



An *emic* approach to distanced parenting of mothers of early school age children: Perception of mothers in Poland, Turkey, and the Netherlands

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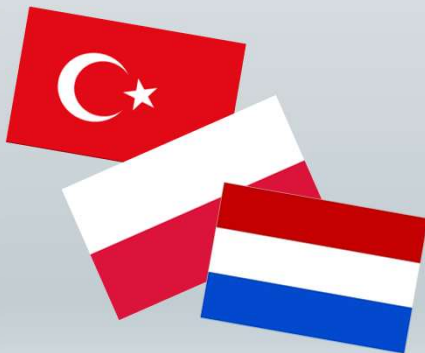
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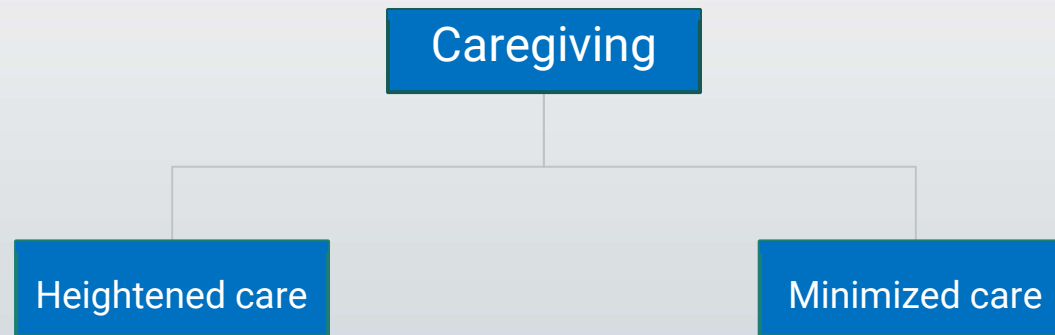
Tillburg University



International Attachment Conference
Attachment & Cultural Diversity symposium
Vancouver, July, 18-20th

Distance in caregiving

Caregiving behavioral system of a parent corresponds to attachment behavioral system of a child (Solomon & George, 2008)



Distanced parenting

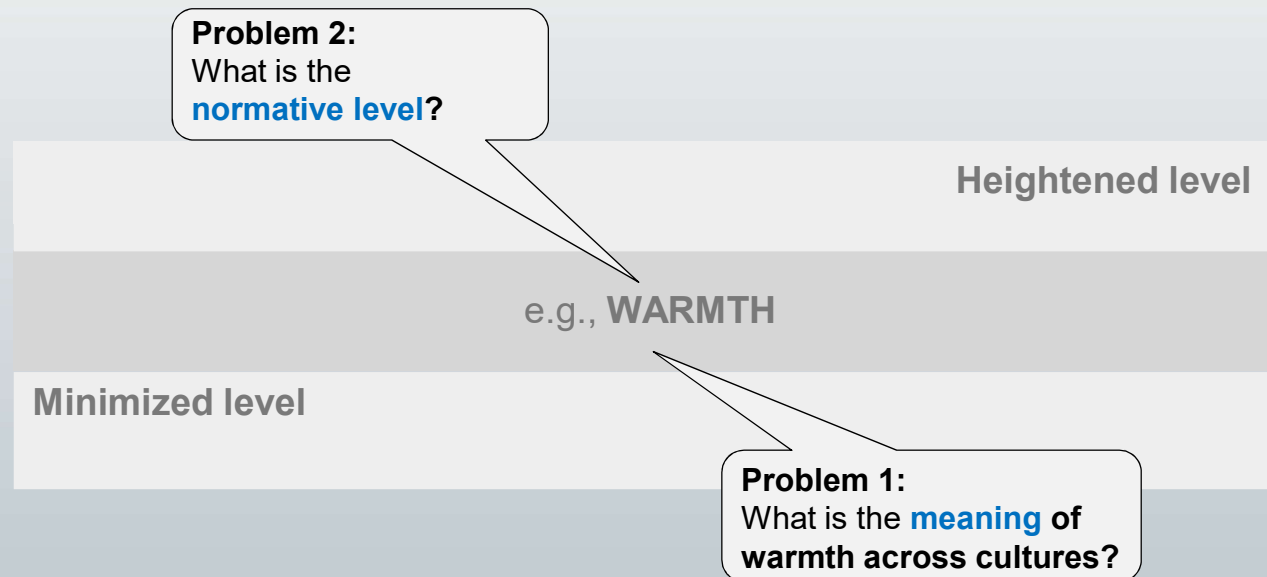
Responsiveness: Parental Engagement, Warmth (vs Rejection)

Control: Harsh Control, Monitoring/Behavioral Control, Autonomy Support

Parental distance undermines security and fosters avoidant behavioral orientation in children (Koehn & Kerns, 2018)

Culture & Parenting

Minimized and distant caregiving can be promoted by overarching **cultural values** and **socialization goals** (e.g., Harkness & Super, 2006; Keller, 2018; Rothbaum et al. 2000; Solomon & George, 2008)



Aim of the study

To analyze:

- (1) the commonsense meaning and (2) acceptance (normativeness) of *maternal distance in parenting* as perceived by mothers of children in the ages between 8 and 12 in Poland, Turkey and the Netherlands.

