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Legacy in Lines: Exploring Intergenerational Attachment Through Bird's Nest Drawings

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ENG **Abstract:** This study aims to examine the cross-generational transmission of attachment representations through a projective drawing method, the Bird's Nest Drawing Test. The sample consisted of fifty grandmother–mother–child triads, comprising a total of one hundred and fifty individuals. Following standardized instructions, each participant was asked to draw a bird's nest. All drawings were evaluated using a uniform rating system. Frequency differences in attachment-related indicators across generations were examined through descriptive statistical methods and chi-square analyses. The findings revealed a high level of stability across generations. Indicators such as the presence of a parent bird, chick or egg, parent–offspring intimacy, the use of nature-related colours, and page-space utilization appeared to be consistent across generations. However, two elements were observed more frequently in children's drawings: the inclusion of the sun and the depiction of the nest within a tree trunk. These differences may reflect children's greater need for expression and their tendency to represent secure attachment more explicitly through symbolic elements in their drawings. Overall, the results suggest that attachment representations are transmitted across generations through behavioural, visual, and symbolic means. In addition, the findings support the Bird's Nest Drawing Test as a reliable and economical projective tool for exploring intergenerational attachment patterns, thereby contributing to the broader application of attachment theory within visual-based assessment approaches.
Keywords: Attachment, Intergenerational transmission, Projective tests, Bird's nest drawing test.

ES Legados en las líneas: Exploración del apego intergeneracional a través de los dibujos del nido de pájaros

Resumen: Este estudio tiene como objetivo examinar la transmisión intergeneracional de las representaciones de apego mediante un método proyectivo de dibujo, el Test del Dibujo del Nido de Pájaros. La muestra estuvo compuesta por cincuenta tríadas abuela–madre–niño/a, lo que representa un total de ciento cincuenta participantes. Siguiendo instrucciones estandarizadas, se solicitó a cada participante que realizara un dibujo de un nido de pájaros. Todos los dibujos fueron evaluados utilizando un sistema de puntuación uniforme. Las diferencias en la frecuencia de los indicadores relacionados con el apego entre generaciones se analizaron mediante métodos estadísticos descriptivos y análisis de chi-cuadrado. Los resultados revelaron un alto nivel de estabilidad intergeneracional. Indicadores como la presencia del ave progenitora, el polluelo o el huevo, la intimidad entre progenitor y cría, el uso de colores asociados a la naturaleza y la utilización del espacio de la página se mantuvieron consistentes entre generaciones. No obstante, dos elementos aparecieron con mayor frecuencia en los dibujos de los niños: la inclusión del sol y la representación del nido dentro del tronco de un árbol. Estas diferencias pueden reflejar una mayor necesidad de expresión en los niños, así como su tendencia a representar el apego seguro de manera más explícita a través de elementos simbólicos en sus dibujos.En conjunto, los hallazgos sugieren que las representaciones de apego se transmiten a través de generaciones mediante medios conductuales, visuales y simbólicos. Asimismo, los resultados respaldan el Test del Dibujo del Nido de Pájaros como una herramienta proyectiva fiable y económica para la exploración de los patrones de apego intergeneracional, contribuyendo así a la ampliación de la aplicación de la teoría del apego en enfoques de evaluación basados en lo visual.
Palabras clave: Apego, Transmisión intergeneracional, Pruebas proyectivas, Test del dibujo del nido de pájaros.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Method. 2.1. Research Design. 2.2. Population and Sample. 2.3. Instruments for Data Collection. 2.3.1. Demographic Information Form. 2.3.2. Bird's Nest Drawing Test. 2.4. Data collection procedures. 2.5. Data analysis. 3. Results. 4. Discussion. References.

