Chapter 6

Discussion and Implications

Summary of the main findings

**Attachment: Conceptualisation and Measurement**

In a large number of studies, attachment styles are defined and measured as relation-specific phenomena (e.g., Schmitt et al. 2003, 2004). In this dissertation, attachment styles are defined as a trait describing the general way in which people relate to others. In Chapter 2, we found satisfactory reliability of three of the four dimensions of attachment styles proposed by the model of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) – secure, fearful and preoccupied attachment. However, we did not find evidence for the postulated structure of the model which implies that the preoccupied attachment is defined by a positive model of others and a negative model of self. The data rather suggest that preoccupied individuals, like fearful individuals, have a negative “model of others”. The results in Chapter 2 also suggest that the fourth dimension proposed by the model – dismissing attachment – yielded two sub-scales: avoidance of close emotional ties and excessive self-sufficiency. These findings are in accordance with previous studies that suggested two distinguishable constructs: fearful and dismissive avoidance (Duggan & Brennan, 1994).

**Attachment and Migration**

Numerous studies have demonstrated the role of demographic variables in immigrants’ adjustment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The present research showed that attachment styles are better predictors of immigrants’ adjustment than demographic variables such as education, age or age at emigration (Chapter 3), and that the combination of the two attachment styles – high secure and dismissing attachment – may predispose people to migration (Chapter 4). Attachment styles seem to be relatively stable characteristics – no evidence was found that they change under the influence of the host culture (Chapter 4). We also found that a secure attachment style is a better predictor of the well-being of immigrants than of non-immigrants (Chapter 4).

**Cultural Differences in Parenting and Attachment Styles**

In Chapter 5 we found that the wider culture of a society may exert an influence on the attachment styles of people. In accordance with previous
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studies (Schmitt et al., 2003, 2004), we found that respondents from Eastern Europe scored higher on preoccupied attachment than respondents from Western Europe. However, we did not find evidence that attachment styles in the generation of Western and Eastern Europeans growing up in a more unified and internationalized world show more similarities than attachment styles in the generation of their parents from Eastern and Western Europe. Moreover, we demonstrated that the attachment styles of parents, parenting styles and parental psychological health predicted the attachment styles of their adolescent children.

Implications and Conclusions

Implications for the Conceptualization of Attachment Styles

In the literature on psychological development, attachment styles typically refer to how infants organize their attachment behaviour with respect to a particular caregiver (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978). Accordingly, research stemming from a classical developmental attachment framework conceptualizes attachment as a relationship construct. In contrast, research stemming from individual differences defines attachment as a personality trait rather than as characteristics of relationships. Kobak (1994) argued that attachment theory is “first and foremost a normative theory” and that the conceptualisation of attachment as an internal personality structure rather than a quality of relationships is unfortunate (p. 42). His criticism is based on evidence that attachment styles show, even in the relatively brief period between 12 and 18 months, considerable “instability and openness to environmental change”. Furthermore, he points out that conceptualising and measuring attachment as a personality construct causes the attachment system to be abstracted from a relationship context, whereas classical infant research indicated that attachment quality may depend on the attachment figure. Reducing a person’s internal models to a single personality style may, according to Kobak, ignore the complexity and relationship specific character of attachment ties. The present findings contradict this argumentation. First, we have seen that such a dramatic change in life as migration and the process of acculturation did not influence the attachment style of consecutive cohorts of immigrants (Chapter 3). In Chapter 5, we observed high and positive correlations between the general attachment styles of parents and their children. We also found correlations between the general attachment styles of children and parenting characteristics. These results indicate that parental characteristics may influence not only attachment in the dyad parent-child, but also the general attachment of
children. Aside from the arguments brought forth by the present findings, it should be noted that patterns of interpersonal relationships show considerable consistency within individuals; people tend to use similar tactics in their interpersonal interactions with different interaction partners.

Definitions of secure attachment (when conceptualised as a relation construct) include perceived support as a key component (Collins & Feeney, 2000, 2004). The positive correlations between secure attachment and perceived social support found in Chapter 3 indicate that secure attachment, defined as a general trait, is probably underscored by the same belief in a supporting and responsive “other”, as it is in the case of relationship-specific secure attachment. Nevertheless, the present author would not opt for abandoning the measurement of relation-specific attachment. Barry, Lakey and Orehek (2007) found, for example, that when measured independently, relation-specific and general attachments were differentially related to different concepts: relationship-specific attachment accounted for more variance in measures of affect, whereas general attachment style accounted for more variance in self-esteem. Livesley, Jackson and Schroeder (1992) in their factor-analytic study on a hundred personality inventories found independent dimensions referring to generalized insecure attachment and intimacy problems in close relationships. The present findings suggest that attachment, conceptualised and measured as a general trait, constitutes an addition to the personality framework, valid for describing individual differences in general sociability. It seems that people interact with their social environment while relying on a few close attachment relations, and that relation-specific attachment and general attachment are associated. Some evidence suggests, for example, that differences in interactions with close and not close friends are more pronounced for fearful individuals, as compared to those who have secure, dismissing or preoccupied attachment styles (Kafetsios & Nezlek, 2002). Further studies could elucidate the relation between relation specific and general attachment. Future studies could also bring more understanding of how “working models” are organised and how they shape later attachment (whether treated as a relationship concept or a general trait).