Why these cultures?

Dimensions of cultures:

Hofstede (2009): **Individualism/Collectivism**, Restraint/Indulgence

Gelfand (2011): Tightness/Looseness of culture

Polish: Restrain, individualistic

Turkish: Tight, collectivistic

Dutch: Individualistic, indulgent

H1: Control

may be more normative in Poland and Turkey

H2: Autonomy support & Warmth may be more normative in the Netherlands



Method

Method: The project

Combination of *emic* and *etic* approach to attachment and parenting in Poland, Turkey and Netherlands

mixture design plan:
Qual (emic) – Quan (etic)



Lubiewska, K. Głogowska K., Sumer, N., Aran, O., van de Vijver, A. J. R., de Raad, W.



Method: Sample & Qualitative Data Collection



Sample: Mothers of children between 8-12 year of age in Poland ($n = 30$), Turkey ($n = 30$), and Netherlands ($n = 30$)

Interviews:

- How does an *distanced, avoidant* mother behave in relation with her child? (describe)
- How *good* in your opinion is this type of mothering? (indicate using Likert scale)



Results

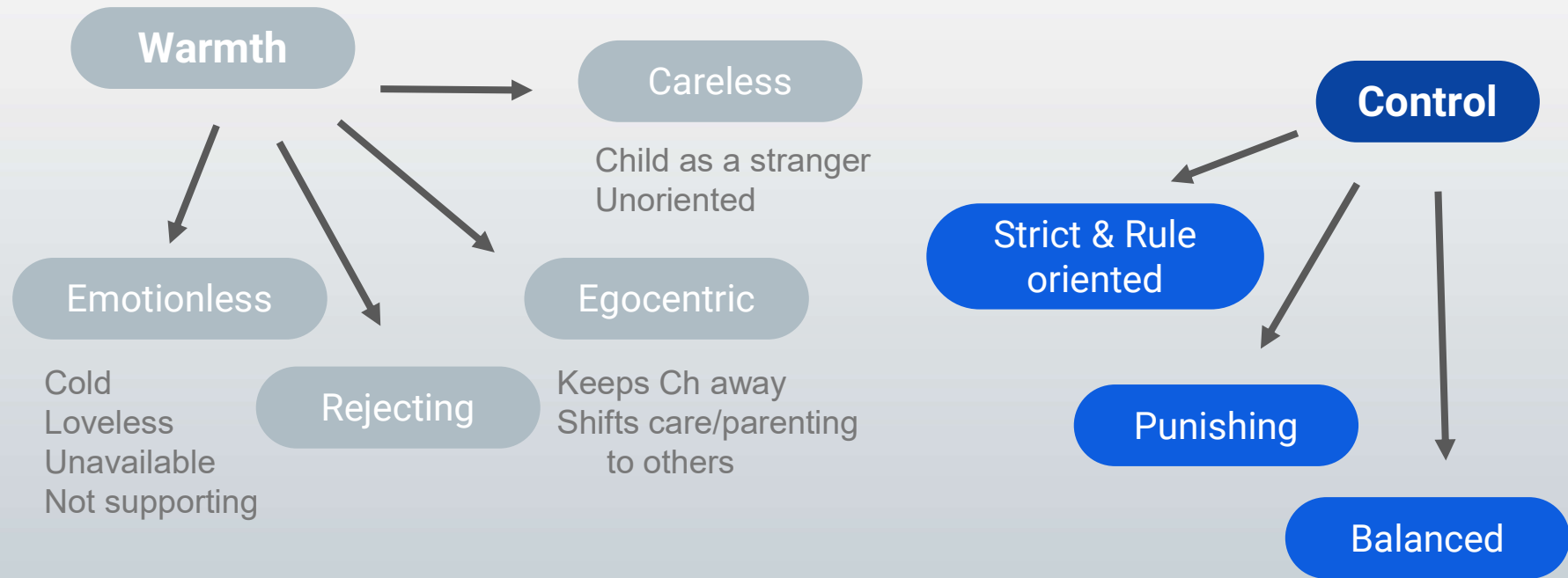
- ❑ Meaning of distanced parenting: Themes across cultural groups
- ❑ Normativeness of distanced parenting: Acceptance of distant, avoidant parenting across cultural groups



Results

- Themes

Major themes in narratives



Distanced mothers are: Emotionless

Cross-cultural similarities:

Emotionless: (1) Cold, chilly, not warm; (2) Physically and emotionally distant;
(3) Not expressing feelings (love); (4) Not interested in child.

Cross-cultural differences:

Netherlands ($n = 13$): **emotional poverty**,
detached/unavailable

Poland ($n = 10$): **Dry** in contact; **cold breeding**

Turkey ($n = 11$): **Cold hearted**

(NL3) *"I'd say rather cold. Rather cold and chilly. And I think that that is not really so fine for the child emotionally. Maybe he'd start displaying compensational behaviour, you know? So I think you'd see physical distance, in a literal sense and emotionally."*

Distanced mothers are: Rejecting

Cross-cultural differences:

Rejection in Netherlands ($n = 6$): Pushing the child away, negativity toward the child
(also blaming), emotional neglect

Poland ($n = 1$): Being **abhorred** by the child

Turkey ($n = 0$)

(PL28) *“I get the impression that at this moment she abhors her child. She is in this world certainly not to have children. I do not know, she was forced to have a child, or it happened by chance. But rather in today's age it is by no means accidental.”*

Distanced mothers are: Egocentric

Cross-cultural similarities:

Egocentric: (1) Busy, prioritizing herself over child; (2) Keeping child; (3) Lack of interest in own child.