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1. Introduction

The attachment system has been suggested to be the single most powerful tool for evaluating how early relational experiences with caregivers influence the development of emotion regulation and interpersonal functioning throughout life. Attachment behaviors and the strategies derived from them continue to shape the way people handle distress, seek help, and view themselves in relationship to others, as described by Shaver and Mikulincer (2012). Based on Bowlby's (1969) initial conceptualization, attachment is not only a biologically preadapted tendency but also a goal - directed behavioral and emotional system that aims at maintaining safety, proximity, and emotional bonding with primary caregivers. By means of repeated interactions, children acquire attachment styles that are solidified into internal working models, which are cognitive schemas about the worthiness of the self to be loved and the availability and responsiveness of loved ones. These internal schemas influence how children, and subsequently adults, interpret information about their relationships, how they regulate their emotions within stressful situations, and what they anticipate within their interpersonal relations (Prince et al., 2021). An extensive literature also indicates that these early-formed models evidence striking persistence across time, and contribute to shaping trust, intimacy, and assistance-seeking in subsequent life stages (Sroufe, 2005; Thompson, 2021). In this way, attachment is not just an early relational event experience but a psychological architecture that structures relational behaviour and emotional meaning-making across life (Sroufe, 2005).

Attachment theories have largely been developed by focusing on individuals' attachment histories rather than on the intergenerational transmission of attachment, even though researchers have long recognized the importance of the family context. Also important are the parents' own capacity to form secure attachment representations toward their own caregivers of origin, their level of emotional attunement, their typical relational style, and their preferred methods for dealing with stress, since these are all factors that influence the type of attachment representations their offspring created (van IJzendoorn, 1995; Main et al., 1985). These characteristics of the parents influence not only early efforts at care but also provide the emotional context of a broader emotional climate in which children begin to recognize safety, responsiveness, and interpersonal trust signals. A large number of empirical studies support the notion that secure parental attachment is associated with sensitive and responsive parenting, and parenting sensitivity and responsiveness are the strongest predictors of children's healthy adjustment and emotional resilience (Stern et al., 2022). In contrast, it has been demonstrated that parental insecurity increases the chances that offspring will develop anxious, avoidant or disorganized attachment (Dalgar et al., 2021), particularly in the face of inconsistent or emotionally dysregulated care (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Since these relational patterns are performed repeatedly in everyday interactions, they become a strong vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of psychological understanding, relational expectation, and emotion regulation. As a result, the mechanisms by which attachment is passed from one generation to the next are central to the study of family processes and the psychological legacy they contain (Cassibba et al., 2017).

Verbal reports are sometimes inadequate, especially for children or adults who cannot easily articulate their emotional experiences, and this has contributed to the growing use of projective methods in attachment assessment (Shemmings, 2004). Through projective drawing methods, individuals are able to project and symbolically externalize emotional content, thereby making unconscious thinking patterns, central relational themes, and internal emotional states subtly but meaningfully visible (Maharani et al., 2023). Increasing research suggests that drawings provide unique insights into the way people understand family relationships, relational distance and proximity, power relations and emotional tone of relationships, sometimes revealing dimensions of experience which are not readily accessible in talk alone (Demir, 2025a). Research in basic and clinical science related to family drawings and figure-based measures established that children's attachment styles are reflected in diverse pictorial markers, such as spatial positioning, relative figure size, use of color, presence of boundaries, as well as the inclusion or exclusion of key relational partners (Procaccia et al., 2014; Sheller, 2007; Fury et al., 1997). The results indicate that projective drawings offer a different viewpoint on internal working models, as they allow clinicians and researchers to view symbolic representations of security, vulnerability, and relational expectations, which may not come to light in structured interviews or questionnaires (Betts & Groth-Marnat, 2013). As a result, projective techniques are a useful adjunct in the assessment of attachment, providing additional diagnostic depth and developmental understanding to the formulation of relational functioning (Demir, 2025b).

In this spirit, Kaiser's (1996) Bird's Nest Drawing Test (BND) has been recognized as an original and inventive projective technique for the indirect and systematic assessment of internal working models of attachment. In contrast to verbal instruments, which place significant demands on the individual's ability to reflect and to explicitly articulate, the Bird's Nest Drawing Test serves as a symbolic channel for implicit relational expectations and emotional orientations to be visually manifested. Projected imagery frequently conveys themes of safety, nurturance, emotional closeness, and protection, which makes these symbolic expressions a natural bridge between attachment theory and psychodynamic assessment approaches that emphasize unconscious meaning and symbolic communication (Betts & Groth-Marnat, 2013). As image-based methodologies are considered to be less mediated by conscious cognitive processes and are more often created with the qualities of immediacy, they have been found to reveal unconscious relational dynamics, affective

components, and latent emotional narratives with immediacy and richness of expression (Betts & Groth-Marnat, 2013).

