



Attachment styles and majority members' attitudes towards adaptation strategies of immigrants

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between attachment styles and majority members' attitudes towards adaptation strategies of immigrants. A second purpose was to determine the construct validity and the stability of the Attachment Styles Questionnaire. A group of 177 first-year psychology students (Study 1), and a more representative group of 260 adults (Study 2) filled out the questionnaire about attachment, model of self, trust in others, and attitude towards adaptation strategies of immigrants. During the follow-up, roughly one year later, both groups filled out the attachment styles questionnaire a second time. In addition, the students answered the questions about the adaptation strategies. The construct validity and stability of the Attachment Styles Questionnaire were satisfactory. Furthermore, the secure attachment style appeared to be positively related to the attitude towards integration (Study 2). Fearful attachment was positively associated with the attitude towards assimilation (Study 1), and negatively with the attitude towards integration (Study 2). Dismissive attachment was negatively related to integration (Study 1) and positively to separation (Study 2). The preoccupied attachment style appeared to be positively related to marginalization (Study 1). Moreover, the attachment styles predicted—to some extent—the attitudes towards adaptation strategies of immigrants over a period of roughly one year.

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1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, Dutch society has become multicultural. Currently, 19% of the Dutch population consists of immigrants. Of these immigrants, 54% are from nonwestern countries and approximately 21% are Muslims (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [Statistics Netherlands], 2004). Consequently, dealing with ethnic and religious diversity has become an important task for today's society and politics. Relevant questions in this regard are: What is the attitude of the host society towards immigrants? Do majority members want immigrants to assimilate into Dutch society or do they accept immigrants who maintain their cultural identity? Do individual differences play a role?

The influence of several variables, such as self-efficacy, perceived cultural distance, and in-group bias on the attitude towards immigrants and their adaptation strategies has been studied (see for example Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Odrzalek, 2000). The present study focused on the influence of attachment styles on the attitude towards immigrants' adaptation strategies. Attachment styles have been little investigated in acculturation research (see for exceptions Bakker, Van Oudenhoven, & Van der Zee, 2004; De Pater, Van Vianen, & Derksen, 2003). Yet, they are an important factor to examine because attachment styles are stable social interaction tendencies which influence several aspects of social functioning, such as the amount of perceived social support, social competencies, quality of relationships, and the way in which we relate to other people (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999, for an overview). Furthermore, attachment styles influence the way we approach unfamiliar others (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), for example, out-groups (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) found that the activation of the sense of a secure base, which is characteristic of the secure attachment style, leads people to react less negatively to members of several out-groups (e.g. immigrants), to be more open to other world views and to be more accepting of people who do not belong to their own group. Therefore, it is plausible that attachment styles also influence the orientation of majority members towards adaptation strategies of immigrants.

1.1. Attachment

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), children develop an attachment bond with their caregivers during the first years of life. Bowlby distinguishes three attachment styles. A secure attachment style is developed when children perceive their caregivers as available and responsive. In contrast, children develop an ambivalent or avoidant style when they perceive their caregivers as either inconsistently responsive or unavailable and not responsive. Numerous studies have shown the influence of individual differences in attachment in infancy on a great variety of domains in life, including relations with peers, friends, and siblings; competence in preschool and kindergarten; behavioral problems; and behavior towards unfamiliar adults (see Cassidy & Shaver, 1999, for an overview). In the last few decades, starting with a study by Hazan and Shaver (1987), research on adult attachment has flourished. The influence of adult attachment styles has been

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