

The Effects of Attachment Styles on Resilience and Emotion Regulation

Xingyi Tang

College of Humanities, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, 200000, China

1000481849@smail.shnu.edu.cn

Abstract. Since the inception of Bowlby's Attachment Theory, a sizable body of research has explored the impact of attachment styles on psychological resilience and emotion regulation. This paper attempts to integrate the literature on the impacts of attachment on resilience and emotion regulation from the perspective and domain of social-personality orientation using a literature analysis to present an overview of current research. The results reveal that different attachment styles could impact both resilience and emotion regulation. To be specific, secure attachment helps individuals develop resilience. Attachment type can influence individuals' selection of emotion regulation strategies. The study's limitations are then presented. The sample of individuals can be enriched in the future to develop more effective intervention programs. Finally, interventions that can be applied to infants is proposed. Overall, this study integrates evidence from different empirical studies on attachment relationships and provides perspectives for further understanding the influencing mechanisms of attachment styles.

Keywords: Attachment style, resilience, emotion regulation.

1. Introduction

The birth of Bowlby's Attachment Theory series revolutionized the scientific inquiry into the emotional connection between mother and child. Synthesizing concepts from various areas, Bowlby created the integral framework of attachment theory. It is now more widely accepted in the scientific community that attachment is a persistent emotional relationship that drives people to seek out and hold onto a certain object, especially when they feel threatened. The attachment system is goal-correcting, and that for infants, the goal is to seek feeling security. Once the infant's need for security is met, the attachment system returns to a homeostasis. When this pattern of attachment behavior develops in a healthy way, a secure emotional connection is created.

Attachment theory has provided researchers with a solid theoretical framework for understanding psychological and behavioral differences between individuals. Since the introduction of attachment theory, numerous investigations have looked at how attachment styles affect psychological resilience and emotion regulation. The mechanisms by which attachment styles impact resilience and the link between attachment and resilience have received the majority of attention in recent studies [1-4]. Whereas current research on the effects of attachment styles on resilience focuses on the mechanisms of attachment effects on emotion regulation or how attachment affects strategy selection of regulating emotion [5-7].

This paper summarizes the collected literature to reflect the current research progress in the field, which is of guidance and reference value to researchers engaged in research on this topic and field.

2. Introduction to the Study Objects

2.1. Introduction of Concepts

2.1.1 Resilience

Resilience refers to the ability and dynamic process of the body or mind to adaptively overcome in the face of stress and adversity [8]. Everyone experiences stressful life events, and resilience can help people generate better-coping mechanisms to deal with these stressful life events and lower the risk of mental diseases like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression.

2.1.2 Emotion Regulation

The process of controlling the intensity, persistence, or kind of an emotional reaction is known as emotion regulation. It is goal-oriented. This process can be either explicit or implicit. When the goal of regulating emotions is activated, either explicit or implicit processes are mobilized. Emotion regulation processes can be explicit, such as the efforts to appear calm in an emotional state. It can also be implicit, taking place unconsciously, where regulation can be accomplished effortlessly and automatically. It can be said that regulating emotion is a continuous process including conscious and unconscious, explicit and implicit, effortful and automatic regulation [9].

2.2. Classification and Characteristics of Attachment Styles

There are two orientations of attachment styles: the developmental clinical orientation, which is dominated by developmental and clinical psychologists, and the social personality psychology orientation, which is dominated by personality and social psychologists.

The most obvious difference between the two orientations is the use of measurement instruments. Research in the developmental-clinical orientation generally distinguishes between groups of different attachment types through interviews, projective tests, and other measures that require in-depth processing and coding. The most representative of these is the Adult Attachment Test (AAI), according to which there are four different types of attachment: secure/autonomous, dismissing, preoccupied, and unresolved/disorganized.

The social-personality psychology orientation prefers a simple self-report method of categorizing attachment types. The initial classification of attachment types as "secure," "avoidant," and "anxious" have evolved into the "avoidant-anxious" dimension. This has evolved into four types centered on the "avoidance-anxiety" dimension: secure, anxious, dismissing-avoidant, as well as fearful-avoidant.

The main research directions differ between the two orientations. The developmental-clinical orientation focuses on the impact of adults' parenting behaviors on their children's attachment patterns as well as mental health aspects from a psychodynamic and family systems perspective. Meanwhile, the social-personality psychology orientation focuses on how adult attachment affects social cognition, emotion management, interpersonal relationships, as well as personal adjustment. Therefore, the attachment styles mentioned below utilize primarily the perspectives and domains of a social personality psychology orientation.

3. The Effects of Attachment on Resilience

3.1. The Mechanisms that Attachment Styles Affect Resilience

Ansley & Rick conclude that resilience may be effectively influenced by attachment through self-care and self-efficacy [2]. They evaluated how attachment stability, self-efficacy, and self-care affect undergraduate students' resilience. In their hypothesis, the association between secure attachment and increased resilience will at least be moderated by self-efficacy and self-care. In more specific words, it was predicted that those with more secure attachment styles would be more resilient because they would have higher levels of self-efficacy and engage in self-care routines more frequently. Four separate scales were completed by experiment participants and according to their research, secure attachment people seem to be more resilient because they frequently engage in self-care habits and have stronger self-efficacy beliefs.