Increasingly, specific visual features of nest drawings have been found to have diagnostic significance. Nest protectiveness, the stability or permeability of nest boundaries, the parent–offspring configuration and size, the intentionality of color choices, and the degree of utilization of the drawing area have all been found to be significantly related to attachment security in children, adolescents, and adults (Demirbağ, 2016; Goldner et al., 2016; Wijayanti et al., 2023). These traits are not regarded as simple stylistic choices or fleeting emotional expressions but rather as symbolic representations of deeper core internal working models involving expectations for caregiving availability, experiences of relational safety, and approach/avoidance strategies. In summary, this line of evidence indicates that the Bird's Nest Drawing Test taps into a distinctively acute level of how people consciously and unconsciously organize relational information. It could uncover relational patterns and affective configurations that are not accessible or that may be less accessible when working solely with structured interviews, self-report instruments, or behavioral observation (Kaiser, 1996).

The current research is focused on studying the transmission of attachment representations across three generations by way of the Bird's Nest Drawing Test (BND) a projective instrument of attachment theory. Since attachment it is not just an internal process but a dynamic configuration between family members which is influenced by generational transmission of attachments and representations, the current study is novel in that it addresses a vital void in the literature by assessing three generations (grandmother-mother-child) by using the identical visual method. Results suggesting that parents' attachment styles exert enduring influences on children's emotion regulation abilities and social adjustment (Sharif et al., 2018) further provide additional support for the theoretical justification of the current study. Projective drawing methods differ from verbal ones in that they bring unconscious themes related to attachment, such as experiences of care and safety or emotional representations of the family, to light in a disguised but informative way. Investigating whether and how attachment representations are maintained or transformed over three generations based on visual elements of attachment-related behaviours, this study aspires to make contributions theoretically to attachment research, and practically to clinical, educational and family therapeutic contexts by providing a multifaced approach to assessment.

Although the Bird's Nest Drawing Test originates from art-based practices and has been widely utilized within art therapy contexts (Demir, 2025), the present study is positioned within the framework of psychological assessment rather than therapeutic intervention. Specifically, this study approaches drawing as a projective assessment tool that enables the exploration of internal working models of attachment through symbolic representation (Yoon, 2025). In this sense, the use of drawings is not intended as a therapeutic process, but as a structured method for accessing implicit relational schemas. Nevertheless, the study maintains a conceptual bridge with art therapy by acknowledging the expressive and symbolic capacities of visual production, which enrich the assessment of attachment representations (Betts & Groth-Marnat, 2013). Thus, the current research is best understood as situated at the intersection of psychological assessment and art-based inquiry, with a primary emphasis on assessment.

In line with these aims, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There is a significant relationship between the grandmother's drawing indicators of attachment representations and those of the mother.
2. There is a significant relationship between the mother's attachment-related drawing indicators and those of the child.
3. As secure attachment indicators increase in grandmothers' drawings, the likelihood of secure attachment indicators appearing in mothers' drawings increases.
4. The presence of insecure attachment indicators in mothers' drawings increases the likelihood of insecure attachment indicators in children's drawings.

2. Method

This section describes the research design, study population and sample, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis.

2.1. Research Design

The study adopted a mixed analytical framework integrating qualitative interpretation with quantitative analysis (Yıldırım & Şimsek, 1999). However, rather than following a strictly phenomenological methodology, the study employed a structured evaluation approach using predefined criteria derived from the Bird's Nest Drawing Test. The qualitative data obtained from the drawings were interpreted in terms of symbolic and relational content. Subsequently, these qualitative indicators were transformed into categorical variables and analyzed quantitatively to examine cross-generational patterns. In this sense, the study adopts a mixed analytical approach that integrates qualitative interpretation with quantitative analysis (Kümbetoğlu, 2008). The researchers were aware of their theoretical orientation toward attachment theory and projective assessment methods, which may have influenced the interpretation of the drawings. To minimize potential bias, the evaluation process was based on predefined criteria, and multiple raters independently assessed the drawings to ensure consistency and reliability. This combined approach allowed for the preservation of the richness of

qualitative data while enabling systematic comparison across generations, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational attachment representations.

