How do Lithuanian children talk about emotions during Child Attachment Interview?

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Background
Recent years have witnessed a growth in the study of attachment in middle childhood (Brisman, Kerns, & Selbert, 2012, Fox & Borelli, 2015) with increasing number of studies adopting narrative based methods in the assessment of attachment representations (Kris, Steele, & Steele, 2012, Shmueli-Goetz et al., 2008).

Whilst attachment is a universal phenomenon, relatively little is known about the expression of attachment in different cultures at different developmental stages. The potential influence of the cultural expression of attachment in middle childhood has rarely been investigated with most of the research conducted in Western cultures. More specifically, very few studies have emerged from Post-soviet countries where cultural trauma might still have an impact on both individuals and the family system (Gailiene, 2015).

Importantly, the ability to communicate emotions and thoughts is central to the formation of attachment bonds and to the construction of attachment narratives that are thought to reflect internal representations. Traditionally, communication about emotions has not been a big part of everyday family conversations in Lithuania.

Aim
In this context, our study aims to shed light on how Lithuanian children talk about attachment relationships and to ground them in descriptions of interactions with attachment figures assessed.

Method
Participants
Participants were 117 children aged 7-11 (M = 8.51, SD = .997), 61 boy and 56 girls. Children were recruited through different schools in Lithuania.

Measures
Child Attachment Interview (CAI, Shmueli-Goetz, Target, Forangy, & Datta, 2008) is a semistructured interview, in which children are invited to describe their relationships with their primary caregivers. CAI contains 19-questions asking children to recall and describe their attachment experiences with, and perception of their attachment figures, in particular, at times of hurt, emotional upset, illness, separation and loss. CAI consists of 9 scales, one of the scales is Emotional openness scale on which the child’s ability to express and label emotions, and to ground them in descriptions of interactions with attachment figures is assessed.

Results
Emotional openness scale

The scores of Emotional Openness scale of CAI ranged from 1.5 to 9 (M = 5.73, SD = 2.09).

Distribution of attachment classifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Fig. 1. Distribution of attachment classifications with both parents.

Main Findings
Labelling of emotions

Children differed in variety of emotions labeled in narratives.

Talking about emotions spontaneously vs. after prompting

In smaller part of the interviews children spontaneously talked about emotions before the questions about emotions. In those instances: mostly labeling emotions, some descriptions of situations, less reasons for emotions.

In considerable part of the interviews children talked about emotions, gave more elaborate descriptions of emotions and their context after prompting.

Complexity of description of emotional experience

• Labelling of emotions was the most common response.
• Some children in addition to labelling provided descriptions of situations where emotions were experienced.
• Explanations of reasons behind emotions and description of impact of emotions were less common in the interviews.

Discussion

Whilst Lithuanian children differed in how they talk about emotions during interview about their attachment figures and attachment relationships, some common tendencies were observed in most of the interviews. These initial findings draw attention to the importance of having in mind the cultural environment of the child when assessing attachment representations with narrative based measures developed in Western cultures (e.g. US, UK). In this context further cross-cultural studies are needed in order to elucidate deeper understanding and to ensure adequate measurement of attachment across cultures in middle childhood.

Acknowledgements
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