(TR10) *“She would love her kid while sleeping.”*

(PL 17) *“Such mothers do not devote their time to their children.”*

Cross-cultural differences:

Netherlands ($n = 9$): M shifts parenting/care to others ($n = 2$)

Poland ($n = 15$): Negative judgement of maternal egocentrism verbalized (e.g., *not normal*)

Turkey ($n = 6$)

(NL1) *“An avoidant mother leaves everything to do with her child to other people...”*

Distanced mothers are: Careless

Cross-cultural similarities:

Careless: (1) lack of care regarding: feeding, school issues and whereabouts; (2) unoriented in child's issues (whereabouts, eating/dressing, problems, histories).

Cross-cultural differences:

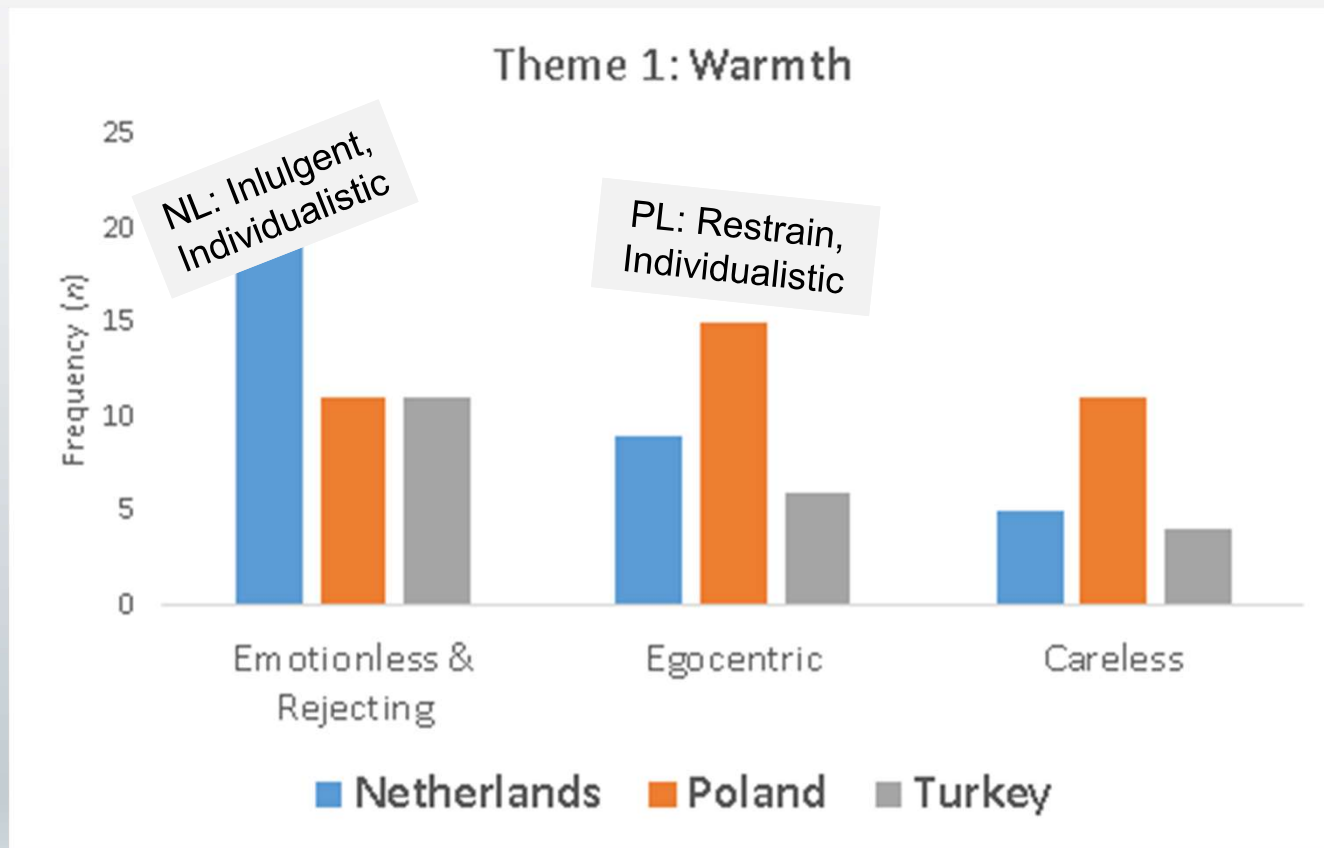
Netherlands ($n = 5$): Not giving surprise presents ($n = 1$) may be culture specific

Poland ($n = 11$): (1) Carrying vs raising a child; (2) indifference (regarding: what ch does, child, different issues; talks in indifferent way); (3) Child as a stranger.

