

# Review of Adult Attachment

Jian-quan Liu<sup>1</sup>, Xiang Li<sup>2</sup>, Yi Liu<sup>3</sup>, Zhi-bing Zhong<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of Graduate, Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Nanchang, Jiangxi 330004, China

<sup>2</sup> College of Graduate, Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Nanchang, Jiangxi 330004, China

<sup>3</sup> College of Graduate, Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Nanchang, Jiangxi 330004, China

<sup>4</sup> Psychological Counseling Center, Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Nanchang, Jiangxi 330004, China

\*Corresponding author. Email:494234679@qq.com

## ABSTRACT

This paper puts forward the concept, classification and measurement of adult attachment, and summarizes the related researches, including the researches on adult attachment and personality traits, interpersonal relationship and clinical psychopathology, the influence of adult attachment on intimate relationship, and the attachment patterns of parents and children. It is hoped that this review will provide more information to those who want to further study this field in social science in the future, so as to further deepen and improve this field.

**Keywords:** *Adult attachment; Review; Related research; Social sciences*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

<sup>12</sup>Attachment is generally defined as a special emotional relationship between a young child and his caregiver, usually a parent. It arises from the interaction between a child and its caregiver and is an emotional bond. Attachment is an important research topic in children's social and emotional development. It originates from the observation of infants from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Freud was the first to focus on attachment. He believed that early childhood was the most important period in a person's life. Freud especially emphasized the significance of parent-child relationship in the development of individual personality. He believed that parent-child relationship would become the prototype of various interpersonal relationships in the future. But it is the British psychopathologist John Bowlby who has really made a well-researched study of attachment, suggesting that any behavioural patterns that lead to a certain level of closeness to others are individually different and can last a lifetime. This has led to the expansion of attachment theory to focus on adult attachment.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF ADULT ATTACHMENT

British psychiatrist Bowlby was the first scholar to put forward the concept of "attachment". On the basis of habitology, he integrated psychoanalysis theory, information processing theory and cybernetics, established the attachment theory, systematically discussed the

biological basis of attachment generation, the stage development of attachment and its internal mechanism, and analyzed the characteristics of attachment. Bowlby defines attachment as "any behavioral pattern that leads to a certain degree of closeness to another person is individually different, which may last for a person's whole life, producing strong emotions during the formation, retention, removal and renewal of attachment" [1]. Mary Ainsworth inherited and developed the attachment theory, which defines attachment as "an enduring emotional connection between one person and another across time and space." Meanwhile, the unfamiliar situation method is proposed to divide the attachment type of children [2].

With the development of attachment, adult attachment has been paid more and more attention. Berman and Sperling pointed out that adult attachment is an individual tendency to seek and maintain attachment objects that provide stable security both physically and psychologically [3]. Weiss believes that adult attachment differs from other social relationships in three ways: seeking closeness, safe base, and resisting separation [4]. Main and Kaplan et al. hypothesized that adults' review of their early attachment experiences and their evaluation of the impact of these early experiences on current psychological and social functioning would become a relatively stable psychological state associated with attachment [5]. Bowlby believed that in the interaction between an individual and his caregiver in childhood, an "internal work model" would be formed, which is the mechanism of the system accompanying a person's whole life [6]. Bartholomew proposed a two-dimensional internal model of adult attachment to explain the cognitive mechanism of adult attachment [7].

<sup>1</sup> Jiangxi Provincial Education and Science "13th Five-Year Plan" 2020 Annual Project(No.146)

<sup>2</sup> Project supported by the Subject of Research on College Students' Leadership Training Under the Double-Education Mode (2018jzdz-1)

### 3. THE CLASSIFICATION OF ADULT ATTACHMENTS

There are four types of attachment style theories abroad:

1. In his book, John Bowlby describes the transition from childhood attachment to adult attachment model, and describes three types of insecure attachment: (1)Obsessive caregiving, which seeks acceptance from others by pleasing and satisfying their needs; (2)Compulsive care-seeking, which stems from a fear of loss or abandonment in childhood and a desire for love and support in adult relationships; (3)Self-dependent. It is taking the self away from others in order to avoid being close to them.

2.Georage, Kaplan, Main 's Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) Attachment scale classifies Adult Attachment into three categories: secure, avoidant, and contradictory. Secure type means that the individual has an appropriate view of the early relationship; Avoidant types deny or underestimate the effects of early attachment; Ambivalent is a confused understanding of past experience. In the later practical application, unorganized attachment behaviors were found, which were called unsolved or unorganized [8].

