



Personal reactions to ‘strange’ situations: Attachment styles and acculturation attitudes of immigrants and majority members

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Abstract

A growing number of studies examine the influence of individual factors on acculturation attitudes of immigrants, but few studies focus on majority members’ attitudes. In this paper, two studies are reported on the relation between attachment styles and acculturation attitudes of both immigrants ($N = 177$) and majority members ($N = 243$) in the Netherlands. Until now very few studies have associated cultural adjustment with attachment styles. This is remarkable, because attachment theory refers to interaction with others in new situations. Four different styles of attachment (the secure, dismissing, preoccupied and fearful attachment styles) are related to Berry’s classification of acculturation attitudes. People, both immigrants and majority members, with a secure attachment style were positive towards integration, whereas people with a dismissing attachment style were not. Dismissing immigrants were more positive towards separation. Whereas both immigrants and majority members with a secure attachment style showed a similar pattern of correlations between attachment and acculturation, they seem to react quite differently, and even in opposite ways, when they have a preoccupied attachment style. Yet, the different reactions may be caused by the same psychological process: The existential ambivalence of preoccupied people may lead to diverse reactions.

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1. Introduction

For a long time many people have considered the acculturation of immigrants as a one-way-process of influencing from majority group to immigrants. Recent immigration streams, however, are bringing about fundamental changes in the major immigration areas. For instance, in the US 13% of the population consists of Hispanics. It is predicted that within 50 years, a quarter of the American population will have an Hispanic background (Nagayama Hall & Barongan, 2001). Consequently, the US could change into an Anglo-Hispanic society with English and Spanish as two national languages. Western Europe too is changing into a bicultural society. In the 1960s, large groups of immigrants from mediterranean countries came to Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The majority of these immigrants are muslim. At present, more than 5% of the population of the four just mentioned countries is muslim. Their number is still growing, whereas the native population is declining. Islam is a vital religion. Not surprisingly, islamic values and traditions gradually pass through in Western European societies. For instance, the Festival of Fast-breaking is becoming an important holiday in the Netherlands. Because of these immigration streams and their impact, host societies increasingly start to care about what immigrants want and do and adopt a more conscious position towards immigrants.

Therefore, in the present study we will focus on acculturation attitudes of both immigrants and majority members. According to Berry (1980, 1997) immigrants are faced with two fundamental questions (see Fig. 1): “Is it valuable to retain one’s traditional culture?” and “Is it valuable to have positive relations with the larger society?” On the basis of the answers to these questions four acculturation attitudes, later called “strategies” (Berry, 1997), may be distinguished: (a) integration (it is important to maintain both cultural identity and to have positive relations with the host society); (b) assimilation (only positive relations with the host society are important); (c) separation (only maintaining my cultural heritage is of importance); and (d) marginalisation (neither outcome is important). In this paper, we will primarily refer to acculturation attitudes rather than strategies, because we want to know the *appreciation* of both immigrants and majority members of how the acculturation between the two groups should be and not how it actually takes place.

In most multicultural societies, the current discourse centres around the question whether immigrants should assimilate or integrate. Berry (1997) and many other researchers (e.g. Berry & Sam, 1997; Horenczyk, 1996; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998; Zagefka & Brown, 2002) found that integration is the most preferred and most ‘healthy’ adaptation strategy of immigrants. In contrast, majority members generally tend to have an assimilation

		Wish to maintain original culture	
		Yes	No
Need for contact with majority group in society	Yes	Integration	Assimilation
	No	Separation	Marginalisation

Fig. 1. Classification of acculturation attitudes according to Berry (1980).

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