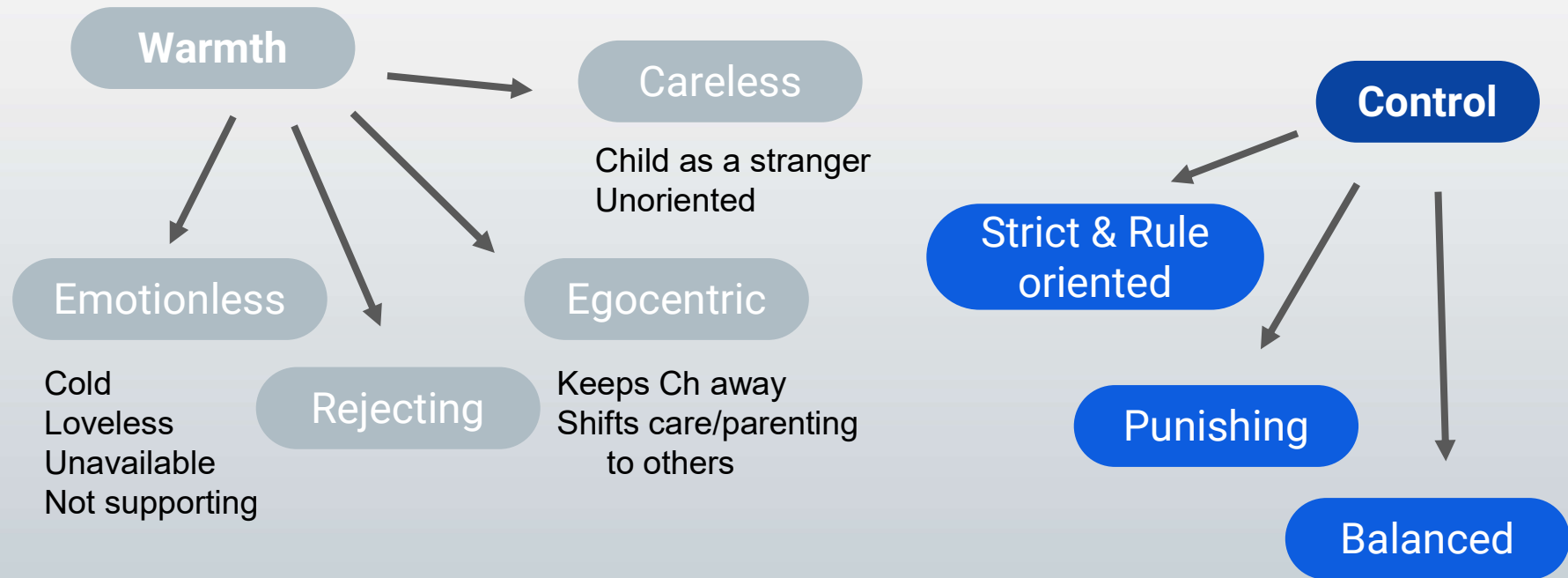
Turkey ($n = 4$)

(PL4) "...*indifferent, uninteresting in the child, living next to him. Taking care of the child and not raising.*"

Warmth across cultural groups



Major themes in narratives



Distanced mothers are: Controlling

Control: Defined as setting and keeping boundaries

Cross-cultural differences:

Netherlands ($n = 1$)

