

# Social Change and Human Development: Revisiting Van Lange's Proposition on Attachment and Social Orientation

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## ABSTRACT

*In our previous paper, Van Lange's suggested link between early bonding and social values orientations was explored using same questionnaires applied to non-western participants. The results showed strong differences which were attributed to possible socioeconomic change. In this paper, we revisited those findings considering Greenfield's theory on social change and human development. Thus, after a brief review of major tenets of that theory, we documented the socioeconomic changes reported by the Mexican government finding a strong support for her theory. Findings show that between 2000-2020 major sociodemographic changes occurred such as: overall population increased, women's participation in labor force and in college education increased, and technological changes, specifically internet. Overall, Greenfield's proposition that sociodemographic changes lead to cultural change, and this into changes in socialization, may explain the observed inconsistencies in attachment and therefore, social orientation values.*

## Keywords

Social change, Human development, Attachment theory, Social orientation, Van Lange's proposition, Interpersonal relationships, Social psychology, Prosocial behavior, Human attachment, Developmental psychology.

## Introduction

Consistent with our objective of demonstrating the usefulness of Greenfield's theory apply to the analysis of attachment in non-western societies, we will proceed as follows. First, we recapitulate and follow-up the discrepancy between earlier Van Lange study and García non-westerners study. Secondly, stressing the strong attention in lively debates on relevance of attachment in current literature, we will review major contributions that focus on the sociocultural factors affecting attachment in their various styles with particular attention to definition of social and cultural change, and attachment. Thirdly, emerging from that review, an outline of the major tenets of Greenfield theory offering a description of the different social and psychological processes affecting human development. Most relevant features to explain differences between

westerners and non-westerners in attachment and social values. Overall, this review will lead to the methodological concerns and procedures to arrive to a table of findings considering Greenfield's model.

First of all, recapitulating García's previous article [1], in which we applied Van Lange's link on attachment with social values, this section briefly provides the rationale for a new data and analysis. As stated in García [1], at the end of the 20th-century attachment became a relevant issue in theory, research, and even clinical applications, with Cassidy & Shaver [2]. In 1997, Van Lange [3] applying questionnaires to European participants and using McClintock's [4] classification of interaction responses (individualism, competition, and cooperation) provided evidence of a relationship between attachment type and social orientation in European participants. IJzerman & Denissen [5] who replicated Van Lange's original study using slightly new methods reported discrepancies. To include non-western participants, in 2024 we attempt to test the validity of Van Lange proposition, and after reporting change and continuity in the non-western responses,

we suggested the possibility of explaining them in terms of social change without specifying those factors.

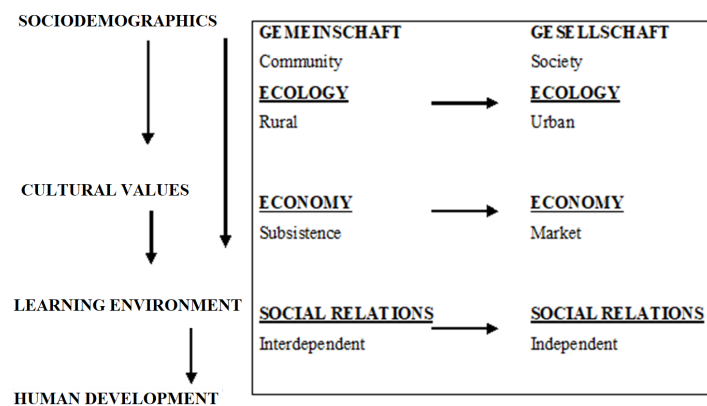
Secondly, stressing the attention of attachment in current literature which emphasizes its relevance and progress on theoretical and methodological grounds. Yet, when one focuses on that sociocultural factors affecting attachment in their various styles, the challenges for the definition of social and cultural change and attachment remain. Ainsworth and Bowlby [6,7] in 1991 restated the importance of their ethological approach to the study of attachment. In the same year, Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper [8], proposing the concept of “reproductive strategy” from the behavioral ecological perspective stressed the relationship between early bonding (“S” secure-insecure attachment) and interpersonal development. In 2017, Varnum and Grossman [9] disentangle the complex definitions used to distinguish cultural change from cultural evolutions, reported finding that cultural change is most concerned with the question: **what?** While evolutionary approaches are concerned with the **why changes occur**. Boccato and Capozza [10] after reviewing a decade of attachment styles and social groups continue restating that “the quality of interaction experienced in early childhood with primary caregivers contributes to trust beliefs in adulthood”. Thus, while most of the researchers agree on the importance of cultural factors, limited specificity of which factors affect what or how the different social processes are linked to specific outcomes. This challenge of definitions is observed in the only study on attachment and sociocultural factors among Mexicans [11]. In this qualitative study, limited to 11 participants and using online focus groups, unfortunately shows a fragile validity due to sample size and technique for data collection. Thus, the analysis of cultural factors influencing attachment raises more questions than answers. And yet this also raises strengthens more the relevance Greenfield’s [12] model as it will be shown in the following section.

