

The Relationship Between Attachment and Intimacy

Yuwen Peng^{1,a,*}

¹Malvern college, Chengdu, Sichuan, 610000, China

a. Crystal.Pengyuwen@Malvernchengdu.cn.

*corresponding author

Abstract: Attachment type and intimacy have an inseparable influence. The purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of attachment type on intimacy and the factors affecting the relationship between them. By reviewing the relevant literature in the past, this paper found that individuals with secure attachment can often obtain a high index of intimacy, while individuals with anxious attachment and avoidant attachment are difficult to obtain a high-quality intimacy. In addition, self-esteem, interpersonal self-efficacy and sacrifice motivation may play an important mediating or regulating role in the relationship between the two. For example, individuals with high self-esteem are more willing to pay in intimate relationships, which can build a more stable intimate relationship. This paper provides theoretical support for the study of the relationship between attachment types and intimacy. Future research should expand the age range, or explore the connection between attachment types and intimacy with a unified framework. In addition, it is also important to explore how different cultural backgrounds affect the early formation of attachment patterns in young children in order to distinguish the relationship between attachment types and intimate relationships under different cultural and educational backgrounds.

Keywords: attachment type, intimacy, self-esteem, sacrifice motivation, interpersonal self-efficacy

1. Introduction

Since the British psychiatrist Bowlby proposed the attachment theory, attachment and intimacy have been one of the topics of great concern [1]. Attachment occurs in the early childhood of an individual and is the link of communication with the mother. The interdependence between the child and the mother makes attachment the core of individual survival. When individuals enter the society, the focus of life and communication will shift to peers, and parents are no longer the only attachment objects of individuals. However, the relatively stable internal working mode established during the interaction between early children and their mothers will affect the communication mode of new attachment objects in adulthood. Safe attachment can provide positive attitude and improve happiness index for partners, but if unhealthy attachment relationship is formed in the early stage, it may lead to abnormal attachment relationship.

Previous studies are mostly based on the Western cultural background, and lack of discussion on intimacy and attachment types in the eastern context. Therefore, this paper mainly searches for the survey reports on Chinese students, and explores the relationship between different attachment types and intimate relationships according to previous research reports in China. This paper first lists the

attachment types of children and adults, then analyzes the intimate relationship, and analyzes the relationship between different attachment types and intimate relationship, as well as the role of self-esteem, interpersonal self-efficacy and sacrifice motivation. For example, individuals with strong self-esteem are more willing to give in intimate relationships, are better able to cope with problems, and do not develop a sense of inferiority and self-blame. In addition, when individuals with high self-efficacy encounter difficulties in intimate relationships, they will take positive actions, adhere to the attitude to solve problems, and appropriately reflect their emotions. And consider failure in relationships as an ability to self-learning, thereby promoting the long-term and stable development of the relationship.

2. Attachment Types

2.1. Attachment Types of Young Children

Children will form a relatively stable internal working mode in childhood and form attachment types. This attachment mode is extremely important, and even affects the attachment mode of individuals to intimate objects in later adulthood. As for the classification of children's attachment types, Ainsworth uses the unfamiliar situation test and tests of multiple subjects to classify children's attachment into safe attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious attachment [2].

2.1.1. Avoidant Attachment

When entering the game room with their mother, such children can play with toys and do not care whether their mother is present or not. When their mother leaves the game room, they are not nervous. When their mother returns, they do not immediately look for their mother, but deliberately avoid their mother and focus on the game. This kind of children are easy to find attachment in others. The effect of this kind of children accepting the comfort of strangers and comforting their mothers is the same.

2.1.2. Anxious Attachment

Due to the mother's inability to provide long-lasting and stable care to young children in the early stages, they develop anxious attachment. Children with anxious attachment often feel abandoned, so their attachment to their mother is extremely strong. They always pay attention to their mother's actions and do not let her leave them. Such children are extremely distressed when their mother leaves the game room. When their mother comes back, they will show contradictory psychology, that is, they want to interact with their mother and resist contact with her.

