

The Influence of Attachment Style on Adolescents' Offline Campus Social Relationships

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Abstract. Adolescence is an important period for social development. Serves as the main offline environment for adolescents, campus provides them with chances to communicate and collaborate, which has a significant influence on the formation of their social patterns. Based on the attachment theory, this essay aims to discuss how different attachment styles influence adolescents' offline campus social behavior and interpersonal relationship choices. The research first focuses on the attachment model and the offline social traits of adolescents, and then analyzes how secure attachment promotes positive social initiatives, effective conflict management, and deeper relationship building, while insecure attachment can lead to social withdrawal, unstable relationships, and other problems. In addition, the paper will also explore how variables such as gender, ongoing family environment, and cultural background moderate this relationship. In conclusion, this study not only helps to better understand the social social development of adolescents, but also provides direction for them to form healthy offline campus interpersonal relationships, thereby moderating the impact of attachment style on social patterns.

Keywords: attachment style, offline campus relationships, peer interaction, adolescent social development

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a crucial stage for social development. While the offline campus environment is uniquely important in the formation of adolescents' social patterns - such as peer interaction, in-class cooperation, and extracurricular activities - attachment styles are known to be a fundamental factor influencing these patterns largely. Therefore, exploring the correlation between attachment styles and offline campus interpersonal relationships can definitely help adolescents build healthier connections with others and compensate for their attachment-related shortcomings from upbringing.

Based on attachment theory pointed out by John Bowlby, this paper will discuss secure and insecure attachment styles separately, focusing on how they play different roles. Generally speaking, people with a secure attachment style, that is, they have a trusting relationship with caregivers, tend to have a positive self-image and active relationships with others. On the contrary, insecure types, including anxious, avoidant, and disorganized types, usually lead to social deficits, such as difficulty trusting others, fear of rejection, and avoidance of others' kindness. For adolescents, these characteristics are mainly reflected in social patterns, such as their social initiative, frequency of

interaction, and conflict resolution ability, as well as in their interpersonal relationship choices, such as friendship standards, group affiliation, and intimacy preferences.

Given this framework, this essay explores answers to the following questions: How do attachment styles affect adolescents' patterns of social behavior on campus? To what extent do attachment patterns influence adolescents' criteria for interpersonal relationship choices? Will the gender, family environment, or other factors effect the influence of attachment patterns on social choices? Understanding these questions helps teenagers have a better understanding of interpersonal relationships.

2. Attachment theory and social development

Attachment theory was first pointed out by British psychologist John Bowlby and later further developed and refined by his colleague Mary Ainsworth through the famous Strange Situation experiment. The theory's main idea is that emotional bond formed between infants and their primary caregiver (usually their mother) is an evolutionary instinct for survival. This early relationship is internalized into an internal working model, which serves as a blueprint for future relationships.

By observing infants' reactions to separation and reunion with their mothers in the Strange Situation experiment, Ainsworth initially defined three main types of attachment. Later, other researchers added a fourth.

To begin with, a securely attached infant feels safe and confident to explore when their mother is present. When the mother leaves, the child cries. When the mother returns, the child actively seeks contact and resumes play. Then in adulthood, these kinds of traits translate into emotional stability, balanced interdependence and a positive self-image. Therefore, this attachment style is recognized as the healthiest and most ideal.

In contrast, an anxiously attached infant shows intense distress when separated from the mother, but displays conflicting behavior when the mother returns. As a result, when they grow up, they often show a lack of security and require constant attention with low self-esteem, believing "I am only valuable if others love me".

Those with avoidant attachment style, as infants, rarely show distress when their mother leaves, but actively avoid her when she returns, seemingly more focused on toys than on her. In adult relationships, they often emphasis on independence, considering others as unreliable. In addition, they are emotionally distanced from others, finding it difficult to fully trust their partner and feeling uncomfortable when the relationship becomes close.

Finally, infants with disorganized attachment types tend to exhibit contradictory behaviors and look bewildered at family gatherings. This is usually related to their experiences of being abused or neglected. Such adults show a strong desire for intimate relationships while being extremely afraid of being hurt. Therefore, their behavioral patterns are hard to predict and may fluctuate between anxious and avoidant types.

3. Offline social traits of adolescents

Adolescents' offline social interactions exhibit distinct characteristics. To begin with, biologically, adolescents experience a growth spurt and changes in secondary sex characteristics, reflected by physiological and physical changes [1]. This biological maturation often drives an increased attention to the other sex, resulting in romantic relationships. Furthermore, adolescents tend to join larger peer networks with cross-sex peers and create opportunities for romantic contact, which serves as an iconic offline social characteristic of teenagers.