2.2. Population and Sample

The research sample consisted of individuals from three generations of the same family lineage living in Istanbul. The sample comprised 150 participants from 50 families, with three members from each family participating: the grandmother, the mother, and the child. The child group (the focal group) consisted of fifty children aged 7–10 years who attended primary school. The second generation consisted of their biological mothers (29–45 years old), and the third generation consisted of 50 grandmothers (52–68 years old). Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis using convenience sampling. Regarding educational qualifications, the grandmothers were either primary school or high school graduates, whereas most mothers were high school graduates or held undergraduate degrees, and a few had graduate degrees. Consistent with the study requirements, all participants were evaluated for their literacy level and their ability to complete a drawing task. The inclusion of grandmothers, mothers, and children from the same family system provided a valuable opportunity to examine the intergenerational transmission of attachment representations.

2.3. Instruments for Data Collection

Data were obtained by using a Demographic Information Form, which was intended to bring out the participants basic sociodemographic information, and the Bird's Nest Drawing Test to representationally assess attachment representations.

2.3.1. Demographic Information Form

Introduced by the research team, this form was a collection of basic information on demographics, such as age, education, residence, and family system. The results provided a more well-defined picture of the sample and helped in interpreting the findings in context.

2.3.2. Bird's Nest Drawing Test

The Bird's Nest Drawing Test, developed by Kaiser (1996), is a projective instrument designed to explore internalized attachment models through a symbolic and primarily nonverbal mode of expression. During this activity, participants were asked to draw a bird's nest on a sheet of paper, an approach that is generally perceived as warmer and less threatening than direct family drawings. The participants were informed that the exercise was a metaphor, and this seems to prompt impromptu symbolic exchanges rather than permission-derived or defensive reactions. Given that the activity is simple and nonprescriptive, participants from all age ranges can communicate relational expectations, affective themes, and a sense of security without having to consciously articulate and/or reflect upon their answers. The Bird's Nest Drawing Test has been predominantly used in research with children (Fine, 2002; Sheller, 2007; Spencer, 2018) and more recently with teenagers and adults (Akba and Demir, 2024; Bouteyre et al., 2022) illustrating its feasibility across age ranges.

To standardize the rating, the Turkish version of Demirbağ (2016) also includes the 12-item Yes / No checklist Bird's Nest Drawing Assessment Scale. These items evaluate symbolic and structural characteristics of the drawing (e.g., Is there a parent bird? Are there eggs or baby birds? How much greenery is there? How much of the page is used? How many environmental elements like the sun or cloud are presented? How realistic are the chosen colors? Do the colors of the nest and the egg seem naturalistic?). Item ten is reverse scored because a closed nest represents limited motion and a sense of being contained. Since qualities like openness, use of naturalistic colors, relational closeness, and environmental coherence are taken to be indicative of positive working models of attachment, higher scores are indicative of more secure attachment representations. Reliability analyses for the Bird's Nest Drawing Test indicate good psychometric properties: interrater reliability coefficients range between .66 and 1.00, internal consistency (KR-20) has been found to be .70, and split-half reliability is also adequate. Concurrent validity has been established through associations with well-validated measures of attachment suggesting that the Bird's Nest Drawing Test captures symbolic repertoires of attachment in a sensitive and integrated manner. In sum, it offers a structured but imaginative way to study attachment at the transgenerational level in research and clinical practice.

2.4. Data collection procedures

Ethical approval was received from the Research Ethics Committee of Istanbul Gelisim University (Approval no: 2025/05, dated 30.05.2025) prior to the commencement of the study. After obtaining ethical permission, data were collected from three generations living in Istanbul. The aim of the study was explained to each family, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. First, participants completed the Demographic Information Form. They were then asked to draw a bird's nest on an A4 sheet of paper using colored pencils.All drawing procedures were conducted in quiet and familiar environments for the participants, such as their homes or school settings, in order to ensure comfort and minimize external stressors. The Bird's Nest Drawing Test was administered individually to each participant. Participants were free to use the paper and colors in any way they preferred. After completing the drawing, a brief reflective discussion was conducted using prompts such as "Would you like to say something more?" to facilitate further expression. The drawings were evaluated according to the 12-item criteria of the Bird's Nest Drawing Test. The evaluation