**Drawing Conclusions about Cultural Differences**

The average scores on attachment styles in the Polish sample of non-emigrant respondents in Chapter 4 and in the samples of Polish parents in Chapter 5 differed considerably. These differences can be attributed to demographic variables: respondents in Chapter 4 come from a region of Poland with a high (30% in 2005) unemployment rate, which entails a much lower socio-economic status of those respondents when compared to the respondents living in the capital city who participated in our survey in
Chapter 5. These results are in accordance with previous studies, which showed that people with lower socio-economic status had an anxious-ambivalent attachment rather than a secure or avoidant attachment (Shaver & Hazan, 1994). Apart from the differences in attachment styles which might have been induced by socioeconomic status, age-related differences also played a role. For example, Polish teenagers in Chapter 5 had significantly higher secure attachment styles than their parents. The foregoing example shows that differences in mean scores often occur due to demographic characteristics and not culture per se. Thus, in cross-cultural research which aspires to inspect differences between nations, big and representative samples with respect to age, country regions, and social strata should be used. As the present research did not use such samples, prudence is especially warranted before generalizing from the findings.

**Some Methodological Considerations**

The model of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) posits four attachment types: secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing (see introduction to Chapter 1). Secure and fearful types are conceptual opposites, so are preoccupied and dismissing. The measurement developed based on this model – the Attachment Style Questionnaire developed by Van Oudenhoven et al. (2003), used in the present dissertation combines theory driven attachment prototypes with an empirically based dimensional approach. While in the typological approach it is necessary that categories in opposition, such as secure and fearful, encompass all the individuals subjected to the categorization, in the dimensional approach, where scales are derived from factor analysis, having categories in opposition may become methodologically troublesome. Items representing the secure factor also loaded highly on the negatively correlated fearful factor. High secondary loadings cause items to “switch” factors, which decreases factor replicability when a study is conducted in small samples. Assessment of opposite, negatively correlated constructs, such as secure and fearful attachment, may however also be useful in cross-cultural studies. Below we give an example of its usefulness.

It is common practice that, when accounting for cross-cultural differences in acquiescent response style, researchers use positively and negatively-formulated items and subtract the scores respondents obtain on positively and negatively formulated items (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). If the number obtained in such a way, is close to zero, it indicates that the response style was non-acquiescent. It is known, however, that statements with negations may entail conceptually irrelevant variance caused by the different language abilities of respondents (Holden & Fekken, 1990) or the ambiguity of an item (Angleitner, John, & Lohr, 1986). Moreover, it has been found
that respondents are generally less likely to endorse negatively phrased items (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). Another problem with negative formulation is related to syntax equivalence in different languages. For example, an English sentence with one negation – *I never go to the cinema* is translated into Polish by *Nigdy nie chodzę do kina*, a sentence with two negations. In addition, a Likert-type answering scale with categories agree-disagree will introduce another negation. When English respondents are faced with two negations (one comprised in the item and one in the answering scale), Polish respondents will have to process three negations. Such a lack of syntax equivalence may evoke differential item functioning and add culture-specific variance that is not relevant to the concept under assessment. Consequently, accounting for response bias using negatively formulated items may not be a reliable method. Negative items could be omitted in favour of opposite categories such as fearful and secure attachment, assessed with simple and positively formulated items, and acquiescent response tendencies could be appraised in diverse samples based on differences in correlations between two opposite concepts. For example, in Chapter 5 we appraised response tendencies comparing correlations between secure and fearful attachment computed in the sample of Eastern and Western Europeans. We found that Eastern Europeans have more acquiescent response tendencies than Western Europeans, which was congruent with the results of item analysis (see: Chapter 5).

**Practical Implications**

The present findings have a number of practical implications; I will start from implications for psychological counselling for immigrants. Maladaptive behaviours resulting from a lack of secure attachment may be a source of suffering that can be soothed in psychotherapy. Horowitz, Rosenberg and Bartholomew (1993) reported that patients with attachment-related problems such as excessive social dependency, vulnerability to depression and interpersonal loss showed satisfactory improvement in a brief dynamic psychotherapy. Therefore, in clinical practice, it would seem helpful to treat some immigrants’ problems from an attachment perspective.