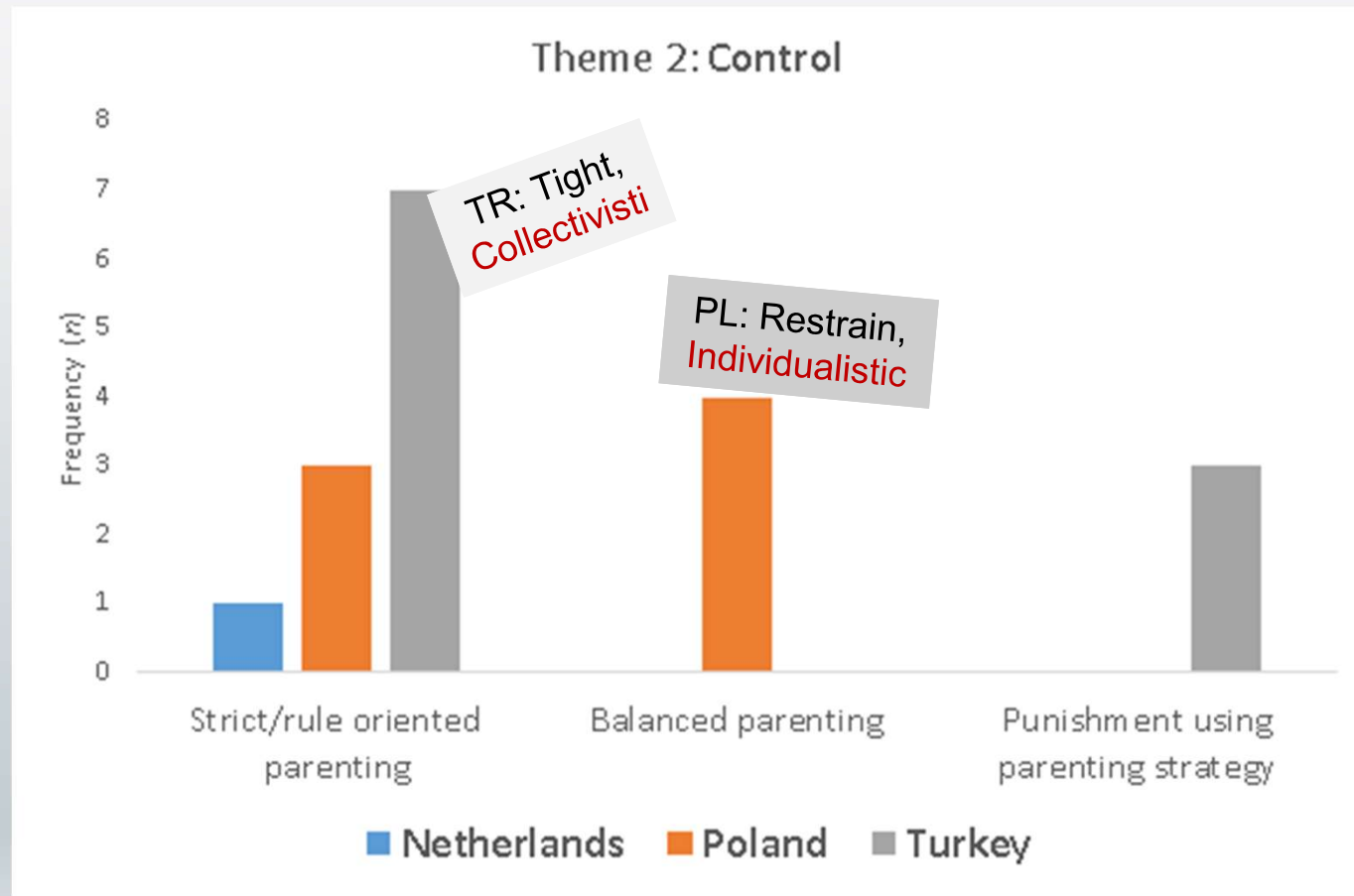
Poland ($n = 7$): Emotionally balanced parenting (autonomy support)

Turkey ($n = 7$): punishing the Ch - not spoiling way of parenting (TR10)

(PL15) “Distanced mother is balanced, (...). She is neither scared, nor oversensitive, overprotective.”

(PL24) “She is such an inconceivable mother, letting child develop and have his world, of course. This control is known to be, but she lets the child fall over or fail, and let him learn from his own experience. It is not easy, because you know that mother wants to show everything (to the child) using her own example, but it can not be done this way.”