process was conducted by the research team. The team consisted of one researcher with a PhD in psychology and extensive experience in art therapy and projective drawing methods, and one clinical psychology graduate student trained in children's drawing analysis, projective tests, and art-based assessment approaches. In addition, two master's-level clinical psychologists, who were blind to the participants' backgrounds, independently rated each drawing. All raters had experience in projective measures and art-based assessment methods. The coding framework was developed with input from two academic experts in the field. The data collection process adhered to ethical standards, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation throughout the study.

2.5. Data analysis

The qualitative information from the drawings was analyzed by applying a structured twelve-item rating system of the Bird's Nest Drawing Test. Two qualified raters scored all drawings independently; discrepancies in score were discussed and consensus was reached. Once rating was done, all dichotomous answers coded as "yes" (1) or "no" (0) were imported into SPSS 25.0 for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were performed after data entry to evaluate the number and percentage of each visual parameter in the three generations. This process enabled the detection of structurally and symbolically repetitive configurations, which are unique signifiers for the groups of grandmother, mother and child. To test if certain features are significantly more frequent in a generation, chi-square (χ^2) tests for categorical data were conducted. These allowed us to examine, for attachment-related imagery, whether there was meaningful generational stability or change.

In this analytic strategy, the investigation developed from a solely descriptive account of attachment orientations to evaluating in a systematic fashion the continuance or discontinuance of such representations across generations of kin. Using a qualitative interpretation and a quantitative comparison, the method offered a more refined representation of attachment-related visual themes at the family level. This integrative approach enhanced the interpretive power of the Bird's Nest Drawing Test by connecting the subjective visual outputs to empirical data, thereby informing more general statements about the stability or change of attachment patterns across time.

Although quantitative analyses were conducted to examine the distribution of attachment-related indicators, the interpretation of the findings was grounded in a qualitative understanding of symbolic representations. In this context, statistical results were used to identify recurring patterns, which were then interpreted within the framework of attachment theory and symbolic expression.

3. Results

Demographic information of the three generations and the results of the chi-square analyses of the visual cues emerged from the Bird's Nest Drawing Test and the frequency distributions of the qualitative results are reported in this section.

Table 1. Distributions of Three Generations According to Bird's Nest Drawing Test Indicators and Chi-Square Test Results

Bird's Nest Drawing Evaluation Criteria		Grandmother		Mother		Child		χ2	p
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
Is there a parent bird in or near the nest?	Yes	38	76	39	78	33	66	2.114	.348
	No	12	24	11	22	17	34		
Is there a baby bird or egg present?	Yes	34	68	40	80	39	78	2.224	.329
	No	16	32	10	20	11	22		
Is green the dominant color?	Yes	8	16	8	16	8	16	0.000	1.0000
	No	42	84	42	84	42	84		
Was more than 20% of the paper area used?	Yes	39	78	42	84	41	82	0.615	.735
	No	11	22	8	16	9	18		
Is there a sun figure?	Yes	5	10	7	14	14	28	6.234	.044*
	No	45	90	43	86	36	72		
Is there a cloud?	Yes	5	10	6	12	9	18	1.500	.472
	No	45	90	44	88	41	82		
Are there "M-shaped" birds?	Yes	2	4	4	8	6	12	2.174	.337
	No	48	96	46	92	44	88		
Are there extra figures (flowers, animals)?	Yes	7	14	6	12	10	20	1.335	.513
	No	43	86	44	88	40	80		

Bird's Nest Drawing Evaluation Criteria		Grandmother		Mother		Child		χ2	p
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
Are the colors suitable for the figures?	Yes	23	46	20	40	26	52	1.449	.485
	No	27	54	30	60	24	48		
Is the nest enclosed in a tree trunk?	Yes	39	78	32	64	43	86	6.798	.033*
	No	11	22	18	36	7	14		
Is the nest touching the ground?	Yes	28	56	25	50	27	54	0.375	.829
	No	22	44	25	50	23	46		
Are the parent and baby bird together?	Yes	25	50	29	58	24	48	1.122	.571
	No	25	50	21	42	26	52		