Research on what specific factors are linked between attachment and social value orientation outcomes still represent a challenge, particularly when for almost a century anthropologist and psychologists have reported the high levels since 1940’s up to now. Mexican participants even now in comparing them with samples of 33 nations were found as third place in terms of social mindfulness. Since 1960 Oscar Lewis [13,14], using anthropological methods reported high levels of cooperation, although even then he noticed that the level of cooperation was lower compared to that of his first visit to Tepoztlán. Madsen [15,16], strengthened this picture of high cooperation, who using experimental methods concluded that socialization played a major role for high levels of cooperation. This view prevailed until García [17] using same methods, procedures and participants of same areas 50 years apart showed a decay of cooperation and raise of competition.

Thirdly, derived from the above state of the art, Greenfield’s theory seems the most powerful and coherent theoretical resource. Greenfield following Tönnies [18] distinction between community and society examines human development as illustrated in Figure 1. In this figure, following the vertical lines we can see that

initially sociodemographic changes lead to changes in cultural values, which eventually lead to different patterns of human development. Following the horizontal lines, from left to right, Greenfield shows two major columns which represent with different types of social formations departing from community which is based on close relationship of continuous direct interaction. The opposite formation is the society which, by definition, shows interaction but not relationship. While in the community, which are face to face interactions, in the society it is only the group. The most predominant type of interaction is competition. Thus, this is more suitable for the market economy. As described earlier, the social relations are mainly cooperation in the community, while its counterpart is competition or individualism.

Back to the margin of Figure 1, the sociodemographic changes bring in turn, change in cultural values. Under the new values, for example, family, in the traditional culture is the only reason to live. Work is a means to an end. The new capitalist society promotes production and consumption, attachment could be a waste of time. The mothers, due to social change, must invest their time in a market economy, not in the emotional, not in attachment and not economically productive tasks.



**Figure 1:** Greenfield’s theory of social change and human development.

In comparing this model with previous contributions already reviewed, this model represents several advantages. It derives from dozens of empirical studies; it allows to examine the within and between in the different social formations which in turn influence the understanding of the ecological settings and their corresponding learning environment. Above other factors, the model allow for comparison of different groups and consideration for their attachment as one form of caregiver and child social interaction or attachment styles. We may even suggest that positive attachment may be linked to trusting relationships or the origin of other reproductive strategies with their corresponding competitive relations. Based on this theoretical model we reexamined the data obtained comparing the results of non-western samples.

**Method**  
**Participants**

To explain the strong differences between Van Lange reported in

García [1], first, a general hypothesis if social change has occurred among our participants who fluctuate between age 15 and 25, it would be reasonable to explore whether major sociocultural changes occurred in those decades.

Secondly, we investigated the non-western results of four major hypotheses generated and reported in our previous article. All beyond simple replications, two major steps were developed to revisit Van Lange's link between attachment and social motivation. One was applying to the non-western group under rapid social change in Mexico, the same questionnaires used with western group (See means in Figures 2 & 3). The task was, therefore, to look for an explanation to original Van Lange and García [1] which reported two major findings: obvious mean differences between the two groups and correlational findings within non-westerner groups.

A comparison between means reported by Van Lange 1997 (Westerners), and García's [1] (Non-westerners) as seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3, shows the following differences: First, westerners scored higher values for all social orientations than non-westerners, prosocial, individualistic and competitive values oscillate between three and six, while their counterparts scored around three for all social orientations.

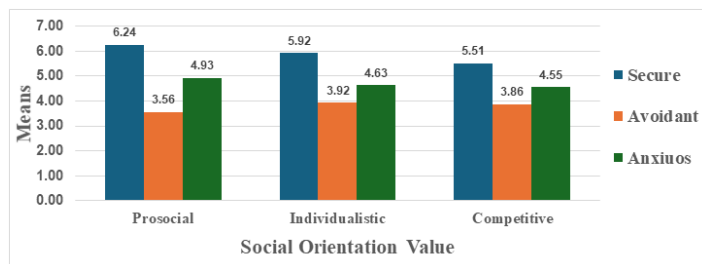


Figure 2: Van Lange's 1997 sample.