Control across cultural groups

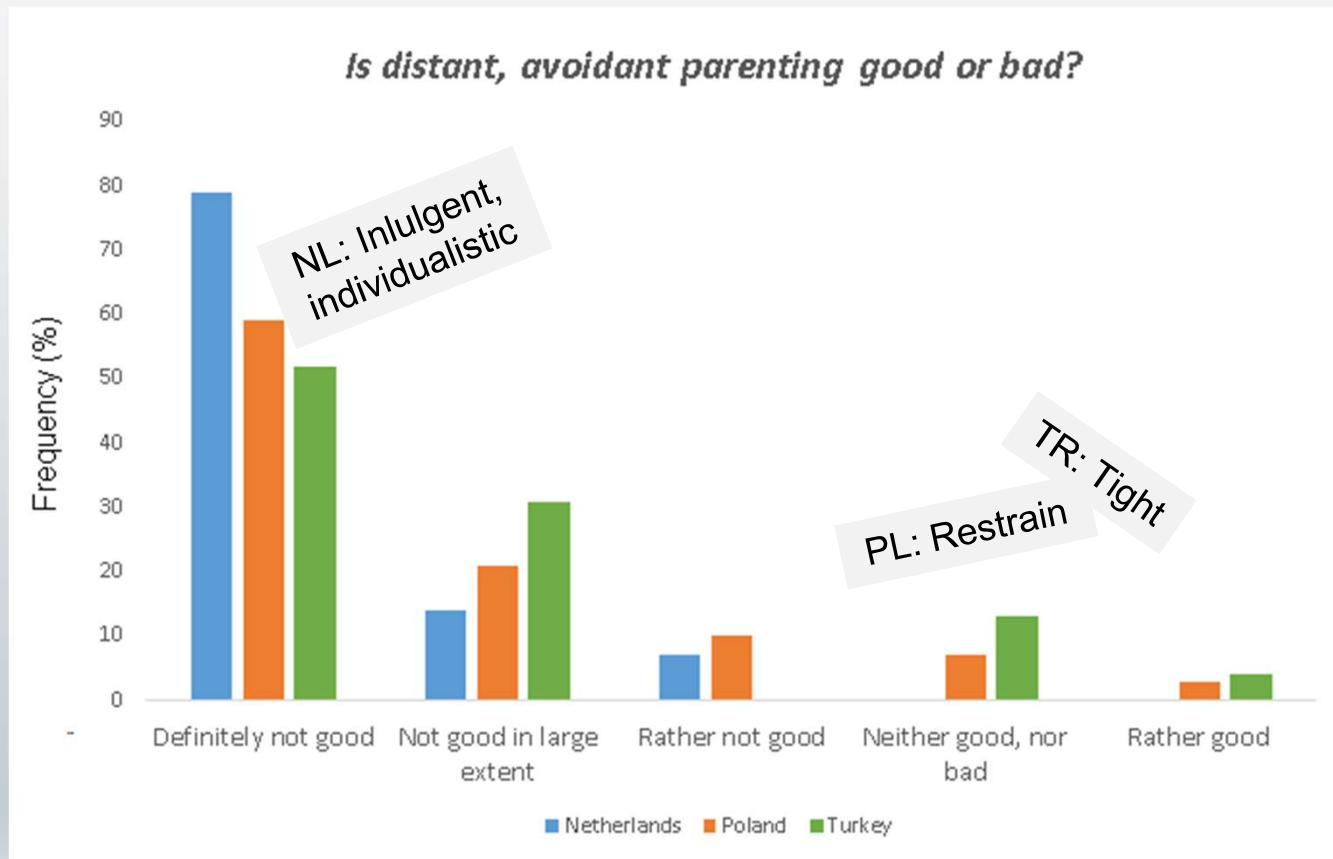


Results

- ❑ Acceptance of distanced, avoidant parenting across cultural groups

Acceptance of distant maternal parenting

Cross-cultural perspective





Discussion

Discussion: Cross-cultural similarities

Narratives about distant parenting are in line with major parenting dimensions (Skinner et al., 2010; Koehn & Kerns, 2018):

Warmth

Rejection

Control (structure and coercion)

Discussion: Cross-cultural differences

Dutch Indulgent & Individualistic culture:

Warmth (emotional distance) and **Rejection**, as well as **communication quality** and parental **interest/involvement** seems to be of high importance for mothers in Dutch (Western) cultures

This finding is in line with other cross-cultural and intra-cultural quantitative findings

(Lubiewska, 2019; Lubiewska, Mayer, Albert, Trommsdorff, 2017; Sumer & Kagitcibasi, 2010)

*DISTANCE
NOT ACCEPTED!*

Discussion: Cross-cultural differences

Turkish and **Polish** tight and restrain cultures:

Egocentric and **careless** parenting in Poland and Turkey

- ❑ **Coercive** control (punishment) in Turkey
- ❑ **Parenting restraint** (balance) in Poland

- ❑ NOT in line with H2: **autonomy support** was stressed in Polish (not Dutch) narratives

but ... child autonomy may be coherent with goal of being independent (not necessarily volitionally) which is valued parenting goal in the Polish context

Control should be considered as child attachment predictor in studies in East European and non-Western cultures (van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2019)

DISTANCE
MORE ACCEPTED

Discussion

Distance/minimized care may be more normative in non-Western cultures

What does it mean for attachment security of children?

Step 2 in **CEE-PaAtt** project:
Quantitative data analysis



Thank you for attention!

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Limitations of the study

- 1) Differences in length of narrations and number of prompts across interviewers.
- 1) As question about distanced, avoidant parenting was asked after interviewees responded to a question about overprotective, anxious parenting of mothers they might have been prone to describe distanced parenting in the contrast to overprotective parenting.

Indicators of distance in attachment research

(Koehn & Kerns, 2018)

Broader construct	Composite subconstructs	Study results: Relation to child's attachment patterns
Responsiveness	Parental Engagement	(in)secure attachment avoidant attachment
	Warmth (vs Rejection)	
Control	Harsh Control , Rejection	(in)secure attachment
	Monitoring/Behavioral Control	(in)secure attachment avoidant attachment
	Autonomy Support (promotion?)	(in)secure attachment

Parental distance undermines security and fosters avoidant behavioral orientation in children

Culture & Parenting

Problem 1: Attachment studies' results are based on **global** parenting **indexes** composed of smaller **dimensions**.

- Parenting dimensions: Warmth is studied as Acceptance + Rejection
Different culture-dependent effects of Acceptance, Rejection, and control
(e.g., Lubiewska et al, 2017)
- Attachment: Mother-child mutual gaze – indicator of attachment behavioral system (BS) or affiliation BS?

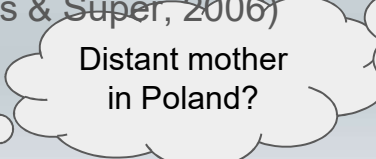
Problem 2 (Lack of *emic* perspective): **Meaning** of parenting dimensions and their **cultural normativeness** is rarely considered in attachment development focused studies.

Examples:

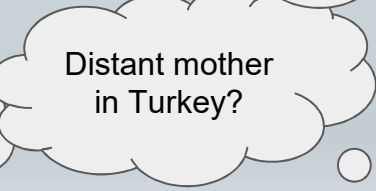
Separation with mother in SSP in Japan (Rothbaum et al., 2000);

Interpretation of mother-to-infant eye contact (Keller, 2015);

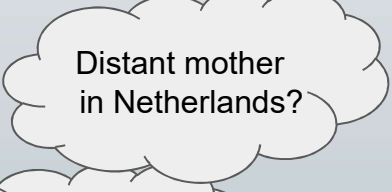
Night isolation (Gottlieb & DeLoach, 2018; Harkness & Super, 2006)



Distant mother
in Poland?



