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ATTACHMENT RELATIONSHIPS AND ETHNIC IDENTITY OF WOMEN IN INTERETHNIC AND MONOETHNIC MARRIAGES

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Abstract

The research is devoted to investigating the perspectives of the implication of the concepts of romantic attachment styles, psychological separation from parents and ethnic identity types to the studies of relationships in interethnic couples. The participants there were 114 women who were marriage with a representative of the titular nationality of one of 6 European countries: Germany, Holland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, France and living in their husbands' countries and 84 women, married with a representative of their own nationality and living in Russia. Peculiarities of attachment to spouses and separation from the parents of women in interethnic marriages compared with women in monoethnic marriages. The correlations between above-mentioned attachment relationships and ethnic identity types are considered. It is shown that women from interethnic couples differ both in a more reliable attachment style and in more harmonious separation from their parents. However, their styles of ethnic identity are more conflict in comparison with women in mono-ethnic marriage. The degree of harmony of ethnic identity style is inversely related to the reliability and harmony of relationships with both parents and spouse, but for women in monoethnic marriage it is more associated with relationships with their parents, and for women in interethnic marriage – with relationships with their spouse.

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Keywords: Attachment style, romantic attachment, psychological separation, separation from the parents, interethnic couple, ethnic identity type.

1. Introduction

The number of interethnic marriages is constantly growing, and the nature of relations between interethnic families and their social environment is changing. Such families are no longer perceived as something unique (Herman & Campbell, 2012). On the one hand, it reduces the psychological pressure on the members of these families and their sense of isolation; on the other hand, it leads to neglecting important specific features of such families and couples functioning, which creates certain difficulties for the spouses, and also reduces the effectiveness of traditional technologies of psychological and social assistance in application to interethnic families.

To date, there is no consensus about the influence of the factor of interethnicity on the quality of marital relationships (Killian, 2001; Troy, Lewis-Smith, & Laurenceau, 2006; Chebotareva & Jaber, 2017). Thus, at present, the researchers are faced with the task of identifying factors that predict the relationship quality in intercultural couples, of developing the theories of interpersonal relations, which can explain the mechanisms of the partners' feelings and interactions in such couples.

1.1. Contemporary approaches explaining relationship quality interethnic couples

Hook, Massengale, Choe, and Rice's (2018) *social bond hypothesis* replicated for interethnic couples, proved to be able to explain commitment and relationship satisfaction in such couples with the interaction of factors of relationship quality and ineffective arguing with perceptions of *cultural humility*.

Rusbult's (1983) *investment model of commitment* (Le & Agnew, 2003) explains why interracial relationships have a higher dissolution rate than intraracial relationships (Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). The authors have found that the experiences of marginalization (Killian, 2001) and social disapproval, that is typical for interracial couples leads to a decrease in investments of the partners and accordingly, to decrease of their commitment (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006).

In turn, investment model of commitment is based on Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) *interdependence theory*, which posits that the level of commitment in some relationship depends on the partner's level of satisfaction with the current relationship and perceptions of the alternatives. Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) stated that satisfaction with current relationship predicted the partners perceives a poor quality of alternatives, and consequently, higher commitment to the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1998; Chebotareva, 2014, 2015). It is supposed that the partners in marginalized relationships "compensate" negative social influence by improving their perceptions by reporting or greater satisfaction, or poorer quality of alternatives.

1.2. Ethnic identity in interethnic couples

Among the most frequently mentioned factors that help couples to cope with the difficulties of intercultural marriages are the positive own ethnic identity of the spouses and the positive attitude towards the partner's culture (Killian, 2002; Yodanis & Lauer, 2017).

Ethnicity is a socially constructed concepts; its meaning changes over time and depends on the referent group (Cokley, 2007). Every person has to decide how to disclose his or her interethnic relationship status (Brummett & Steuber, 2015; Reiter & Gee, 2008).

Sometimes interethnic intimate relationships are considered to be an indicator of assimilation processes, or the weakening of cultural boundaries between different groups (Alba & Nee, 2009). But the researches show that depending on the culture surrounding and on the subjective perception of cultural distance, foreign spouses in cross-cultural marriages mostly relay on their partner, belonging to a native culture, in realizing their life goals, because of their own low social competence in a foreign cultural environment (Chebotareva & Jaber, 2017). Thus, they invest more in family relationship waiting from the local partner investing into his or her life in general.

1.3. Attachment relationships styles

Recently, the concept of attachment styles in adult romantic relationships has been actively developed (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The emotional connection between two adults, in contrast to the attachment of the infant to the mother, is considered to be symmetrical: both adults are sources of security for each other. Subsequently, the two-factor model was developed, where attachment styles are formed by a combination of a degree of anxiety about attachment relationships and a degree of avoidance of attachment relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

The problem of relationships with parents remains relevant in adulthood. The ability of an adult to build safe emotional relationships depends largely on the level of his personal maturity, autonomy, and on emotional independence from the parental family (Hoffman, 1984; Doctors, 2000).

