Attachment in cultural context
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Summary

Political changes after 1989 and resulting from the European Union enlargement increased emigration from Eastern to Western Europe. In the introductory Chapter 1 the data about migration from the Eastern to Western Europe are presented, as well as the data about cultural, social and economic differences between Russia, Hungary, the Netherlands and Poland. In this chapter we also introduce a theoretical basis of acculturation and attachment theory.

In Chapter 2 we focused on the replicability of factors in the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ). Although the Bartholomew and Horowitz model has been used as a framework in many studies, there is a lack of clear evidence whether or not the model is supported by factor analysis. In the original Dutch version of the ASQ, four oblique factors were found, which corresponded to the four attachment types postulated by the model. We reasoned that if factors found in the ASQ are replicable in other samples, this would constitute support for the model. We applied the confirmatory Multiple Group Method, and the exploratory procedure of Simultaneous Component Analysis (SCA) to examine the replicability of factor structure. In both MGM and SCA we found three clear factors, similar to secure, fearful and preoccupied in the original version of the ASQ in all studied samples. However, we did not find evidence for the postulated structure of the model, which implies that the preoccupied attachment is a conceptual opposite of the dismissive attachment. The data rather suggest that preoccupied individuals, like fearful individuals, have a negative “model of others”. Moreover, the dismissing factor yielded to sub-dimensions: avoidance of close ties and excessive self-sufficiency.

In Chapter 3 we examined the relationship between adult attachment styles and psychological and sociocultural adjustment of Polish, Russian, and Hungarian immigrants to the Dutch society. In addition, we also examined the relationship between demographic factors and adjustment and we compared the predictive value of attachment styles and demographic factors for immigrants’ adjustment. The Attachment Style Questionnaire was used to assess respondents’ attachment. Psychological adjustment was measured with the Psychological Health Scale and the Satisfaction With Life Scale. Sociocultural adjustment was measured with the Social Support List – Interactions scale. Two scales for measuring identification and contact with the native and with the Dutch culture were developed and used as indicators of cultural adjustment. We found relations between attachment styles and psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Secure attachment was positively related to psychological and sociocultural adjustment, fearful attachment was negatively associated with psychological adjustment, and
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more negatively with identification with the Dutch culture than with identification with the native culture. Preoccupied attachment was negatively related to psychological adjustment and to identification with the Dutch culture. Dismissing attachment was weakly negatively related to sociocultural adjustment. Correlation patterns across the three immigrants’ samples indicate that dismissing individuals remain relatively indifferent towards their native and the Dutch culture. Regarding demographic factors we found that education and age at immigration were positively associated with psychological and sociocultural adjustment, and length of residence appeared to be positively related to sociocultural adjustment. In general, demographic factors showed a stronger association with sociocultural than with psychological adjustment. Regression analysis revealed that attachment styles were better predictors of immigrants' psychological and sociocultural adjustment than demographic factors – education, age at immigration and length of residence.

In Chapter 4 we examined empirical evidence for a concept of a “migrant personality” using the attachment framework. We compared Polish emigrants in the Netherlands to the Poles living in Poland measuring their secure and dismissing attachment styles, while controlling for age, gender, and education in both samples. The results showed that emigrants are more secure and more dismissing than their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, we examined, whether attachment styles might be influenced by the host culture. For that purpose, we subdivided the sample of emigrants into eleven cohorts (each cohort differentiated from the other by two more years of residence) and we compared the mean scores on secure and dismissing attachment styles in consecutive cohorts of emigrants. We observed that the mean scores on secure and dismissing attachment remained similar over cohorts of emigrants. Moreover, the differences between emigrants and non-emigrants were of similar magnitude across cohorts. This suggests that the attachment styles of emigrants are not influenced by the host culture, and that the observed differences in attachment styles between emigrants and non-emigrants last over time, and presumably, existed prior to emigration. Finally, we found that secure attachment was a stronger predictor of psychological health in the emigrant sample than in the in-country sample. In sum, evidence for a “migrant personality” has been found. This personality, as the results suggest, is functional for emigrants.

In Chapter 5 we investigated the differences in attachment styles between Eastern and Western Europeans. As predicted based on earlier studies, we found that Eastern Europeans have more preoccupied attachment than Western Europeans. This difference, like the results suggest, exist mainly due to the differential parenting practices, more than due to the direct influence of the culture on an individual. Also we addressed the question of
weather the generation of Eastern and Western Europeans, which grow up in more unified and internationalized world, show more similarities in their attachment styles, than the generation of their parents. The results imply a negative answer to this question. In addition, we found that the secure attachment of parents positively predicted a secure attachment style of the child and negatively insecure attachment styles of the child. Conversely, the insecure attachment of parents predicted negatively the secure attachment of the child and positively insecure attachment styles of the child. The results also showed that an authoritative parenting style increases the chance that the child will develop a secure attachment style. With respect to psychological health, the results were consistent with earlier findings that psychological health, regardless of cultural context, is an important factor for the child to develop a secure attachment.

In Chapter 6, overviewing the findings, we highlighted conceptual, methodological and practical implications of the present findings. We propose that the findings may be useful in policy-making and counselling targeted to immigrants. After discussing the major weaknesses and strengths of this research, the direction of the future studies have been proposed, which would combine the research on individual differences and identity of immigrants and which would investigate the relation between personality, temperament and attachment styles.