Distant mother
in Turkey?



Distant mother
in Netherlands?

Why this Aim of the study

Attachment cross-cultural studies:

- ✓ Observational infant studies in non-Western **very traditional cultures** (tribes) (e.g., Mesman, van IJzendoorn, Sagi-Schwartz, 2016).
- ✓ **Immigrant families** (traditional, collectivistic background and modern, individualistic host culture) (Gungor & Bornstein, 2010; Mesman)
- × Normativeness of parenting dimensions across cultures in
 - emic perspective (narratives of mothers)*
 - beyond infancy when culture becomes more influential)*
 - New cultural contexts

Cultural background of expected differences

Cultures' characteristics:

Polish: Restrain, individualistic, controlling

Turkish: Tight, collectivistic, controlling

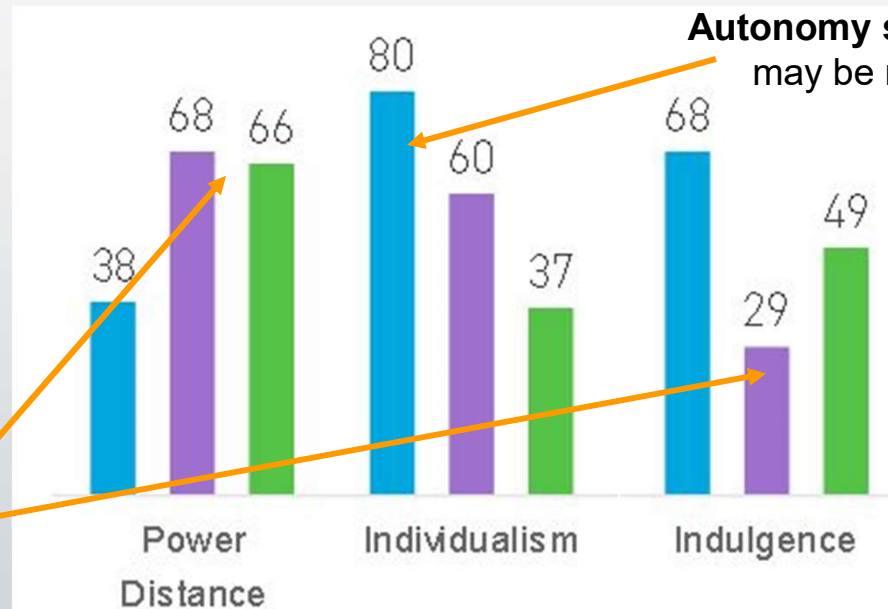
Dutch: Individualistic, indulgent

Cultures' characteristics:

Polish: Restrain, individualistic, power distance

Turkish: Tight, collectivistic, power distance

Dutch: Individualistic, indulgent



Control
may be more normative

Autonomy support & Warmth
may be more normative



Source: Hofstede (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>)



Method: Qualitative Data Collection

This question was preceded by open questions about:

I) Maternal parenting practices in attachment related situations of her child related with:

(D) distress, (E) exploration, (M) misbehavior, (A) availability, (P) prising. Additional questions to each:

- What do you usually **do** in this situation? (describe)*
- How **typical** is it for other mothers you know? (indicate using Likert scale)*

II) Mothering practices, goals and values:

How do you: (1) **express P/N feelings** toward your child?; (2) **criticize/complement**?

Do you: (3) treat your child as a **friend** rather than son/daughter?; (4) use food/**feeding** to show your warmth?; (5) **withdraw** your attention/love

Importance of: (6) **obedience**; (7) **respecting rules**.

Methods of: (8) **control** over following rules; (9) **obedience**

Behaviors of mothers who are: **overprotective, anxious/fearful**

III) (11) What is a **typical** "Polish/ Turkish/Dutch mother" like in the context of other countries/cultures?



Method: Sample & Qualitative Data Collection

Sample: Mothers of children between 8-12 year of age in Poland ($n = 30$), Turkey ($n = 30$), and Netherlands ($n = 30$)

Interviews:

Now I would like to ask you about your opinion related with more general mothering strategies.

(10) *How does an **avoidant, distanced** mother behave in relation with her child? (describe)*

- How good in your opinion is this type of mothering? (indicate using Likert scale)*
- How much avoidant are you in relation with your child? (indicate using Likert scale)*

Theme 1: *Warmth*

Subthemes (<i>n</i>)	Category of Sub-subthemes	Cultural group		
		Dutch	Polish	Turkish
Emotionless (35)	Cold (26)	7	8	10
	Loveless (5)	4		1
	Unavailable/detached (1)	1		
	Not supporting (3)	1	2	
Rejecting (7)		6	1	
Egocentric (30)		4	9	4
	Keeps child away (13)	4	6	2
	Shifts care/parenting to others (2)	2		