2. Problem Statement

Since, spousal and romantic relationships are specific type of interpersonal relationships, we suppose that implication of social psychology concepts of interpersonal relationships are effective, but insufficient. These approaches worth adding with the theories of romantic relationships, such as theory of romantic attachment styles.

Intercultural marriages can be considered on the one hand, as requiring a high level of personal maturity and autonomy; and on the other hand, they may be considered as "separation marriages", i.e. attempts to use another culture to change the patterns of intimate relationships learned in the parental family, we find it important to explore the problem of psychological separation in intercultural couples.

It is also important in researchers of intercultural marriages to take into consideration the specifics of social situation of the couples analyzed. For persons living in a foreign cultural environment we need to take into account their attitudes to the ethnicity.

3. Research Questions

Research Question 1: Are there differences in romantic attachment, psychological separation from parents and ethnic identity types of women in interethnic marriages compared with monoethnic ones?

Research Question 2: How ethnic identity type relates to styles of close relationships at women in interethnic and monoethnic marriages?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the pilot study is to investigate the perspectives of implication of the concepts of romantic attachment styles, psychological separation from parents and ethnic identity types to the studies of relationships in interethnic couples; to analyse the differences in these characteristics and their interactions between interethnic and monoethnic couples.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

114 Russian women aged 21 to 55 years (M = 35.7), married for at least a year (M = 6.7) with a representative of the titular nationality of one of 6 European countries: Germany, Holland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, France and living in their husbands' countries took part in the empirical study. As a controls group 84 Russian women aged from 23 to 55 years old (M = 36.1), married with a representative of their own culture for at least a year (M = 9.2) and living in Russia participated in the study.

5.2. Methods

Next psychodiagnostics techniques were used in the study: "Multi-Item Measure of Adult Romantic Attachment (MIMARA) – OPIJB" (Brennan & Shaver, 1995, adapted by Kryukova & Ekimchik, 2016); "Experience of close relationships" by Sabelnikova & Kashirsky (2015), based on "ECR" questionnaire (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998); "Psychological Separation Inventory" (PSI), (Hoffman, 1984), adapted by Dzukaeva (2014); "Ethnic identity types diagnostic" by Soldatova, Ryzhova (Soldatova & Shaygerova, 2003).

Statistical analysis was conducted with the use of Mann – Whitney U- test, Spearman rank correlations method.

6. Findings

6.1. Romantic attachment characteristics of women in interethnic and monoethnic marriages

The comparative analysis of romantic attachment indicators, diagnosed by ECR questionnaire among women in monoethnic and interethnic marriages, found differences at a very high level of significance. In women in interethnic marriages, the tendency to avoid intimacy in relationships (U = 246.0; p = 0.00000 *) and fear of rejection (U = 827.0; p = 0.000000 *) are much less pronounced. Accordingly, in interethnic couples, women are distinguished by much more safe attachment to a partner. Perhaps it is their safe attachment style allows them to create relationships with representatives of another culture and to move to foreign countries.

Table 1 presents the results of a comparative analysis of the romantic attachment indicators, evaluated with MIMARA questionnaire.

Table 01. Differences in indicators of romantic attachment of women in monoethnic and interethnic marriages

Attachment indicators	Rank Sum		U	p
	Women in monoethnic marriages (n=84)	Women in interethnic marriages (n=114)		
Frustration	12584,50	7116,50	561,500	0,000000
Proximity-seeking	3731,50	15969,50	161,500	0,000000
Self-reliance	9600,00	10101,00	3546,000	0,001837
Ambivalence	12415,00	7286,00	731,000	0,000000
Trust	8708,50	10992,50	4437,500	0,379785
Jealousy/fear of abandonment	9781,50	9919,50	3364,500	0,000356
Anxious clinging to partners	11904,00	7797,00	1242,000	0,000000

As can be seen from table 1, these indicators of attachment styles also differ at very high levels of significance. No significant differences were found only in the indicator of trust, which is at an average level in both groups. Otherwise, women in interethnic marriages feel less frustration from their partners, they have less negative and ambivalent emotions about their romantic relationships, they are less likely to distance themselves from their partners and more inclined to become closer with their partners, less dependent in their relationships.

6.2. Psychological separation from parents of women in interethnic and monoethnic marriages

According to table 2, all indicators of psychological separation of women from interethnic couples also significantly exceed those of women from monoethnic couples. Women who are married to partners from different cultures have much more harmonious style of separation from both parents, i.e. they rarely experience negative emotions in cases of discrepancies with parents, they are also less dependent on the emotional support of parents, their recognition and approval. Most strongly two groups differ in behavioral dependence on parents, which, apparently, is quite natural for women living far from their parents.

Table 02. Differences in separation rates from the parental family of women in monoethnic and interethnic marriages

Separation components	Rank Sum		U	p
	Women in monoethnic marriages (n=84)	Women in monoethnic marriages (n=84)		
Style of separation from mother	4822,00	14681,00	1252,000	0,000000
Style of separation from father	4375,00	15128,00	805,000	0,000000
Affective independence from mother	6251,00	13252,00	2681,000	0,000000

Affective independence from father	5253,50	14249,50	1683,500	0,000000
Cognitive independence from mother	7102,00	12401,00	3532,000	0,002167
Cognitive independence from father	6468,00	13035,00	2898,000	0,000003
Behavioural independence from mother	4076,00	15427,00	506,000	0,000000
Behavioural independence from father	3957,50	15545,50	387,500	0,000000

6.3. Ethnic identity types of women in interethnic and monoethnic marriages

Differences in ethnic identity types among the studied groups are presented in table 3.