3.Bartholomew, Horowitz 's adult Attachment Interview Scale has four classification systems: security, preoccupation, rejection and fear. The secure type reflects the individual's comfort in interpersonal relationships. It believes that relationships have value, a sense of closeness and autonomy (a positive view of self and others). Preoccupation is characterized by anxiety and emotion, excessive immersion and dependence (relationships are negative for the self and positive for others); The rejection type is characterized by a desire for independence (positive for the self) and a denial of a desire for closeness (negative for others). Feared-type is characterized by anxiety, distrust and fear of rejection (negative for self and others)[9].

4. Bennan, Clark & Shave's Intimate Relationship Experience Scale (ECR)[10] has two dimensions of high internal consistency, namely attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. These two dimensions form four attachment types: secure, infatuated, fearful, and indifferent. Secure people have higher relationship satisfaction, feel comfortable with intimacy, see more of the benefits of being with a partner, believe in the good will of others, and respect and trust their partner. Obsessives are moderately satisfied with their relationship, need other people's care, often exhibit excessive control over their partner, which leads to estrangement, and they seek security by becoming more controlling in their relationships. The apathetic type was moderately satisfied in marriage and love relationship, less active and intimate contact with the lover, and avoided emotional involvement. Fearful people are most dissatisfied with marriage and romantic relationships. Negative cognition leads to permanent negative emotional reactions and conflicts. An unwillingness to listen to and deal with a partner's troubles; Have less active and intimate contact with your partner.

### 4. MEASUREMENT OF ADULT ATTACHMENT

#### 4.1. A simple three-paragraph statement selection

As for the measurement of adult attachment style, the original tool is a simple three-paragraph statement selection, formulated by Hazan and Shaver. According to the classification of infant attachment types in Ainsworth, they speculated that adult attachment style can be divided into three types, namely security, avoidance and anxiety [11].

#### 4.2. Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

In 1985, George, Kaplan and Main designed a semi-structured interview to understand attachment in adults and children under the influence of the type theory of Ainsworth, that is, the adult attachment interview. AAI, which has since been converted to the Adult Attachment Q-sort, looks for relationships between emotional regulation and Attachment style by examining how the strongest and weakest emotional strategies are used. Later, adult attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and adult attachment Scale (AAS) appeared successively.

#### 4.3. Adult Attachment scale (AAS)

On the basis of Hazan and Shaver's adult attachment type questionnaire, Collins[12] et al. developed the adult attachment scale, and through factor analysis of the scale, the intimacy comfort, namely the proximity dimension, was obtained. The recognition of dependent others, namely, the dependency dimension; The degree of fear of being unlovable or abandoned, namely the three dimensions of anxiety, transforms the dimension of attachment into the type of attachment.

#### 4.4. Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)

AAQ establishment has experienced three stages of the first and second stages are mainly the contralateral test project to carry on the hoof pick, editors and content validity and face validity. The third stage to determine the questionnaire of 94 projects, and make them respectively 15 points in the table t, t the 15 points table part corresponds to the portion of AAI t table. In this phase also formulated the standard the questionnaire scores. AAQ revised several times, so far, already has a higher validity.

#### 4.5. Relation Questionnaire (RQ)

Bartholomew and Horowitz designed a relationship questionnaire under the influence of Hazan and Shaver's

three-point type. This is a self-presentation scale, which USES 7-point scale to evaluate adult self-description, and puts forward a four-point model of adult attachment style, adding a fear - avoidance type on the basis of Hazan and Shaver's three-point type.

#### ***4.6. Experiences in Close Relationship (ECR)***

In 1998, Bannan, Clark&Shaver designed the intimate relationship experience scale (ECR), a 36-item self-reported attachment scale with two subscales, avoidance (discomfort with closeness and dependence) and anxiety (fear of rejection and abandonment). These two dimensions have higher internal consistency score, four attachment types can be obtained from the two dimensions, and have better structural validity than RQ. The only drawback of this measure is that it provides only two scores for avoidance and anxiety [13].

### **5. STUDIES ON ADULT ATTACHMENT**

#### ***5.1. Research on adult attachment and interpersonal relationship***

Previous studies have found [21] that people with secure attachments have romantic, passionate love and often positive relationships. The avoidant type corresponds to the playful type of love, with less satisfying and intimate relationships. Anxiety-ambivalence corresponds to possessive and dependent love and is negatively correlated with the characteristics of positive relationships other than passion. On top of this, there is growing evidence that secure adults are more satisfied with their relationships than insecure adults. Recent studies in China have shown that the interpersonal attachment style of college students is closely related to the interpersonal intimacy ability, and the interpersonal attachment style has a significant impact on the interpersonal intimacy ability. Attachment anxiety is negatively correlated with self-esteem and subjective support, attachment avoidance is negatively correlated with self-esteem and support utilization, and the insecurity in college students' love relationships has an impact on individual self-esteem and social relations. Some studies have found that insecure people prefer to be around secure people. However, other studies have come to the opposite conclusion, that secure people prefer to be around secure people, while insecure people have problems maintaining relationships with secure people.