Theme 1: *Warmth*

Subthemes (<i>n</i>)	Category of Sub- subthemes	Sub-subthemes	Cultural group		
			Dutch	Polish	Turkish
Careless (20)			4	6	2
	Child as a stranger (2)			2	
	Unoriented (11)	School issues (6)	1	3	1
		Outdoor (2)		1	1
		Eating and dressing (1)			1

Theme 2: *Control*

Subthemes (<i>n</i>)	Category of Sub-subthemes	Cultural group		
		Dutch	Polish	Turkish
Balanced parenting (4)			4	
Strict and rule oriented (12)		1	3	7
	Not spoiling, fulfilling wishes (2)		4	1
Punishing (3)				3

Distanced mothers are: Emotionless

Cross-cultural similarities:

Emotionless: (1) Cold, chilly, not warm; (2) Physically and emotionally distant; (3) Not expressing feelings (love); (4) Not interested in child.

Cross-cultural differences:

Netherlands ($n = 13$): M is not complementing; *emotional poverty*,
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Poland ($n = 10$): *Dry* in contact; *cold breeding*

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(NL3) *"I'd say rather cold. Rather cold and chilly. And I think that that is not really so fine for the child emotionally. Maybe he'd start displaying compensational behaviour, you know? So I think you'd see physical distance, in a literal sense and emotionally."*

Distanced-avoidant mothers are: **Egocentric**

Cross-cultural differences:

Poland ($n = 15$): Example of critical judgement of maternal egocentrism

(PL22) *“she is the mother for whom the child is, only because (s)he exists, i.e. no matter what the child is doing there, it is important that I (the mother) go somewhere to a friend for a coffee, a beautician, or somewhere. It is a mother who is more focused on herself, and treats the child as an addition to own life - I am a mother, I have a child. When time comes I am so beautiful and lovely and I have such a wonderful child, and really knows nothing about this child, about his problems, even successes, because there is no contact with the child. This child is also not taught this, and i(s)he just does not open up, which later results in different situations, or children try to attract attention, or it end up differently.”*

Distanced-avoidant mothers are: **Careless**

.Cross-cultural differences:

Poland ($n = 11$):

(1) Carrying vs raising a child;

(2) indifference (regarding: what ch does, child, different issues; talks in indifferent way)

(PL4) “...indifferent, uninteresting in the child, living next to him. Taking care of the child and not raising.”

(3) Child as a stranger.

(PL14) “Such that full ignorance, that she does not care about anything, as if he is not her child. This is my summary. As if it was not her child, but if she was with a friend, well ... not even with a friend, at a distance. She is not worried, when the child has a problem, whether there is something wrong with him or something bad is happening.”

Distanced-avoidant mothers are:

Punishing & Balanced

Balanced parenting (emotional balance and autonomy support)

(PL15) “Distanced mother is balanced, (...). She is neither scared, nor oversensitive, overprotective.”

(PL24) “She is such an inconceivable mother, letting child develop and have his world, of course. This control is known to be, but she lets the child fall over or fail, and let him learn from his own experience. It is not easy, because you know that mother wants to show everything (to the child) using her own example, but it can not be done this way.”

Punishing

(TR5) “She doesn't treat her children well, she gives punishments.”

(TR9) estimated distant parenting negatively. Nonetheless when she was asked to what extent she is this type of distant mother she indicated that she “... uses distancing as a kind of punishment toward her child.”

Distanced-avoidant mothers are:

Control context

Lack of warmth

(PL5) *“She is so overbearing, I think that my sister is raising her son so overbearing, so demanding - because I have a plan in my head, everything must look like M wants it to be, we do a lesson, now you can do it, it is very intrusive.”*

Positive valence of strict control

(TR25) *“Like me. I don’t show my love. A distanced mother does not spoil her child, does not buy presents.”*

(PL10) *“She is concrete, I think it so. That she has some fixed rules there and the children know that she will only look at them, and they already know how to behave. It seems to me that these mothers are also serious, that mother will show with her eyes and these children already know what she means.”*

Balanced parenting (emotional balance and autonomy support)

(PL15) *“Distanced mother is balanced, (...). She is neither scared, nor oversensitive, overprotective.”*

(PL24) *“She is such an inconceivable mother, letting child develop and have his world, of course. This control is known to be, but she lets the child fall over or fail, and let him learn from his own experience. It is not easy, because you know that mother wants to show everything (to the child) using her own example, but it can not be done this way.”*

Discussion

Child-center narratives in (individualistic and indulgent) Dutch culture

Mother-center narratives in (restraint) Polish culture (e.g. egocentrism, carelessness)

- ❑ Thesis: Understanding of distant mothering prevails in the Netherlands, while judging of this kind of mothering in Turkish and Polish cultures -> normativity band may be stronger in non-Western cultures -> effects of minimized care may be stronger in non-Western contexts if distance is not normative (?)

Discussion: Cross-cultural differences

Warmth:

In line with characteristics of cultures in cross-cultural psychology:

- ❑ **Emotional distance** (emotionlessness and rejection) defines distant parenting in (individualistic and indulgent) **Dutch** cultural group.
- ❑ **Egocentrism** and **carelessness** of mothers in **Polish** and **Turkish** cultural groups (restraint and tight, respectively).