The data in Table 3 show significant differences in the types of ethnic identity between two groups. It is interesting that women in interethnic marriages have a lower level of positive ethnic identity and ethnic indifference. Building a relationship with a representative of another culture and living in a foreign cultural environment, they cannot ignore the factor of ethnicity. And the preference of a partner from another culture to a representative of their nationality is quite consistent with the relatively low level of positive ethnic identity.

Table 03. Differences in ethnic identity types of women in monoethnic and interethnic marriages

Separation components Separation components	Rank Sum		U	p
	Women in monoethnic marriages (n=84)	Women in monoethnic marriages (n=84)		
Ethnic nihilism	4846,00	14855,00	1276,000	0,000000
Ethnic indifference	12839,00	6862,00	307,000	0,000000
Positive ethnic identity	13098,00	6603,00	48,000	0,000000
Ethnic selfishness	4572,50	15128,50	1002,500	0,000000
Ethnic isolation	4100,50	15600,50	530,500	0,000000
Ethnic bigotry	3500,50	12520,00	510,500	0,000000

Also, in the group of women in interethnic couples there is a higher level of both extreme types of ethnic identity: hyper- and hypothetical. Thus, women in interethnic marriages combine harmonious and safe styles of separation from the parental family and of their spousal relationships with the inharmonious, conflicting and extreme style of adaptation to the new culture, that probably may explain the mechanisms of the successful restructuring of relationships with parents and developing relationships with the spouses.

6.4. Correlation of ethnic identity types and attachment characteristics at women in interethnic and monoethnic marriages

According to Table 4, in interethnic group types of positive ethnic identity and ethnic bigotry (recognition of the priority of one's ethnos over the others) are closely related to the characteristics of

romantic attraction. In a multi-cultural environment, in order to maintain reliable relations with a partner, women need some deviation from the "normal" ethnic identity in the direction of increasing the significance of their own ethnic group. It is possible that the woman living in a foreign cultural environment perceive the creation of conditions for maintaining her cultural traditions in her family as an acceptance of her by the partner, a sign of good attitude to her.

Table 04. Correlations of ethnic identity types and attachment characteristic at women in interethnic marriages (n = 114)

	Ethnic nihilism	Ethnic indifference	Positive ethnic identity	Ethnic selfishness	Ethnic selfishness	Ethnic bigotry
Frustration	-0,274	0,083	0,462	-0,345	-0,181	-0,127
Proximity-seeking	0,170	-0,132	-0,263	0,213	0,148	0,186
Self-reliance	-0,038	0,015	0,158	-0,070	-0,018	-0,089
Ambivalence	-0,355	0,161	0,258	-0,316	-0,262	-0,288
Trust	0,271	-0,252	-0,322	0,251	0,280	0,281
Jealousy/fear of abandonment	-0,178	0,100	0,251	-0,268	-0,307	-0,239
Anxious clinging to partners	-0,177	0,054	0,227	-0,212	-0,173	-0,106
Avoidance	-0,155	0,129	0,333	-0,211	-0,167	-0,204
Anxiety	-0,307	0,081	0,310	-0,306	-0,268	-0,144

*Note: Gray color highlights correlations at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$.

The group of women from monoethnic couples found much less statistically significant links between these indicators. In general, extreme forms of identity are inversely associated with measures of unsafe attachment, especially the fear of rejection.

So, the above analysis of the data shows the importance of clear (sometimes even rigid) attitudes on issues of ethnicity for safe romantic relationships in interethnic couples.

Correlation analysis revealed not so many statistically significant links in the group of women in interethnic couples. Ethnic nihilism is associated with the harmonious style of separation from both: the mother and the father, but ethnic selfishness is also directly connected with harmonious separation from the mother. In addition, ethnic isolation is directly related to emotional and behavioral separation from the mother. In the monoethnic group, a greater number of significant ties of separation from parents with ethnic identity were revealed. This suggests that in a multicultural environment this relationship is mediated by a number of other factors.

7. Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that women in interethnic marriages living in a foreign cultural environment, have more reliable and positive attachment relationships with both parents and spouses, they also have more extreme type of ethnic identity which is associated with intrapersonal conflicts. On the one hand, it reflects the ongoing process of adaptation to a new culture, on the other hand, it may be a mechanism for consolidating in this type of interethnic couples.

The type of ethnic identity is closely related to attachment relationships. For women in monoethnic marriages living in their native country it is more associated with psychological separation from their parents, and for women in interethnic marriages living in foreign countries - with attachment to their husbands. In both cases, positive ethnic identity is associated with insecure attachment and dependency, and extreme forms of ethnic identity are associated with strong attachment and personal autonomy in relationships.

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