentes culturas** **(CUIDADORES SECUNDARIOS)**

<b>Lista control</b>		Caso No. _____
<b>Consentimiento</b>		Nombre de Comunidad/Pueblo: _____
<b>Localización GPS</b>		Familia: _____
<b>Audio</b>		Nombre niño o niña: _____
<b>Fotos casa</b>		Entrevistador(a): _____
<b>Identificar otro cuidador</b>		Fecha: _____
<b>Spot Observation</b>		

Buenos días, como ya le habíamos explicado, con nuestra investigación queremos conocer la forma en que niños y niñas de Costa Rica son criados durante el primer año de vida. Estamos entrevistando familias de diferentes zonas del país, y creemos que usted nos puede ayudar a conocer más de su comunidad. Para nuestras preguntas NO hay respuestas buenas o malas, o ideas mejores o peores. Sólo queremos aprender y agradecemos que nos comparta su experiencia .

#### **1. Niño/niña**

**LA ENTREVISTA SE HACE POR REFERENCIA DE LA CUIDADORA PRINCIPAL DEL NIÑO(A) DE INTERÉS.**

- a) Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Edad exacta: \_\_\_\_\_ años \_\_\_\_\_ meses Fecha de nacimiento: \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Relación, vínculo, parentesco con niño(a)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- d) ¿A qué distancia vive del niño(a)?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- e) ¿Con qué frecuencia está con él/ella? (Veces por día, por semana)
- \_\_\_\_\_

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

f) ¿Cuál es su estado civil y desde cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_ años

Casado/a    Soltero/a    Viudo/a    Divorciado/a

Unión libre, Desde cuando \_\_\_\_\_

g) Religión: \_\_\_\_\_

h) Escolaridad (Años de estudio): \_\_\_\_\_ (anotar años)

No hay (     ) Técnico inc. (     )

Primaria incomp. (     ) Técnico comp. (     )

Primaria comp. (     ) Univ. Incomp. (     )

Secundaria inc. (     ) Univ. Comp. (     )

Secundaria comp. (     ) Otro: \_\_\_\_\_ duración \_\_\_\_\_ (     )

a. Por favor indique la edad, el género y parentesco de las personas con quienes usted vive

Género	Relación/parentesco	Edad en años y meses

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

### 2. Composición familiar

a. ¿Quién vive en la casa del niño/a?

Parentesco con el niño/a de interés	Género	Edad en años

e. ¿En qué idioma(s)/dialecto hablan con el/la niña?

---

### 3. Condiciones de la vivienda

k. ¿Con qué materiales está construida su casa? con

cemento  madera  hojas de palma  otro \_\_\_\_\_

l. ¿Cuántos cuartos tiene su casa? \_\_\_\_\_

m. ¿Qué usa para iluminar su casa?  Electricidad  Fuego  candela  Lámpara de canfin  Otro \_\_\_\_\_

n. ¿Cuál es la fuente del agua que usted toma?

Tubería  Manantial  Pozo  Río  Otro \_\_\_\_\_

o. ¿Cuentan con algún medio de transporte?

No  Si   Auto  Motocicleta  Otro \_\_\_\_\_

p. Indíqueme por favor, si cuenta con los siguientes artículos en su casa

Artículo	Si	No	Quienes
Teléfono fijo	( )	( )	
Televisor	( )	( )	
Radio	( )	( )	
Celular	( )	( )	

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

Computadora ( ) ( )

Tableta ( ) ( )

q. ¿Tienen acceso a internet desde su casa (por medio de la computadora o tableta)?

No \_\_\_\_\_ Sí \_\_\_\_\_. ¿Por cuál medio? \_\_\_\_\_

r. ¿Algún miembro de la familia tiene servicio de internet en el celular? ¿Quiénes?

Si No

( ) ( ) Madre

( ) ( ) Esposo /pareja de la madre

( ) ( ) Hijos(as) de la madre

( ) ( ) Otras personas que viven en la casa

s. ¿Tiene usted o algún miembro de la familia cuenta en las redes sociales (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, etc.)?