2.1.3. Secure Attachment

Such children regard their mothers as a safe base and can explore new things in the game room around them. When the mother leaves, the child will show a clear sense of uneasiness. When the mother comes back, he will take the initiative to be close to her. When he meets a stranger, he will show a sense of distance to varying degrees, but with the encouragement of his mother, he will bravely interact with strangers.

2.2. Adult Attachment

Bartholomew and Horowitz put forward adult attachment model in 1991 [3]. They developed an interview method based on the theory of child attachment, which uses a 7-point scale to evaluate the self-description of the interviewee. Adult attachment model can be divided into four categories, three

of which are the same as children's attachment model. The fourth is fear attachment, which shows a negative attitude towards others.

3. Intimacy

3.1. The Meaning of Intimacy

The satisfaction of intimate relationship depends on the state of the individual in the intimate relationship. Jin [4] summarized the meaning of intimacy in his article. His understanding of intimacy is mainly divided into two levels: broad and narrow. In a broad sense, individuals form a specific range of connections with some people in social interaction, such as relatives and partners. In the development stage of interdependence, individuals have close contact with important others. Their importance to individuals should not be underestimated. In a narrow sense, it refers to marriage.

3.2. The Measurement Method of Intimacy Satisfaction

Liu used the ECR scale to measure intimacy satisfaction in the study [5]. The scale is scored by 7 points. 1-7 respectively correspond to the transition from complete disagreement to complete agreement. For example, "I found that the lover is not as close as I thought. If the lover is not around me as I thought, I will feel very depressed". The internal consistency reliability of the scale is good. Intimacy satisfaction can also be reflected in the experimental method. Cui used the experimental method to measure intimacy satisfaction in the study [6]. Specifically, the researcher created a certain pressure situation, and used the camera to record the scene of the conflict and quarrel of the subjects in the state of intimate relationship. According to the reaction of the subjects during the dispute, the researcher used the marriage and love interaction overall coding system to analyze the methods used by the subjects to solve the conflict.

3.3. The Measurement Method of Attachment Type

Brennan et al. Collected a large number of literatures and prepared the experiences in close relationships Inventory (ECR) through multiple evaluations [7]. The scale has 36 items and is divided into two parts for scoring, such as: "I often discuss my problems and concerns with my lover; I don't like to be too close with my lover." main and Cassidy proposed adult attachment interview, which was conducted in a safe and comfortable environment with enough trust [8]. There are 20 questions in the outline of the interview, which requires the subjects to recall their childhood experiences, such as: "did you lose important people in your childhood? Did you lose close people in your adult life? In your memory, when was the first time you separated from your parents?" Researchers will judge the subjects' attachment types according to the questions they answered, but this method requires high quality of the subjects, because when subjects recall their childhood experiences, they will substitute their subjective feelings into them, resulting in less objective answers.

4. The Relationship Between Attachment Type and Intimacy

From the perspective of attachment type and intimacy degree, the satisfaction of secure attachment is generally higher, while the satisfaction of insecure attachment is lower. Liu investigated 853 college students in the study to explore the relationship between adult attachment, sacrifice motivation and intimacy satisfaction [5]. The results of this study show that college students are more insecure in attachment types. The fear type accounted for 61.8%, the infatuation type accounted for 13.0%, the indifference type accounted for 14.7%, and the safety type accounted for 10.3%; Adult attachment negatively predicts intimacy. Specifically, both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are significantly negatively correlated with intimacy satisfaction. The higher the degree of attachment,

the lower the intimacy satisfaction. This shows that the unsafe adult attachment model is not conducive to building a good relationship between the two sides, affecting the love experience and reducing people's satisfaction with the intimate relationship.

Secure attachment has higher relationship satisfaction than non-secure attachment (i.e., attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance). They are more likely to experience positive emotions. In the event of conflict, they can solve problems more calmly and actively rather than escape, so they will have a higher evaluation of intimacy satisfaction [6].