#### ***5.2. The influence of adult attachment on intimate relationship***

In studying the effects of adult attachment on intimate relationships, researchers have been concerned about whether relationship satisfaction is related to similarities in

the type of adult attachment between the two partners, or whether the two partners experience such similarities. Cobb, Davila, and Bradburg[17] have found that positive perceptions of attachment security can predict supportive behavior and satisfaction in relationships. Penor and Scott [18] found that people with avoidant attachments were more likely to have multiple marriages than those with anxious attachments. Feeney and Noller research found that secure attachment style of people has a close relation with quite trust and have sufficient self-confidence, insecure attachment types of avoiding type main show is avoid intimacy, and insecure attachment type main characteristic is a type of anxiety - conflicts in dependence and desire into the emotion, is often a neurotic, rather than the deliberate, friendship-type love [19]. As the study deepened, researchers found that intimate relationships also affect other social functions in adults. Vasquez, Durik and Hyde [14] found that people with secure attachment are more likely to successfully cope with challenges in multiple areas, such as family and work, and can coordinate multiple roles, such as employees and parents [20].

#### ***5.3. Research on the relationship between adult attachment and personality traits***

Attachment theory suggests that the development of personality is influenced by attachment. Studies on personality traits and adult attachment focus on the relationship between the Big five personality and adult attachment. In 1997, Carver used the five-factor personality model to evaluate personality traits, and found that secure attachment type was related to extroversion and agreeableness, while ambivalence attachment type was positively correlated with neuroticism, and avoidant attachment type was negatively correlated with extroversion and agreeableness [14]. Shaver and Brennan found safety attachment types of individual than the contradictions and avoid attachment types of individuals showed less neurotic, and more performance for extroversion. [15] Mikulincer scholars study found [16], for adult emotional control, individual to establish secure attachment, help to their physical and mental development of the individual, the personality is perfect.

#### ***5.4. Attachment mode of parents and attachment type of children***

Parents' representation of their early attachment experience will affect their parenting style and sensitivity to their children, thus affecting their children's attachment security, thus leading to the research on the intergenerational transmission of attachment. A series of studies [3] showed that parents' AAI classification was about 80% consistent with their children's classification in unfamiliar situations. Such as Benoit and Parker [3] a involves the grandmother, mother and baby three generations of attachment types of relevant research shows that when the AAI attachment

classification using three types of models, the classification of the grandmother and mother consistency of 75%, using four types of model consistency of 49%, and her grandmother and infant attachment consistency between the regulation of the attachment type mother [22]. Some studies have found that children of parents who are rated as secure attachment in AAI also often show secure attachment to their parents. Children of parents who are rated as insecure attachment types also often show insecure attachment patterns to their parents, which indicates the intergenerational transmission of this psychological phenomenon [23].

### **5.5. Clinical psychopathology of adult attachment**

The research on the psychopathology of attachment mainly focuses on the following points: first, the relationship between adult attachment and personality disorder. Attachment type is an important element of adult personality structure, and attachment trait is closely related to personality trait. Bowlby believes that insecure attachment can lead to psychological disorders. The second is the relationship between attachment and anxiety and depression. Armsden, McCauley, Greenberg, Burke, & Mitchell [24] found that adolescents who reported clinically depressed symptoms had less secure attachment to their parents. Other studies have also shown that depressive symptoms in adolescents and early adulthood are associated with insecure attachment to parents [25]. Cicchetti and Toth suggest that the internal working patterns of people with insecure attachments promote their negative perceptions of depression towards themselves and others [26]. The third is the research on the attachment of abused individuals. Robert T.M et al. investigated the relationship between attachment security and psychiatric disorders in adult samples with a history of abuse, and empirical studies also proved the relationship between attachment and overall psychological well-being, symptomatology and personal problems [27].

## **6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

In recent years, adult attachment has been paid more and more attention. These studies have improved the concept of adult attachment and made the measurement tool simple and efficient. The research questions from different attachment style individual behavior, cognition gradually to perception and other more subtle levels, the research methods are also gradually diversified. The research on adult attachment and other aspects is more and more extensive, which makes its social significance and clinical application value more improved, and is more conducive to the improvement of individual personality and the advancement of society. However, the current research on adult attachment also has the following shortcomings: (1) The stability and variability of adult attachment. This is about whether the early

attachment established between the child and the primary parent is constant, and if it is constant, in this case early attachment can predict adult attachment, what is the point of self-growth, of personality improvement? In another case, early attachment can be modified and updated by new experience, and adult attachment can approach zero consistency with early attachment. If this is the case, what factors lead to this variability? It's also worth exploring. (2) Do attachers use the same attachment strategy for each attached individual in adult attachment? For example, adult children have different attachment strategies for their parents. There is a phenomenon that sons are closer to their mothers and daughters are closer to their fathers; Another example is that a person is securely attached to his or her brother or sister and becomes insecure attached to his or her partner. What causes this anomaly is also worth studying. The author hopes that this review can provide more information to those who want to further study this field in the future, so as to continuously deepen and improve this field.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This work was supported by Jiangxi Provincial Education and Science "13th Five-Year Plan" 2020 Annual Project(No.146), and Subject of Research on College Students' Leadership Training Under the Double-Education Mode (2018jzzd-1).