Si No

( ) ( ) Facebook

( ) ( ) Twitter

( ) ( ) WhatsApp

( ) ( ) Instagram

( ) ( ) YouTube

( ) ( ) Snapchat

( ) ( ) Otros \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Situaciones de cuidado

a. ¿En qué actividades participa usted con el niño(a)? Detallar

---

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

b. A continuación le voy a pedir que me hable de quienes son los principales cuidadores de el/la niño/a en este momento.

Persona	Edad en años	Idioma/dialecto	Actividades que realiza con el/la niño/a de interés	Tiempo que comparte con el/la niño/a de interés por día (en horas)

c. ¿**Tiene** el/la niño/a un cuidador preferido?       sí     no

Si la respuesta es sí, quién? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Por qué?

d. Mientras los niños crecen, pueden haber varias personas haciéndose cargo de ellos. Ahora le voy a preguntar sobre quienes son esas personas y alguna información sobre las mismas.

Persona	Edad en años	Actividades que realiza con el/la niño/a de interés	Tiempo que comparte con el/la niño/a de interés por día (en horas)
... cuando el/a niño/a acaba de nacer (primeros tres meses)			

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

... cuando el/la niño/a estaba apenas <b>gateando</b> , pero todavía no caminaba (primer año)			
... cuando el/la niño/a estaba apenas <b>caminando</b> , pero todavía no hablaba (segundo año) <b>HIPOTÉTICO</b>			
... cuando el/la niño/a ya estaba hablando (tercer año)? <b>HIPOTÉTICO</b>			

e. ¿De las anteriores, ha **tenido** el/la niño/a un cuidador preferido?  sí  no

Si la respuesta es sí, ¿quién? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

¿Quién más? \_\_\_\_\_ ¿Cuándo? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Por qué?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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f. ¿Qué considera que para los Bribri es lo más importante que debe enseñársele a un niño durante los primeros dos años de vida? ¿Quién o quienes deben hacerlo? ¿Hay diferencia entre lo que se espera entre niñas y niños?

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g. ¿Cuáles considera que serían las mejores condiciones que se necesitan para criar a los niños en el primer año de vida? Ejemplificar

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h. ¿Cuáles considera que serían las peores condiciones que pueden haber en la crianza de los niños en el primer año de vida? Ejemplificar

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i. ¿Por último, dígame qué tradiciones propias de los Bribri le enseña y practica con el niño(a)?

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**¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración!**

## CULTURAL ATTACHMENT THEORY

### Appendix D: Interview guide for grandmothers in Guanacaste

#### Entrevista sobre el rol de la abuela en el contexto del apego en Guanacaste

Lista control	
Consentimiento	
Localización GPS	
Audio	
Fotos casa	
Identificar otro cuidador	
Spot Observation	

Caso No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre de Comunidad/Pueblo: \_\_\_\_\_

Familia: \_\_\_\_\_

Número teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre niño o niña: \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre abuela: \_\_\_\_\_

Entrevistador(a): \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Buenos días, como ya le habíamos explicado, con nuestra investigación queremos conocer la forma en que niños y niñas de Costa Rica son criados durante el primer año de vida. Estamos entrevistando familias de diferentes zonas del país, y creemos que usted nos puede ayudar a conocer más de su comunidad. Para nuestras preguntas NO hay respuestas buenas o malas, o ideas mejores o peores. Sólo queremos aprender y agradecemos que nos comparta su experiencia.

#### Preguntas de la entrevista:

1. ¿Cuántos nietos y nietas tiene usted? ¿A cuántos de sus nietos cuida?
2. ¿Qué cualidades considera que debe tener una **buena abuela**?
3. ¿Qué cualidades considera que tendría una **mala abuela**?
4. ¿Qué **tareas/actividades**/responsabilidades considera que **deben cumplir las abuelas** en la educación/crianza/cuido de los/las niños/niñas en los primeros dos años de vida?
5. ¿Qué **tareas/actividades**/responsabilidades considera que **no deben hacer las abuelas** en la educación/crianza/cuido de los/las niños/niñas en los primeros dos años de la vida?
6. ¿Hay **diferencias** en las tareas/actividades/responsabilidades que deben cumplir las abuelas **por parte de la madre** y las abuelas **por parte del padre**?
7. ¿Cómo **cambió su vida** cuando fue abuela por primera vez (desde el nacimiento del/de la primer/a nieto/a)? (¿Aspectos positivos y negativos?)