High attachment avoidants have negative emotions in their relationships. Cognitively, they believe that people are not trustworthy and reliable. Even if they are in an attachment relationship, they are also suspicious of their attachment partner: so emotionally, attachment avoidants tend to deny their partner's emotional efforts and their own needs for feelings [8]. Similarly, Wang distributed 260 questionnaires in the study, and found that only 15% of the 260 valid questionnaires had safe attachment, of which 45% were fear attachment, which was the group with the largest number of attachments, about 19% were focus attachment, and 21% were indifference attachment [9]. The results show that secure attachment and focused attachment are more likely to develop intimate relationships [9].

5. The Impact on the Relationship Between the Those Two

The factors that affect the relationship between the two are self-esteem, sacrifice motivation and interpersonal self-efficacy.

5.1. The Self-esteem

Studies have shown that self-esteem has a mediating effect on attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance and intimacy happiness index [10]. Wang [8] found that individuals with high self-esteem are more willing to pay in close relationships, can better cope with problems, and will not have the mentality of inferiority and self-blame. And individuals with high self-esteem tend to establish a perfect safe attachment model in childhood. For individuals with low self-esteem, they will doubt, deny themselves and feel unloved in a relationship. The experiment surveyed 490 married couples from 26 provinces and studied the correlation between interpersonal self-efficacy and intimate relationships. Research has shown that marriages with high interpersonal self-efficacy have the highest happiness index, while marriages with low happiness index generally occur in couples with low interpersonal self-efficacy scores. Research also shows that men's interpersonal self-efficacy scores are more likely to affect intimate relationships, as in traditional culture, men should be proactive and women should be passive [8].

5.2. The Sacrifice Motivation

Sacrificial motivation refers to that individuals seek the stability of the relationship by giving up their own interests in the intimate relationship. Liu found that sacrificial motivation can positively predict the intimacy of adult groups, and sacrificial motivation plays a partial intermediary role in the impact of adult attachment on intimacy satisfaction [5]. Cui sampled 436 college students in the study and found that college students generally made high sacrifice motives in intimate relationships, which were manifested in different gender, love status and major [11]. For example, the frequency of sacrifice motivation made by male students is higher than that of female students; The sacrifice motivation of art students and students in love is higher than that of science students and students born. At the same time, the research also shows that the two dimensions of sacrifice motivation are positively correlated with the two dimensions of intimacy quality. Among intimacy, students with higher tendency motivation have higher intimacy index and are more satisfied with intimacy [11].

5.3. The Interpersonal Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the confidence of individuals to complete the challenges they encounter [12]. Self-efficacy has a great impact on intimacy satisfaction. When individuals with high self-efficacy encounter difficulties in close relationships, they will take positive actions, adhere to the attitude to solve problems, and appropriately reflect their emotions. And regard the failure in the relationship as an ability of self-learning, so as to promote the long-term and stable development of the relationship. In terms of thinking mode, high self-efficacy people focus on how to solve the contradictions in intimate relationships and the essence of solving problems. To sum up, individuals with high self-efficacy can obtain a higher index in intimacy [12].

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between attachment and intimacy. Among intimacy, students with higher tendency motivation have higher intimacy index and are more satisfied with intimacy. Among intimacy, students with higher tendency motivation have higher intimacy index and are more satisfied with intimacy. Individuals with high self-efficacy can get a higher index in intimacy.

The original family is crucial to the development of an individual's life. The formation of attachment mode depends on the interaction mode between parents and children, so parents should give children correct guidance and establish correct values. When individuals are in an intimate relationship, in order to manage the intimate relationship well, they can make appropriate sacrifices to achieve the balance of the relationship.