Some conclusions from the present studies can also be applied to migration policies. In Chapter 3 we demonstrated that secure attachment was more strongly and positively associated with immigrants’ adjustment than any of the demographic variables. This suggests that the adjustment of immigrants is less related to immigrant’s education, or other demographic characteristics, but depends more on an immigrant’s attachment style. Paraphrased differently – the maladjustment of immigrants’ results from the lack of a secure attachment. Thus, policy-makers, who try to prevent the
maladjustment of immigrants, should, apart from developing policies that focus on immigrants’ education, develop policies that focus on interventions reducing factors causing insecure attachment. An example of a primary factor is dysfunctions in immigrants’ families which entail insecure attachment in children. Another example of secondary factors is social pressure at schools on children of foreign descent to give up their native identity. Perhaps due to isolation from mainstream society, immigrant parents are less likely than Dutch parents to seek external help for their problems. Psychological counselling provided at schools, targeted especially at immigrant parents, could reduce their isolation and help them to create conducive conditions for their children to develop secure attachment and be better adjusted in the future.

The results presented in Chapter 4 showed that certain attachment patterns (the combination of high secure and dismissing attachment) predispose people for migration, and that secure attachment helps them to adjust after migration. One can easily imagine that, when a company sends an employee abroad, it is important to know the capacities of that person to cope with cultural differences and the stress resulting from being away from home. In such cases, assessment of attachment styles could help to select the best candidate.

The findings described in Chapter 5 indicate that the globalisation of culture can lead to less cultural diversity in terms of psychological traits. It might be perceived as a positive phenomenon because less cultural differences will make us more similar and enhance communication. Some would argue, however, that less cultural diversity is bound to impoverish global culture; by analogy to theories of biodiversity which claim that the more species, the better for the planet, one could posit that the more cultures, the better for our civilization. Cultural diversity helps us to see problems from different angles, thus facilitating progress in society. For example, if members of one culture perceive a problem as unsolvable, someone with other cultural experience may cope with it adequately. But, there again, in order to benefit from cultural diversity, an open-mindedness coming from secure attachment is necessary.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Research
The strengths and weaknesses of the present research come side-by-side, and therefore will be discussed together.

First, in the present research we used data from diverse cultural samples, which strengthens the validity and generalizability of our findings. However, the culture of a respondent was treated solely as a selection criterion. No culture-related or contextual variables were included in the analyses. This limits the inferences we could make about the role of some
aspects of the native cultures in the adjustment of immigrants, and the inferences about the nature of cultural differences. Van de Vijver and Leung (1997) suggest that including contextual and cultural dimensions could improve exploration of cross-cultural differences. Adding contextual variables in future studies including a bigger number of cultural samples and multilevel design could clarify which characteristics of national cultures explain differences in attachment styles.

Second, our measures of the host and native identity of immigrants were empirically derived in factor analysis based on the data from the three samples of immigrants. That represents more methodologically rigorous assessment than one-item assessment or scenario-approach used in many other studies. At the same time, a few limitations follow from such an assessment. For example, we included items which loaded highly on the “native” and “host” factors across all samples under study, and emic (culturally specific) items were omitted. Also, such an assessment entailed the assumption that the process of developing host identity and maintaining native identity are independent, whereas recent studies (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2004; 2007) suggest that they are related. In the next section, we propose possible measures in addition to independent dimensions related to native and host cultures.

Third, we collected data from anonymous, voluntary respondents; therefore, we can assume they gave honest answers to our questions. On the other hand, such a sampling procedure may have caused an under-representation of certain attachment styles, mainly fearful and dismissing. Also, using a snowball method may have caused an undesirable homogeneity of our samples in terms of demographic characteristics, such as age, education and socio-economic status.

Finally, two other limitations relate to the cross-sectional design of the study and to measurement that relied only on self-report. The cross-sectional design of the study makes it impossible to say if, for example, cultural adjustment is the cause or rather the effect of psychological adjustment. Future immigration studies incorporating longitudinal design may examine the causal relationship between cultural and psychological adjustment, and could be more suitable for testing if the host cultures or the mere fact of migration have influence on the attachment styles of immigrants (in Chapter 3).
Future directions

Psychology and Cuisine
The majority of recent studies on acculturation have employed a bi-dimensional model of acculturation. In this model, maintaining the original and acquiring a new culture are perceived as independent, non-exclusive processes (see Chapter 1). Such an approach implies independent assessment of the expressions of the native and host identity of immigrants. We used such an independent assessment in Chapter 3. It can be inferred, however, from studies on identity conflict in immigrants (Ward & Searle, 1991) and cultural distance and adjustment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) that perceived discrepancies between host and native culture may play a more important role in socio-cultural adjustment than identification with either culture. The study of Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver (2004) on implicit acculturation theories also suggests that the process of maintaining the native and developing the host identity are not completely independent. In a similar vein, studies on bilingualism indicate the loss of the first language by a minority group, when a second (dominant) language is mastered (Lambert, 1978). Possibly, the relation between the two processes depends on whether identity is defined through the differences or similarities between the host and native cultures, through the perceived differences and similarities between cultures, or through the need for identity coherence (Berzonsky, Macek, & Nurmi, 2003). When an immigrant perceives the differences between his or her native culture and the host culture as big, it may motivate him or her to renounce a host identity in order to maintain identity cohesion. Put differently: apart from items such as I like Russian cuisine, which we used to measure native identity, in the future we ought to include items such as, To my taste, Russian and Dutch cuisine are very different.