Comparison of the drawings of three generations (grandmother, mother, child) on the 12 attachment indicators of the Bird's Nest Drawing Test by means of chi-square analyses did not yield significant results for most of the variables ($p > .05$). This finding indicates that attachment representations are transmitted stably across generations, and that intergenerational transfer processes in the form of similar drawing patterns are visible in all three generations. Not surprisingly, such indicators as a parent bird inside or having a parent bird outside the nest, the use of appropriate colors, or if the nest ever touched the earth revealed remarkably consistent patterns over the generations. The findings suggest that the development of attachment representations may be influenced not only by individual developmental experiences but also by collective, intergenerational representational dynamics.

However, two indicators differed significantly across generations. Both the 'Is there a sun figure?' ($\chi^2 = 6.23$, $p = .044$) and the 'Is the nest inside a tree trunk?' ($\chi^2 = 6.80$, $p = .033$) were significantly more frequent in the young than in the elders' drawings. These differences could imply that children express environmental or protective shapes more in their attachment imagery. In sum, the findings highlight the potential of the Bird's Nest Drawing Test to capture both similarity and difference in generation-to-generation expressions of attachment-based motifs.

In this section, sample drawings from the Bird's Nest Drawing Test—selected from each of the three generations (grandmother, mother, child)—are also presented to illustrate these findings.



Figure 1. Bird's Nest Drawings from Three Generations: Examples from Grandmother, Mother, and Child

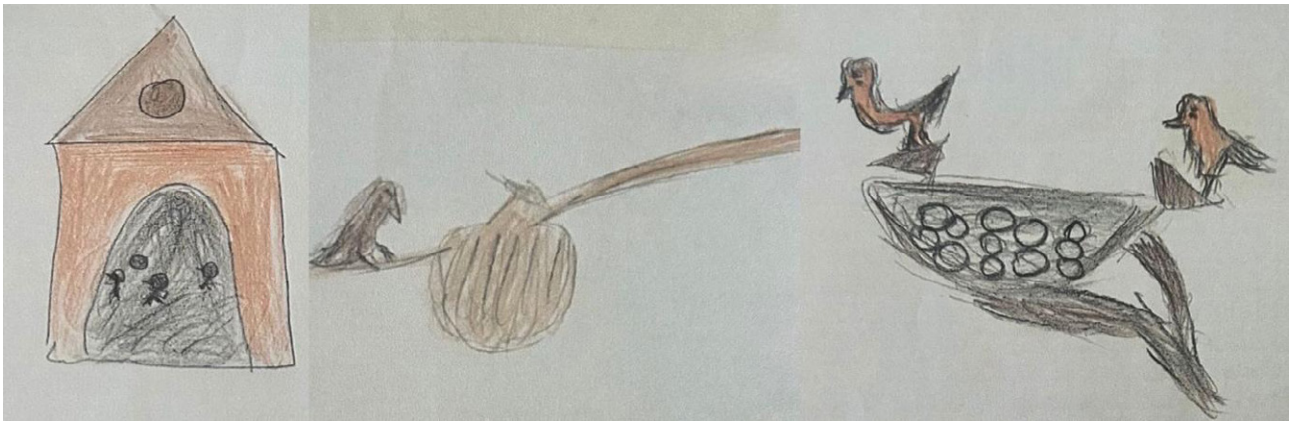


Figure 2. Bird's Nest Drawings from Three Generations: Examples from Grandmother, Mother, and Child