Secondly, adolescents' social interaction becomes broader, faster, and deeper. Peer relationships in childhood are anchored in the neighborhood, but in adolescence, peers often come from different neighborhoods because adolescents transition from smaller elementary to larger secondary schools. This transition is accompanied by an influx of new and unfamiliar peers, causing a destabilization and re-organization of the peer context [1]. As a result, teenagers need more time staying with their friends. As they grow older, they gain greater autonomy and their lives shift from family to friends, developing connections with friends.

Last but not least, significant structural and functional changes in adolescents' social brain network enhance perspective taking, abstract thinking, meta-cognitive thinking, and role taking, which enable adolescents to reflect upon and establish and maintain significant peer relationships [2]. Therefore, their friendship is deeper and more of a shared value.

These are the three main traits of adolescent offline social interactions, which are manifested in increased time spent with peers, increased cross-gender interactions, expanded peer networks, enhanced independence from adults, and increased reflection on adolescent social status.

4. The relationship between attachment styles and offline peer interaction patterns

The attachment model affects many aspects of teenagers, including their social patterns on the offline campus. As children move into adolescence, intimacy and self-disclosure become hallmarks of friendship, with friendships during adolescence being marked by a greater amount of intimacy than those during middle childhood. Therefore, the following content will reflect the social intimacy from the perspectives of social initiative, frequency of interaction, and conflict management to evaluate the influence of attachment type on it.

4.1. Secure attachment and offline peer interactions

Adolescents with secure attachment style often believe that they are worthy of being loved and that others are trustworthy. This inner sense of security provides a powerful motivation and a healthy model for their offline peer interaction.

Firstly, in terms of social initiative, securely attached adolescents often show exceptional confidence and courage. They are unafraid of rejection and are able to initiate interactions easily, as well as join unfamiliar groups and organize activities actively [3]. This initiative is not a deliberate or challenging effort but an outflow of their inner security. Because they deeply believe in their own value, they dare to express their true selves; because they assume others are friendly, they are willing to reach out.

Secondly, in terms of the frequency and quality of social interactions, adolescents with secure attachment are able to maintain more stable, in-depth, and enduring peer relationships. Because of their high social initiative and positive social attitudes, they are generally more popular and accepted, which means they have a wide network of friends and are more frequently exposed to social activities. In addition, they are able to share their thoughts and vulnerabilities freely, which is a key to building deep friendships. Furthermore, they are willing to be listeners and supportive, and are likely to be high-quality listeners, offering emotional empathy and practical assistance to their friends [4]. These interactions, based on trust and respect, make their friendships more supportive and fulfilling.

Thirdly, when it comes to interpersonal conflict resolution, securely attached adolescents generally keep calm and view disagreements with an objective perspective. They tend to employ problem-solving strategies and negotiate to find the best solution for the conflict. This effective

conflict resolution style not only solves conflicts immediately but also strengthens trust and understanding, leading to a more stable relationship.

4.2. Insecure attachment and offline peer interactions

Insecure attachment is a significant risk factor for adolescents' social development. The anxious, avoidant, and disorganized styles share an underlying foundation of deep insecurity. This insecurity will lead to significant difficulties in adaptation across social initiative, interaction frequency and depth, and conflict resolution.

Firstly, adolescents with insecure attachment exhibit distinct patterns in social initiative. Those with an anxious attachment often show urgent social approaches. They are initially perceived positively in social interactions but tend to deteriorate over time [5]. In contrast, highly avoidant individuals are less tolerant of physical closeness [6], leading them to avoid intimate relationships and exhibit negativity in them. The most complex pattern is seen in disorganized attachment, where adolescents may switch unpredictably between initiating actively and resisting intimacy [7].

Secondly, in terms of the frequency and quality of social interactions, adolescents with insecure attachment often struggle to establish high-quality friendships. Anxious individuals may maintain frequent interactions with low quality. Avoidant individuals maintain infrequent and shallow interactions. Disorganized individuals, in contrast, have conflicting interaction patterns, changing wildly between extremes of extreme dependence and intense rejection. These patterns definitely create tension and pain in their relationships, making them unable to establish and maintain lasting, trusting friendships.