More Questions than Answers
The present research gave answers to a number of questions, and at the same time gave rise to many more. Given that a secure attachment style was more important for the adjustment of emigrants than non-emigrants, it seems plausible to suppose that it is more important for the adjustment of immigrants whose culture of origin is very different from the host culture, than for immigrants coming from a similar culture. Further studies could explain the role of the interaction of attachment styles and cultural distance in immigrants’ adjustment.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) demonstrated that priming secure attachment evokes a positive reaction towards out-group members. This result suggests that secure individuals might be less prone to experience an
identity threat in a situation of contact with out-group members, and that they may define their identity as based more on similarities than on differences with other people. This issue also needs further research which would address the question of whether there is any relation between attachment styles and a susceptibility to identity conflict, or if attachment styles may predict reactions to identity threat. It would be also interesting to investigate a more general matter: if there is any relation between attachment styles and the organization of identity? Bartholomew and Horowitz’s (1991) model of attachment posits that secure attachment is defined by a positive model of others and of the self. This, in turn, raises a question: what is, if any, the relation between attachment styles and stereotypes and meta-stereotypes? Individuals high in secure attachment, due to having a positive model of the self and others, might be more prone to activate positive meta-stereotypes than non-secure individuals with negative model of self and others. All these questions lead to the conclusion that migration studies would benefit from integrating two research traditions: individual differences and social cognition. Future studies could elucidate the role of the interplay between attachment, identity and meta-stereotypes in immigrants’ adjustment.

Attachment and Bungee Jumping
At more or less the same time when Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978) were conducting their classical experiments on attachment behaviour in mother-infant dyads (see Chapter 1), Fulker, Eysenck and Zuckerman (1980) found in their famous twin studies a high, 58%, heritability of sensation seeking. From that point onwards, research conducted within the attachment and temperamental frameworks grew apart, only occasionally acknowledging the existence of the other approach. Attachment researchers attributed infants’ behaviour almost entirely to the quality of care-giving, whereas researchers focused on temperament and personality attributed it to genetics. More recent studies, which eventually started to examine the connection between personality and attachment, examined the predictive value of personality and attachment with regard to other variables (Bakker, Van Oudenhoven, & Van der Zee, 2004; Kurdek, 2002; Shaver & Brennan, 1992). These studies seemed to focus on the issue of whether measures of attachment are distinct from the dimensions that personality researchers measured over years. The question as to whether and how attachment experience and temperamental traits interact to influence behaviour, dynamics of relationships and well-being has been rarely addressed. In the study of Thornqust, Zuckerman and Exline (1991), high sensation seeking was found to be related to a strong independence tendency and low satisfaction with a relationship tendency. Remarkably, a similar effect was
found for a dismissing attachment (Shaver & Brennan, 1992). It is plausible that high sensation seeking itself may not be detrimental for close relations, but that the interaction of it with a dismissive attachment could be. Conversely, the interaction of a secure attachment and sensation seeking may annul the detrimental influence of the latter. In Chapter 4 we found that immigrants scored higher on secure and dismissing attachment than non-emigrants. Drawing on these results and on the findings of the classical experiment of Ainsworth, in which secure and dismissing individuals demonstrated high readiness to explore new environments and to approach unfamiliar others (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), we speculated in that chapter that novelty seeking may underscore the high exploratory activity of secure and dismissing individuals. Conceivably, the combination of secure attachment style and sensation seeking on the one hand, and dismissing attachment style and sensation seeking on the other, may differentially influence psychological well-being. It could be inferred from the results of Chapter 4, in which secure attachment, unlike dismissive attachment, was found to be a positive predictor of well-being, that the combination of secure attachment and high novelty seeking is especially favourable for psychological well-being. In order to test the relation between dismissive (avoidant) and secure attachment and novelty seeking and their influence for well-being, a study should be designed to separate variance into temperamental and attachment components. Without being overly serious, one could imagine a study on the well-being of bungee jumpers: surely, they would score high on sensation seeking and endorse secure attachment!

In the end, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the blossoming of research on attachment created an opportunity to move from overly deterministic models of personality to study the interaction of genetic predispositions and the environment. Combining the two perspectives seems to be a particularly promising avenue for future work.