3.2. Attachment Potentially Being a Key Component of Resilience

Darling's research team found that secure attachment might be a key factor in resilience in adulthood [3]. In this study, secure attachment is examined as a potential key component of resilience. The study was then subjected to a meta-analysis that included 33 studies after being thoroughly examined in accordance with PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) criteria. In the meta-analysis, 10 of these trials, totaling 2305 participants, were utilized.

Raw correlation coefficients, which indicate weak to moderate connections between resilience and attachment, varied from 0.20 to 0.57. These relationships were evident and are extremely not likely to be the result of random variation, according to pooled correlation coefficients. Each study also included a qualitative report. Two meta-analysed and narratively presented studies established a link between secure attachment and the presence of resilience.

3.3. Resilience being Predicted by Secure Attachment Style

Terzi's study assesses how college students' resilience is affected by secure attachment, the coping mechanisms they use, and the relationships between them [4]. Experimental evidence suggests that secure attachment style predicts resilience. According to Craparo's research, attachment styles and alexithymia are predictive of coping mechanisms and resilience [5]. Specifically, Attachment security was indirectly associated with positive coping strategies and resilience. Specifically, attachment security is indirectly linked to effective coping strategies and resilience through alexithymia. Conversely, alexithymia mediates the link between insecure attachment styles and insufficient coping.

4. The Effects of Attachment on Emotion Regulation

4.1. Cognitive Neural Mechanisms of Attachment Effects on Emotion Regulation

Different attachment styles have effects on brain structures that influence individual emotion regulation at a neural level. The hippocampus is a vital part of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which controls how individual's body reacts to stress. According to a study, attachment anxiety or avoidance are linked to decreased hippocampus gray matter density, which may indicate problems with stress management in those who are insecurely attached [10].

In addition to this, it has been discovered that gray matter volume from the right parahippocampal gyrus and left middle temporal gyrus strongly negatively correlates with attachment avoidance dimensions [5]. The middle temporal gyrus plays a role in the process of semantic memories as well as the extraction of autobiographical memories, while attachment-related memory processing includes involvement of the parahippocampal gyrus. A smaller gray matter volume would indicate that individuals would be less able to relate [11]. Thus, it is suggested that individuals with high scores on the attachment avoidance dimension have impaired emotional memory extraction, inefficient retrieval of emotional memories, lower empathy, and that they reduce the extraction of attachment-related memories in order to avoid the damage caused by attachment-related memories. Anxious attachment also has an impact on emotion regulation at the cognitive-neural level. Attachment anxiety is negatively correlated with gray matter volumes in functional areas that have the capacity to regulate negative emotions [6].

4.2. The Effects of Attachment on Emotion Regulation Strategy Selection

Attachment style can have an impact on the choice of emotion regulation strategies. Different attachment types favor various emotion control techniques. Various sorts of emotion modulation techniques are available. Common emotion regulation strategies include cognitive reappraisal, expression inhibition, catharsis, acceptance, and redundant thoughts.

Researchers are in agreement that individuals with avoidant attachment favor response inhibition over cognitive reappraisal [7, 8]. However, there is some controversy about which regulatory strategies anxious attachment individuals prefer, with the finding that what strategy high attachment anxiety people preferred is cognitive reappraisal strategies. However, Troyer and Greitemeyer found that this group preferred response inhibition strategies.

The results of such studies appear somewhat confusing due to the differences in categorization of strategies and lacking comparability between them. In general, avoidantly attached individuals rely on cognitive distance and emotional detachment. Anxiously attached individuals are more likely to be caught up in emotionally triggering situations that intensify introspection or catastrophic thinking [12].

In addition, some longitudinal evidence supported, with researchers finding that attachment security in adolescence predicts the choice of strategies that regulating emotion in adulthood. Stable insecure infants use more hypo-regulation strategies (e.g., repression, detachment) and less balanced-regulation strategies (e.g., openness, collaboration) in the face of relationship crises in adulthood than stable secure infants; while unstable insecure infants employ more hyper-regulation strategies (e.g., exaggerated emotional expression, introspection) [13].

5. Discussion and Suggestion

5.1. The Limitation of Research

There are some shortcomings in the existing studies, which have paid more attention to secure, anxious and avoidant attachment individuals, while the psychological resilience, emotion regulation ability and characteristics of fearful-avoidant individuals are less studied at present. Based on theoretical and empirical research, future studies can provide good and efficient intervention programs to improve psychological resilience and emotion regulation of people with insecure attachment style.

5.2. Recommendations Based on the Findings

Resilience can be increased. Instead of being thought of as a natural quality, resilience should be seen as a dynamic process and aided by solid and long-lasting relationships with important people. The strength of attachment links with the emergence of resilience. For those who have experienced adversity in infancy, resilience is likely to be a key component in developing, and resilience lowers the chance of negative consequences in adulthood. Such secure attachment connections can exist with people other than the primary carers, too. The same protective impact can also be obtained from relationships with extended family, instructors, and therapists by enhancing one's sense of security [14]. In addition, personal care and self-confidence to some extent moderate the association between attachment and resilience, making repeated practitioners vital to take into account in interventions aiming at enhancing resilience and well-being. Developing self-care is suitable for use in conjunction with any psychological intervention for the treatment of mental disorders and can be a useful complement to psychotherapy.