Thirdly, when it comes to interpersonal conflict resolution, adolescents with insecure attachment tend to take destructive strategies. Anxious individuals often display intense outbursts and blame others. Avoidant individuals tend to take silent treatment and withdrawal. By comparison, disorganized individuals experience the most significant difficulties in conflict resolution. Because they lack an internal organizational strategy for coping with stress, their behavior may appear disorganized, erratic, or out of control [7]. Such reactions not only fail to resolve the conflict but can also significantly fuel the conflict, sometimes even frightening their peers and often leading to the rapid end of the relationship.

4.3. Influencing factors and moderating variables

The association between adolescents' attachment styles and their offline peer interaction patterns are deeply influenced by a range of internal and external factors, which serve as important moderators. They either strengthen or weaken the predictive effects of attachment style, and together they shape the ultimate picture of adolescents' social development.

Firstly, gender differences play a key role in this relationship. Research shows that adolescents with the same insecure attachment style may exhibit gender-specific behaviors, which are closely related to societal expectations of gender roles. For example, girls with anxious attachment may be more likely to express their anxiety and dependence verbally, such as seeking emotional validation and confiding more frequently; whereas boys with the same anxious attachment style may exhibit more externalizing issues, such as control or jealousy-fueled arguments [8]. Furthermore, gender can regulate the impact of attachment anxiety on loneliness. When the level of attachment anxiety increases, the degree of loneliness in girls increases more than that in boys [9]. These evidence suggest that gender will moderate the effect of the attachment model on adolescent social model.

Secondly, the ongoing quality of the family environment is also a key moderating variable. While attachment style is stable across time, it is not unchangeable at all. Improvements in parenting styles can effectively buffer the negative effects of insecure attachment. Take parental divorce as an example. This will undoubtedly bring insecurity and a sense of abandonment to the child, which often leads to insecure attachment [10]. However, maternal emotional state and stability, positive communication about the other parent, and a greater capacity to control anger and maintain a positive exchange of information with respect to the other parent predict secure affective relationships in emerging adult children [10]. These types of positive behaviors promoted by parents allow children to feel loved and cared for by both parents, which buffers the negative effects of divorce on children.

Last but not least, cultural background can also affect the influence of attachment style on adolescents' social patterns greatly. While East Asian cultures stress group collaboration and harmony, North American cultures highlight individual independence and freedom. This difference means that people with avoidant attachment styles may have difficulty getting on well with others and face more prejudice in collectivist cultures due to their poor social ability. In contrast, in individualistic cultures, their independent behavior may be respected and accepted to a certain extent [11]. Therefore, the cultural content also serves as a moderator in the relationship between attachment styles and social patterns.

5. The relationship between attachment styles and interpersonal relationship choices

The attachment theory serves as a basic structure to understand people's perceptions, behaviors, and social patterns. The needs people want met in their adult intimate relationship are presented to persons who are woefully similar to the persons who did not meet those needs when they were children [12]. Therefore, this internal working model influences how people choose partners greatly. When it comes to adolescents, their choices towards interpersonal relationships are also impacted. The following texts will discuss how it functions.

Adolescents with secure attachment always see themselves as worthy of love and others as trustworthy. Therefore, their internal working model is positive and stable, indicating that they do not need to rely too much on friends to gain a sense of security. Instead, their principle of making friends is deep matching, such as having same hobbies and values, pursuing stable and long-term relationships. Besides, in this kind of relationship, they are free to make any arrangements and agreements, as long as they agree and know precisely what they are agreeing to. Being able to do this depends on both of them being interdependent, rather than codependent [12]. As a result, the person they choose to be their friend is usually independent and emotionally self-sufficient.

Insecurely attached adolescents, however, are always driven by immediate emotions and external pressures, reflecting in their eagerness to find an emotional supporter. Therefore, they usually choose someone who can stay with them for a long time and always listen to them, regardless of the other person's wishes and emotions. They do not have high requirements for the kind of friends they make, because what they want is not deep companionship and understanding, but just support. For example, the social networks of individuals with anxious attachment are more likely to be composed of people who provide security and availability rather than people who are connected based on closeness or similarity [13]. For them, choosing friends is just a choice of their emotional support, a tool.