4. Discussion

To the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first to explore the intergenerational transmission of attachment representations across three generations using the Bird's Nest Drawing Test as a projective assessment tool. A further explanation for the intergenerational continuity of such representations at both behavioural and symbolic levels is provided by Bowlby's (1969) concept of internal working models. Cassidy and Shaver (2016) conceptualize attachment as a developmental process extending from childhood into adulthood, while Bretherton (1990) highlights the role of mother–child interactions in maintaining this continuity. In addition, Fonagy et al. (1991) emphasize parental mentalization capacity as a key mechanism in the transmission of secure attachment. Projective and visual representations may reflect patterns of attachment, consistent with findings from Hazan and Shaver (2017) on adult attachment and Main et al. (1985) on the continuity of attachment representations across the lifespan. In this sense, the Bird's Nest Drawing Test can be understood as a relational and projective tool that makes visible the notion that attachment is not only an individual process but also a relational memory pattern transmitted across generations. These findings may also be interpreted within a sociocultural context. In collectivist family structures, such as those commonly observed in Turkish society, intergenerational continuity in relational patterns and caregiving representations may be more strongly preserved through shared family practices, emotional communication styles, and cultural expectations regarding closeness and dependency (Strand et al., 2019).

That there are also parent bird(s) in or at the nest, a chick or egg is included, and parent–offspring proximity is depicted provide telling information for attachment representation assessment at the projective level. These are all representations of a type of working model related to perceptions of parental availability, ability to provide care, and family solidarity. There were none of the three checks (grandmother to mother, mother to child) in the chi-square analyses for these measures. This is indicative of attachment representations as not only contained within the subject's experience but also organised within a relational matrix is transmitted inter-generationally. Depicting a parent bird with a chick or egg also indicates the continuity of the protective and nurturing family roles, and the patterns of symbolic motifs in the figures correspond to the continuity of attachment in the unconscious. However, intergenerational transfer of IWM is influenced not only by early experiences but also by family narratives, styles of emotional communication, and capacities for mentalization (Cassibba et al., 2017; Shemmings, 2006). The detection of such transgenerational attachment patterns in projective drawings seems to substantiate how relational memory is transmitted not simply verbally but visually and symbolically. Therefore, the BND serves as a useful tool for assessing attachment patterns not only within the developmental context of the individual, but also within the larger situational and cultural transmission of the attachment system. The repeated portrayals of parent–offspring proximity can be read as visual articulation of the characteristic features of secure attachment: emotional closeness, support-seeking, and protection-need. This interpretation is consistent with previous research suggesting that attachment representations are shaped not only by individual experiences but also by broader relational and cultural contexts (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013; Rothbaum et al., 2000; Strand et al., 2019).

The research also evaluated visual signals, including whether green was predominant, if over 20% of the paper was covered, and if colors resembled the natural attributes of the figures. The results were almost identical when considering the three generations. These parallels suggest that attachment representations might be carried over not just relationally but also aesthetically and symbolically. The literature comments that characteristics such as size of the drawing, level of detail, use of color and the % of the paper taken up, correlate significantly with attachment security (Bat Or et al., 2022; Gantt & Tabone, 2003; Kaiser, 1996). Those with secure attachment typically draw more space, have more details, and use colors that are found in nature (Fury et al., 1997). Likewise, in the current study, over 20% of the total space of the paper was filled in all three generations with colors used for natural elements and the subjects had the same internal coherence throughout the drawing. Moreover, green was used at the same rate across all three generations, with a frequency of 16% in each group. Earlier work also connects reliant on use of the color green for strong attachment security (Akba & Demir, 2024; Gül & Demir, 2025; Francis et al., 2003). In sum, these data imply that attachment representations may not simply be sustained with a relational content, but also in aesthetic, emotional and symbolic expressions.

The analyses also investigated whether the nest was drawn in contact with a surface, and analogous trends were found in all three generations. Setting the nest on a surface is not only physical grounding but also psychological grounding. And yet feeling tethered to a structure, place, or relational system is deeply intertwined with the security whose absence forms the heart of attachment representations. The connection between belonging and attachment security has consistently been supported in the literature (Çıkrıkçı & Gençdoğan, 2017). Shlomi's (2010) research with emerging adults revealed that individuals with a childhood secure attachment had a more robust sense of belonging. Although family instability did not directly predict belonging, it was argued that secure attachment would make this association significant. People with less attachment security were more likely to make up for family instability with other forms of belonging. Taken together, these data suggest that attachment is not simply a pattern of relating but also a relational "grounding experience" that makes it possible for the individual to find a place in the world.