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Bowlby J M. The Making and Breaking of Affectual Bonds[J]. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 1979, 130:201-210.
- [2] Ainsworth M, Bowlby J, Piaget J, et al. Attachment theory[J]. Retrieved August, 1973, 20: 2018.
- [3] Berman W H, Sperling M B. The structure and function of adult attachment[J]. *Attachment in adults: Clinical and developmental perspectives*, 1994: 3-28.
- [4] Weiss R S. Reflections on the present state of loneliness research[J]. *Journal of social Behavior and Personality*, 1987, 2(2): 1.
- [5] Van Ijzendoorn M H. Adult attachment representations, parental responsiveness, and infant attachment: a meta-analysis on the predictive validity of the Adult Attachment Interview[J]. *Psychological bulletin*, 1995, 117(3): 387.
- [6] Bowlby J. Attachment and loss: retrospect and prospect[J]. *American journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1982, 52(4): 664.

- [7] Bartholomew K, Horowitz L M. Attachment styles among young adults: a test of a four-category model[J]. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 1991, 61(2): 226.
- [8] Li Peihong, Liu Zhilong, Li Danping. Research review of adult attachment [J]. *Coastal Enterprises and Technology*, 2006 (3): 178-179.
- [9] Bartholomew K, Horowitz L M. Attachment styles among young adults: a test of a four-category model[J]. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 1991, 61(2): 226.
- [10] Brennan K A, Clark C L, Shaver P R. Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview[J]. 1998.
- [11] Huang G H, WU Q Y. A review of adult attachment style [J]. *Journal of Wuhan University of Technology*, 2008, 30(6): 117-119.
- [12] Collins N L, Read S J. Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples[J]. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 1990, 58(4): 644.
- [13] The Measurement of Adult attachment: Intimacy Experience Scale (ECR) [J]. *Journal of psychology*, 2006, 38(03): 399-406.
- [14] Carver C S. Adult attachment and personality: Converging evidence and a new measure[J]. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1997, 23(8): 865-883.
- [15] Shaver P R, Brennan K A. Attachment styles and the "Big Five" personality traits: Their connections with each other and with romantic relationship outcomes[J]. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1992, 18(5): 536-545.
- [16] Mikulincer M, Shaver P R, Pereg D. Attachment theory and affect regulation: The dynamics, development, and cognitive consequences of attachment-related strategies[J]. *Motivation and emotion*, 2003, 27(2): 77-102.
- [17] Cobb R J, Davila J, Bradbury T N. Attachment security and marital satisfaction: The role of positive perceptions and social support[J]. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2001, 27(9): 1131-1143.
- [18] Ceglian C P, Gardner S. Attachment style: A risk for multiple marriages?[J]. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 1999, 31(1-2): 125-139.
- [19] Feeney J A, Noller P. Attachment style as a predictor of adult romantic relationships[J]. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 1990, 58(2): 281.
- [20] Vasquez K, Durik A M, Hyde J S. Family and work: Implications of adult attachment styles[J]. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2002, 28(7): 874-886.
- [21] Shaver P, Hazan C. Being lonely, falling in love[J]. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 1987, 2(2): 105.
- [22] Crowell J A, Treboux D. A review of adult attachment measures: Implications for theory and research[J]. *Social development*, 1995, 4(3): 294-327.
- [23] Fonagy P, Steele H, Steele M. Maternal representations of attachment during pregnancy predict the organization of infant-mother attachment at one year of age[J]. *Child development*, 1991, 62(5): 891-905.
- [24] Armsden G C, McCauley E, Greenberg M T, et al. Parent and peer attachment in early adolescent depression[J]. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, 1990, 18(6): 683-697.
- [25] Carnelley K B, Pietromonaco P R, Jaffe K. Depression, working models of others, and relationship functioning[J]. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 1994, 66(1): 127.
- [26] Cicchetti D, Toth S L. The development of depression in children and adolescents[J]. *American psychologist*, 1998, 53(2): 221.
- [27] Huang G H, WU Q Y. A review of adult attachment style [J]. *Journal of Wuhan University of Technology*, 2008, 30(6): 117-119.