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8. ¿Dígame **cuánto tiempo** pasa al día con su nieto/a? (cuando trabaja y en días libres)?
9. ¿Y descríbame **qué hacen** cuando pasan el tiempo juntos? ¿Juega usted con él/ella, algún juego específico?
10. Descríbame un **día típico/usual** con su nieto/a.
11. Pensando en el **futuro** ¿Cree que las actividades como la cantidad de tiempo que vayan a tener con su nieto/a, cambien cuando esté mayor (cuando va al kínder/a la escuela)?
12. ¿Hay **diferencias** en la crianza de los **niños** y las **niñas**? (¿dependiendo del género?)
13. ¿Quién o quienes toma/n las **decisiones** sobre la educación/la enseñanza del niño/de la niña en los primeros dos años de vida?
14. ¿Usted experimentó situaciones que eran estresantes para su nieto/a? ¿Quién o quienes **atiende/n** a (nombre del niño/de la niña) en estas situaciones?
15. ¿Quién o quienes debe/n **disciplinar** al niño/a la niña en los primeros dos años de vida?
16. ¿Cómo describiría **su relación** con (nombre del niño/de la niña)?
17. ¿Cómo describiría la relación entre (nombre del niño/de la niña) y sus **padres**?
18. ¿Cómo describiría la relación entre (nombre del niño/de la niña) y su **abuelo**?
19. ¿Cree que una abuela debe **transmitir sus conocimientos** sobre la educación/crianza/cuido de niños a la generación siguiente? (¿Qué conocimientos?)
20. ¿Cree que una abuela debe **dar consejos** a los padres del niño/de la niña relativos a la educación/crianza/cuido?
21. ¿Qué **diferencias** siente usted entre la **educación que usted le dió a sus hijos** y la que puede dar actualmente a sus nietos? ¿Qué haría diferente?
22. ¿Qué cosas considera que le dan los **padres** a un niño/una niña que no le da una abuela?
23. ¿Y de la parte de la **abuela**, alguna cosa que puede dar la abuela que no pueden dar los padres?
24. ¿Y de la parte del **abuelo**, alguna cosa que puede dar el abuelo que no pueden dar la abuela o los padres?
25. ¿Cuáles **relaciones/personas** considera que son las más importantes en los primeros dos años de vida para el niño/la niña?
26. ¿Qué cree que un niño debe **aprender de su abuela** en sus primeros años de vida? ¿Cuando usted era niña, aprendió esto de sus abuelas?
27. ¿Hay **tradiciones** de la zona de Guanacaste que usted enseña/va a enseñar a su nieto/a (comida típica, fiestas, costumbres...)?
28. ¿Pensando en la relación con su nieto/a; cómo describiría una **relación usual** entre una abuela y su nieto/a durante los primeros dos años de vida en la zona de **Guanacaste**? (¿Es la misma relación que tiene sus familiares, vecinos?)

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### Appendix E: Additional interview guide for caregivers in San José

#### **Preguntas agregadas sobre “parentaje intensivo”**

##### Percepción como madre y padre

- ¿Qué es ser una buena madre? ¿Qué es ser un buen padre?
- Entre madre y padre, ¿quién cree que tiene más responsabilidad sobre la crianza de los niños(as)? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Padre y madre son igualmente capaces en esta labor de crianza?

##### Centrada en los niños/as

- ¿Usted consideran que los hijos/as deben ser el centro de atención?
- ¿Deben las necesidades de los hijos siempre estar primero que las de sus padres?
- ¿Qué técnicas para disciplinar a su hijo/a utiliza o utilizaría?