Other interesting results were that "sun figure" was drawn more often in children's drawing than in adult generations. The sun symbolizes physical and emotional security, warmth, life, energy, optimism, and source of emotional feeding (Akoğlu, 2023). In the literature, the presence of the sun in children's drawings is defined as a sign of positive affect, having a secure interaction with the outside world, and being open to the environment (Fury et al., 1997; Davido, 2014; Yavuzer, 2017). Thus, children's more frequent use of the sun may be

indicative of a secure internal sense of safety or perhaps of emotional expression that is more externally focused. This also could be associated with children's vivid imagination and tendency at this stage of development to externalize their emotional needs and themes related to personal growth through symbols. Hence, the high frequency of the sun in children's drawings may be considered as a projective measure for both attachment security and developmental expression.

Therefore, the fact that children enclosed the nest within a tree trunk more than adults did may point to an intensified projective safety-seeking, protection-oriented motivation, and need for spatial insulation against possible external aggressions. In these drawings, the nest is often placed deep within a tree cavity or surrounded by protective elements, creating a sense of warmth, containment, and safe shelter. These motifs resonate powerfully with the developmental truth of childhood, where caregiver reliance remains paramount and where the outside world can seem unpredictable at best and terrifying at worst (Demirbağ, 2016). For Bowlby (1969), the "secure base" serves as an essential psychological foundation that supports exploration by offering a sense of emotional constancy and protection. When young children stress the importance of closed, protective nests, they may be expressing their dependence on this secure base and their desire for immediate accessibility to comfort and protection. The cross-generational contrast may thus be reflective of younger respondents being more sensitive to the imperative of environmental buffering and adults, who have matured and are more able to command this buffering for themselves, no longer needing to project such intense need for protection in a symbolic form. To that end, closed-nest imagery in children may be viewed as an age-appropriate manifestation of vulnerability, dependence and desire for closeness to attachment figures.

In summary, the findings of the present study suggest that the Bird's Nest Drawing demonstrates comparable attachment representations across three generations, which is supportive of the notion that attachment is not simply an individual experience, but a relational matrix that is transmitted intergenerationally. The recurrence of symbols within their drawings indicates that the notions of care, safety, belonging and protection are intergenerational, while higher levels of protective and hopeful symbolism in the children's drawings seems to relate to developmental requirements. Taken together, these results highlight the potential utility of projective drawings as a means through which to both reflect a child's attachment representation at a relational and an aesthetic–symbolic level, as well as demonstrate the need for further replication with larger and more heterogeneous samples as a multi-method approach. These findings highlight the importance of considering both psychological and sociocultural dimensions in the study of attachment, particularly when examining intergenerational continuity. The integration of symbolic, relational, and cultural perspectives may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how attachment is constructed and maintained across generations.

Nevertheless, this research has limitations at several levels. Since the Bird's Nest Drawing Test is a projective technique, its application as a theoretical-interpretative tool can be influenced by the theoretical orientation of the evaluator, which could affect the objectivity of the results. Furthermore, the homogeneity of the sample in terms of socio-cultural background limits the generalizability of the findings. Focusing exclusively on projective data without using quantitative attachment scales or observational interaction measures constrains the potential for describing the multidimensional architecture of attachment representations. The emotional and environmental background in which the drawings were completed were uncontrolled, possibly influencing variability in the projective indicators. Lastly, the descriptive nature of the study precluded causal inferences of intergenerational resemblance, highlighting the importance of longitudinal and mixed-method research to more closely examine the mechanisms of attachment transmission.

On the basis of the results of this study, we can make a number of suggestions for future research and practice in the area:

- The inclusion of male subjects would facilitate a more complete study of potential gender differences in attachment representations.
- A larger and socio-culturally heterogeneous sample would improve the generalizability of the findings.
- What are needed, then, are longitudinal studies that can more cleanly show how representations of attachment develop and intergenerational transmission mechanisms operate.
- The application of projectives methodology with quantitative attachment measures would allow for greater variability in the data and enhance validity.
- Use of qualitative methodologies such as semi-structured interview or narrative analysis could unravel additional layers of personal and cultural significances attached to the symbols.
- Cross-cultural comparisons would clarify what are universal and what are culture-specific elements in representations of attachment.
- Comparative investigations employing different projective instruments may redound to fuller understanding of the depth and layers of the internal representations.

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