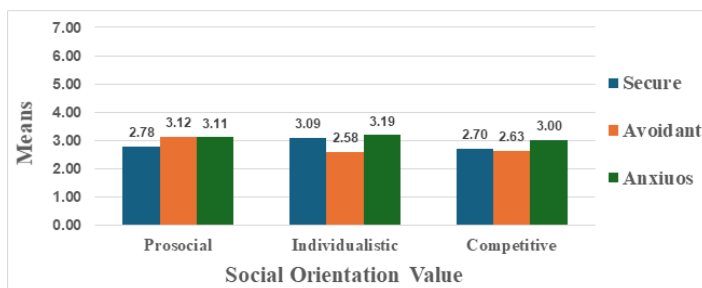


Figure 3: García's 2024 sample.

Second, a closer examination of the non-westerners, between attachment and social orientation values, the results allow us to see the effects of social change (See Table 1, Correlation analysis). This correlation analysis shows prosocial behavior without necessarily related to secure attachment. Also, anxiety and avoidance were related to a range of social value orientations, not limited to individualism, high levels of anxiety were linked to prosocial orientations. Furthermore, women showed higher levels of anxiety in comparison to men. All these observations seem to be more related to social change as it will be observed in Figure 4.

		Social Orientation Value		
	Attachment Style	Prosocial	Individualistic	Competitive
General	Secure	-0.085	0.102	0.038
	Avoidant	<b>0.276**</b>	<b>-0.229*</b>	-0.170
	Anxious	0.040	-0.038	-0.053
Male	Secure	0.133	0.013	-0.310
	Avoidant	.359*	-0.227	<b>-0.434**</b>
	Anxious	0.142	-0.042	-0.110
Female	Secure	-0.124	0.105	0.128
	Avoidant	0.169	-0.168	-0.023
	Anxious	-0.026	-0.016	-0.019

Nota. Rho's Spearman Analysis. \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01.

Table 1: Correlation analysis (Reported in García [1]).

## Results

Based on Greenfield's model, the following outline provides an account of actual results after an intense search in governmental publications (INEGI [19,20]).

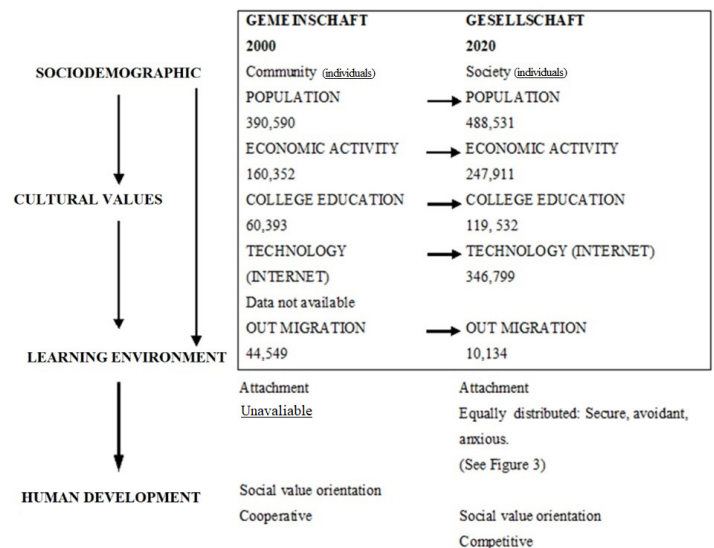


Figure 4: Social change and human development adapted from Greenfield [12].

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to reexamine our previous study in which originally, we applied Van Lange's questionnaire on attachment and social value orientation to non-westerners, Mexican indigenous participants. The results showed discrepancies between the means of the two samples. Furthermore, a closer look at the non-westerners sample showed limited correlations between attachment and social orientations value. To sum, changes in population, participation of women labor force and college education, together with technological changes, mainly internet, seem to explain better the attachment and social value orientations shown by these Mexican indigenous participants in their responses to Van Lange's questionnaires. The purpose of this paper was to look at the discrepancies in light of Greenfield's theory of social change and human development, understanding attachment and social

orientation values (Cooperation, individualism and competition). Overall, the results supported the theoretical propositions of social change and limited support to Van Lange's link between attachment and social value orientations. Beyond this attempt remains the need for more controlled studies and precise definitions of concepts such as attachment and sociodemographic changes.

Lastly, but not less important, this research is more than a simple replication. This is an attempt to strengthen the reconsideration of socioecological and historical context of the participants in order to understand their influence in psychological processes, particularly in human development. This is the time to understand the relevance of studying the psychological processes, such as attachment, in interaction with other processes, such as the historical events.

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