##### Amamantamiento

- ¿Qué piensa del amamantamiento? (exclusividad, importancia, tiempo, etc.)
- ¿Considera el amamantamiento como la mejor forma de alimentación para el/la bebé?
- ¿Cuándo considera que debe culminar el amamantamiento?

##### Estimulación

- ¿Es necesario que el niño/a reciba algún tipo de formación (estimulación) fuera del hogar? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Qué tipo de formación o estimulación considera más importante?
- ¿Qué artículos utiliza con el niño/a durante el día? Juguetes, encierro, cuna, coche, peluches, etc.
- ¿Utilizan dispositivos electrónicos con los hijos/as?

##### Acceso a la información

- ¿Consulta a profesionales en salud sobre temas del niño/a? ¿Quiénes? ¿Sobre qué temas?
- Consulta a manuales o libros sobre diversos temas de parentaje y desarrollo infantil.
- Ven programas de televisión con contenidos en temas de parentaje y desarrollo infantil.
- Busca en páginas de internet o redes sociales información relevante a temas de parentaje y desarrollo infantil.

##### Labor intensa:

A continuación le vamos a decir unas afirmaciones, y usted nos indica si está de acuerdo o no.

- ¿Ser padre o madre es una labor agotadora? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Ser madre o padre requiere de gran inversión económica? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Ser madre o padre requiere de gran dedicación de tiempo? ¿Por qué?

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Appendix F: Erklärung über die Eigenständigkeit der erbrachten wissenschaftlichen Leistung

### **Erklärung über die Eigenständigkeit der erbrachten wissenschaftlichen Leistung**

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit ohne unzulässige Hilfe Dritter und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Die aus anderen Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Daten und Konzepte sind unter Angabe der Quelle gekennzeichnet.

Bei der Auswahl und Auswertung folgenden Materials haben mir die nachstehend aufgeführten Personen in der jeweils beschriebenen Weise entgeltlich/ unentgeltlich geholfen.

1. Development in context: What we need to know to assess children's attachment relationships: Prof. i.R. Dr. Heidi Keller (Konzeptualisierung, Schreiben), Mariano Rosabal-Coto (Konzeptualisierung, Datenerhebung und Analyse)
2. The cultural specificity of parent-infant interaction: Perspectives of urban middle-class and rural indigenous families in Costa Rica: Prof. i.R. Dr. Heidi Keller (Konzeptualisierung, Schreiben), Mariano Rosabal-Coto (Konzeptualisierung, Datenerhebung und Analyse)
3. The influence of ecocultural contexts on grandmaternal caregiving and grandmother-grandchild relationships: Prof. i.R. Dr. Heidi Keller (Konzeptualisierung, Schreiben), Mariano Rosabal-Coto (Konzeptualisierung, Datenerhebung und Analyse)
4. Feeding, food, and attachment: An underestimated relationship?: Prof. i.R. Dr. Heidi Keller (Konzeptualisierung, Schreiben), Mariano Rosabal-Coto (Konzeptualisierung, Datenerhebung und Analyse), Esteban Durán Delgado (Datenerhebung und Analyse, Schreiben), Karina Fallas Gamboa (Datenerhebung und Analyse), Carolina Solís Guillén (Datenerhebung und Analyse), Dr. Jorge Sanabria Leon (Datenerhebung und Analyse)

Weitere Personen waren an der inhaltlichen materiellen Erstellung der vorliegenden Arbeit nicht beteiligt. Insbesondere habe ich hierfür nicht die entgeltliche Hilfe von Vermittlungs- bzw. Beratungsdiensten (Promotionsberater oder andere Personen) in Anspruch genommen. Niemand hat von mir unmittelbar oder mittelbar geldwerte Leistungen für Arbeiten erhalten, die im Zusammenhang mit dem Inhalt der vorgelegten Dissertation stehen.

Die Arbeit wurde bisher weder im In- noch im Ausland in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form einer anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegt.

(Ort, Datum)

(Unterschrift)