In addition to the correlation between attachment style and friendship choices, it also influences the sense of belonging and exclusion within a group in a bidirectional way [14]. People with secure attachment feel a stronger sense of belonging within the group and often take on leadership

responsibilities. They also protect themselves when faced with exclusion and do not feel their self-worth is being attacked. Similarly, they do not reject others, treating them with kindness and gaining their trust. This, in turn, strengthens their sense of security, strengthening their secure attachment and benefiting from their interactions with others. For them, belonging far outweighs exclusion. Insecure individuals, however, find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging within a group because they can be extremely sensitive and possessive. If they do not receive special treatment from their friends within the group, they feel neglected and ignored, leading to anxious internal friction and arguments, avoidant repression and somatic symptoms, and disorganized complex symptoms. For insecure individuals, exclusion far outweighs belonging. Consequently, insecure attachment can increase the likelihood of developing suicidal ideation due to frustrated belongingness needs [15].

6. Discussion

6.1. Gaps/limitation

Although existing research have demonstrated the relationship between attachment patterns and adolescents' social relationships on campus, there are still several obvious limitations.

Firstly, the over-reliance on self-report data causes bias. Scales like Experience in Close Relationships Scale (ECR) are widely used to assess social relationship equality. However, this self-assessment questionnaire data may be influenced by social desirability bias (SDB). For example, anxious attachment may lead to deep self-blame, judging oneself and failing to accept one's inner desires, thus exhibiting bias in the questionnaire data, trying to only show the positive side. Furthermore, cognitive bias can also influence the research's results. By automatically and systematically interpreting interactions with peers in a negative light, adolescents with anxious attachment see the world more negatively than the real world, which can lead to misjudging influencing factors when studying moderating factors.

Secondly, existing research lacks longitudinal studies, making it impossible to infer the specific direction of influence between attachment patterns and moderating variables. Furthermore, micro- and macro-level identity processes involve distinct qualitatively different processes [16], as well as the development of attachment patterns. To further deepen the understanding of how micro-level processes influence the development of macro-level attachment patterns, future research needs to incorporate assessments of micro-level processes into long-term longitudinal studies to assess macro-level processes.

6.2. Future directions

To overcome the limitations mentioned above, future research could proceed in the following directions:

First, employ multiple strategies to collect data. To overcome the biases from self-report data, future research should combine different measurement methods. For example, peer-report methods could collect evaluations from friends or peers to provide a more objective perspective. Besides, experimental methods could employ cognitive tasks (such as narrative and recall tasks) to unconsciously measure the biases, thereby assessing cognitive biases in individuals with anxious attachment more objectively [16]. This multi-method cross-validation strategy can effectively reduce common method bias and more accurately reveal relationships between variables.

Second, longitudinal studies are needed and they should consider both micro and macro levels. Future research needs to employ intensive long-term designs (e.g., diary-based and experience

sampling methods) to record daily micro-interactions. For example, an individual's fear of friends' rejection or daily expectations of close relationships should be measured daily. Furthermore, these individuals should be studied for a longer time (e.g., several years) to assess the development and changes in their macro-attachment styles. By putting micro-level process assessments with long-term macro-level longitudinal studies, researchers can learn how micro-level interactions gradually influence the development of macro-level attachment styles, allowing them to truly understand the relationships between variables.

7. Conclusion

This article summarizes the effect of attachment style on adolescents' offline social behavior and relationship choice. Teenagers' offline social interaction features include the desire for romantic contact as a special form of emotion, more frequent and broader social interaction, and a deeper pursuit of shared values. Then, based on the above characteristics, researchers further explore how attachment styles influence social patterns. Research findings show that, generally, adolescents with secure attachment exhibit more social initiative to pursue and establish a more stable and deep friendship and more effective conflict resolution. Typically, adolescents with insecure attachment (including anxious attachment style, avoidant attachment style, and disorganized attachment style) will encounter problems in establishing trust, a lack of intimacy, and poor relationship stability. Besides, gender, quality of family environment, and cultural background will moderate the relationship between attachment style and social patterns.

Currently, existing research still has some limitations, such as over-reliance on self-assessment data and a lack of long-term longitudinal design, which makes it impossible to infer the causal relationship between variables and difficult to fully explore the dynamic process of how macro-attachment pattern is shaped by micro-interaction. Therefore, future research should try to use a multi-method data collection strategy and a long-term follow-up design to explore more about the specific process of how attachment influences social development.

The research findings in this study also have the following practical significance for educational practice, family intervention, and psychological counseling: Schools can introduce psychological courses based on attachment theory to help adolescents with insecure attachment improve their social cognition, emotion, and conflict resolution ability. Parents can help their children repair the hurt of attachment by improving the quality of companionship and enhancing the responsiveness of emotion. Psychological counselors can help adolescents to better understand their interpersonal patterns from the perspective of attachment. Through these means, educators and mental health counselors can help adolescents establish positive and healthy social relationships.

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