Interventions for emotional regulation differ for different attachment types. A review of previous studies on the effects of attachment type on emotion regulation reveals that anxiety attachment and avoidance attachment do not have the same impact on the choice stages of emotion regulation. This suggests that individuals with different types of insecure attachments do not have the same reasons for having difficulties or disorders in emotion regulation. Therefore, different targeted interventions should be formulated according to the characteristics of different types of attachment strategies. The reasons for the emotion regulation difficulties of different types of insecurely attached individuals should also be considered. The secure initiation and positive thinking interventions may be more suitable for improving the emotion regulation of attachment-avoidant individuals, who are characterized by low emotion awareness.

In the case of infants, there is a need for preventive treatments to enhance emotion regulation early in life. Individuals need therapies that demonstrate the causal role of parenting in early emotion regulation and emphasize practical preventive techniques that promote sensitive parenting practices. The Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) intervention's quick (10-session) effects are very impressive. The effectiveness of ABC has been proven in three separate randomized trials [15]. The main goal of ABC treatments is to make parents more sensitive to their children's needs. These interventions are also looked at for their effects on children's behavioral and physiological regulation. It is anticipated that ABC interventions will produce some positive outcomes. Parents who received ABC interventions, for instance, reported that their children had less behavioral problems [15].

6. Conclusion

This study takes attachment, resilience and emotion regulation as the object of research. Literature analysis was utilized to summarize the collected literature. In summary, a great number of behavioral and neuroscientific investigations have shown the influence of attachment on psychological resilience and emotion regulation. Neuroscience studies have also shown that attachment has an impact on how people regulate their emotions. Different attachment patterns have different effects on psychological resilience and emotion regulation. This study also suggests that families receiving the ABC intervention as an ideal preventive intervention can help infants develop emotional regulation skills.

References

- [1] Bender, A., & Ingram, R. (2018). Connecting attachment style to resilience: Contributions of self-care and self-efficacy. *Personality and individual differences*, 130, 18-20.
- [2] Darling Rasmussen, P., Storebø, O. J., Løkkeholt, T., Voss, L. G., Shmueli-Goetz, Y., Bojesen, A. B., ... & Bilenberg, N. (2019). Attachment as a core feature of resilience: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological reports*, 122 (4), 1259-1296.
- [3] Terzi, S. (2013). Secure attachment style, coping with stress and resilience among university students. *The Journal of Happiness & Well-Being*, 1 (2), 97-109.
- [4] Craparo, G., Magnano, P., Zapparrata, M. V., Gori, A., Costanzo, G., Pace, U., & Pellerone, M. (2018). Coping, attachment style and resilience: the mediating role of alexithymia. *Maediterranean Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 6 (1).
- [5] Zhang, X., Deng, M., Ran, G., Tang, Q., Xu, W., Ma, Y., & Chen, X. (2018). Brain correlates of adult attachment style: a voxel-based morphometry study. *Brain Research*, 1699, 34-43.
- [6] Troyer, D., & Greitemeyer, T. (2018). The impact of attachment orientations on empathy in adults: Considering the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies and negative affectivity. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 122, 198-205.
- [7] Vrtička, P., Bondolfi, G., Sander, D., & Vuilleumier, P. (2012). The neural substrates of social emotion perception and regulation are modulated by adult attachment style. *Social Neuroscience*, 7 (5), 473-493.
- [8] Rutter, M. (2012). Resilience as a dynamic concept. *Development and psychopathology*, 24 (2), 335-344.
- [9] Gyurak, A., Gross, J. J., & Etkin, A. (2011). Explicit and implicit emotion regulation: A dual-process framework. *Cognition and emotion*, 25 (3), 400-412.
- [10] Quirin, M., Gillath, O., Pruessner, J. C., & Eggert, L. D. (2010). Adult attachment insecurity and hippocampal cell density. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 5 (1), 39-47.
- [11] Zheng, C., Wu, Q., Jin, Y., & Wu, Y. (2017). Regional gray matter volume is associated with trait modesty: Evidence from voxel-based morphometry. *Scientific reports*, 7 (1), 14920.
- [12] Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2019). Attachment orientations and emotion regulation. *Current opinion in psychology*, 25, 6-10.
- [13] Girme, Y. U., Jones, R. E., Fleck, C., Simpson, J. A., & Overall, N. C. (2021). Infants' attachment insecurity predicts attachment-relevant emotion regulation strategies in adulthood. *Emotion*, 21 (2), 260.
- [14] Mota, C. P., & Matos, P. M. (2015, April). Adolescents in institutional care: Significant adults, resilience and well-being. In *Child & Youth Care Forum* (Vol. 44, pp. 209-224). Springer US.
- [15] Dozier, M., & Bernard, K. (2019). *Coaching parents of vulnerable infants: The attachment and biobehavioral catch-up approach*. New York City: Guilford Publications.