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Bowen theory – Challenging the International Paradigm of Attachment Theory



When applying Bowen theory in organizations, families and communities, practitioners of the theory will encounter a major paradigm clash with Attachment Theory, arguably the agreed upon international paradigm for understanding symptoms and relationships. Attachment Theory is so webbed into society, organizational consulting and mental health theory and practice; that applications of Bowen theory will inevitably bump up against it.

Attachment Theory is so omni-present and unchallenged that it can be difficult for practitioners of Bowen theory to be clear about the differences and to practice Bowen theory consistently. Many assume they are very similar, when actually in many important ways they are almost diametrically different understandings. The most important similarities and differences and their implications for application will be discussed here.

This presentation summarizes over ten years of research and presenting by the author on the similarities and differences between

Bowen theory and Attachment Theory. It represents an effort to help herself and other serious students of Bowen theory define a theoretical self in a sea of Attachment Theory. Some of the confusion between the two theories is fed by both theories having some major foci in common. However, they also diverge radically in a number of crucial areas. Both the shared themes and the divergent conceptualizations will be overviewed here in the name of people making conscious choices in their theory and its application.

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