Most of this article only draws on surveys of college students, so the results will be relatively one-sided. Moreover, although college students have matured in terms of physical age, their minds still need to be improved in the following life paths. Therefore, the following suggestions are provided for college students

Firstly, interpersonal self-efficacy plays a mediating role in a relationship, so when encountering challenges in an intimate relationship, one will take positive actions, adopt a positive attitude to solve problems, and appropriately reflect one's emotions. Treating failure in a relationship as a self-learning ability can promote the long-term and stable development of the relationship. In terms of thinking patterns, high self-efficacy individuals focus on how to solve conflicts that arise in intimate relationships and the essence of problem-solving. Secondly, moderate sacrifice is also an important factor in maintaining intimate relationships. Thirdly, secure attachment often makes it easier to obtain high-quality intimate relationships, but at the same time, it does not mean that non secure attachment cannot achieve good intimate relationships, as non-secure attachment can be improved through the initiation of secure attachment in the later stage. Individuals' attachment type affects their intimate relationship in many ways, including expectations of others and satisfaction with the intimate relationship. This article concludes that those with high avoidance are more likely to view others with suspicion, which is clearly not conducive to forming happy and healthy intimate relationships. Before starting an intimate relationship, individuals need to first understand their own attachment style. Therefore, in intimate relationships, individual should consciously manage and "forget" unsafe attachment styles.

However, previous research also has limitations. In previous studies, the tools used to measure intimacy and attachment types were relatively single, and the questionnaire survey method had high requirements on the quality of the research object, otherwise the results would be subjective. Future research should further explore the causal relationship between the two by using experimental method or longitudinal research, and broaden the scope of research to explore the impact of different attachment types of individuals at different ages on intimacy.

Due to the main use of survey questionnaires for interviews, the results tend to be subjective, and each person's understanding of happiness varies, resulting in different scores. Currently, there is no specific standard to evaluate intimate relationships and attachment types. It is hoped to have a unified standard for scoring in the future, such as using artificial intelligence to evaluate intimate relationships in a more objective way or from the perspective of bystanders. In future research, a wider range of age groups can be selected and classified surveys can be conducted in regions with different economic development, such as comparing the different proportions of attachment types in first tier cities and rural areas,

References

- [1] Bowlby, J. (1982) *Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect American Journal of orthopsychiatry*, 52 (4), 664.
- [2] Mary, D. Salter ainsworth (1978). *The Bowlby Ainsworth attachment theory Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (3) Doi:10.1017/s0140525x00075828.
- [3] Bartholomew,K,&Horowitz,L.M.(1991).Attachment styles among young adults:A test of a four category model.*Journal of Personality and Socia*.
- [4] Jin F (2018). *Study on the relationship between attachment style, sexual communication and intimacy satisfaction [d]. Harbin Engineering University*.
- [5] Liu Y (2022). *Research on the relationship between adult attachment, sacrifice motivation and intimacy satisfaction of college students (Master's thesis, Tianjin Institute of Physical Education)* <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202202&filename=1022505862.nh>
- [6] Cu M. *Adult attachment, conflict resolution behavior and intimacy satisfaction of College Students' lovers (Master's thesis, Zhejiang University of science and Technology)* <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201402&filename=1014228250.nh>
- [7] Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., and Shaver P. R. (1998). *Self report measurement of adult attachment: An integrated overview In: Simpson J A, rholes w s eds. attachment theory and choice relationships, New York; The Guilford press, 46-76.*
- [8] Wang X (2019). *The impact of adult attachment on intimacy violence (Master's thesis, Harbin Engineering University)* <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202101&filename=1020161215.nh>
- [9] Wang l (2021). *A survey of attachment types and intimacy quality of college students. Educational observation* (09), 60-63. doi:10.16070/j.cnki.cn45-1388/g4s.2021.09.018.
- [10] Main, M, Kaplan, N& Cassidy, J (1985). *Security in finance, child development, and adult:a move to the level of representation.chronicles of the society for research in child development, so* (1/2), 66-104.
- [11] Zhaishuna *Sacrifice motivation in college students' intimate relationship and its impact on relationship quality [d]. Henan University, 2014.*
- [12] Bandura A. *self-efficiency: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 1977*84191-215.