Research on Attachment Relationship, Self-Esteem and Psychological Maturity in Love among Chinese College Students from Single-Parent Families

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Abstract: In modern society, individuals' emotional health is significantly impacted by the interplay of attachment relationships, self-esteem, and psychological maturity within romantic relationships. The aim of this research is to elucidate the intricate relationships among these three factors, seeking to comprehend their combined influence on the romantic encounters of Chinese college students hailing from single-parent households. A total of 576 valid questionnaires were collected in this study, including 234 from single-parent families. The results showed that the vast majority of the respondents belong to the refusal type of attachment relationship, the medium level of self-esteem and lower level of coping with love stress, caring and interest in love psychological maturity, and their views on love and marriage showed doubts and anxiety about the stability and commitment of love relationship. However, some of them might be able to make more sophisticated personal options due to their individual growth processes which affected the shaping of their perspectives on marriage and love. An intervention program is to improve the psychological maturity in love of single-parent families from the perspective of individual, parents and school.

1. Introduction

In the past few years, with the rapid development of Chinese society and the diversification of family structures, single-parent families have become a common family form in China [1]. Due to reasons such as divorce, widowhood, or other family changes, children in single-parent families often face more challenges in their growing up. The university period is an important stage for college students to establish intimate connections, but the pursuit and development of love often encounter difficulties. The Issues encountered in romantic relationships often disable them to adapt and solve, leading to negative emotions and even extreme behaviors, and this situation is more severe in the group of college students from single-parent families attachment relationships are emotional connections established between individuals, usually formed during childhood. Research has shown that college students from single-parent families may face difficulties in establishing

stable attachment relationships due to the lack of a complete family support system [2].

Self-esteem is an individual's evaluation and feeling of their own value and ability, which is crucial to individual psychological development and social adaptation. However, college students from single-parent families often face the risk of self-esteem damage because of the lack of parental attention and support. They may feel prejudices and negative judgments from the outside world, affecting the establishment of their self-image and self-confidence. The research has indicated a significant negative correlation between self-esteem of single-parent family students and interpersonal stress [3].

Furthermore, the presence of psychological maturity in love encompasses an individual's emotional and cognitive preparedness in fostering healthy and meaningful romantic relationships, characterized by attributes like empathy, effective communication, and the proficient handling of relationship challenges [4]. It required a comprehensive understanding of oneself and a well-balanced ability to connect, highlighting the importance of both independence and interdependence in the romantic context. However, college students from single-parent families may have great challenges in how to establish a stable and healthy love relationship with the partner because of the lack of correct demonstration and guidance from their parents. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that the maturity of love psychology is a gradual process, and different individuals may have varying degrees of maturity at different stages. Additionally, personal experience, educational qualifications as well as personality characteristics can also exert an impact on the maturity of love psychology.

As mentioned above, it is very important to explore the relationship between attachment relationship, self-esteem and love psychological maturity among college students from single-parent families in China. Through in-depth research, we can better understand the characteristics and needs of this group in terms of emotional development and mental health, and provide useful references for providing corresponding psychological counselling and social support, so as to promote their better adaptation to college life and achieve their own development goals, and provide new perspectives and inspirations for research in associated fields.

2. Participants and Measures

2.1. Participants

College students from single-parent families in China were selected as the research object by using the random sampling method. Single-parent families refer to those where either the father or the mother has passed away or gotten a divorce, leaving the children to be raised by only one parent. In this study, 600 questionnaires were distributed in total to the students of three universities in Hefei, Anhui Province, China (Anhui University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Anhui Xinhua University and Anhui Medical University), including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Meanwhie, prior to the formal investigation, 30 students were selected randomly to verify the reliability and validity of the scale. Ultimately, a total of 576 valid questionnaires were obtained, with 234 of them coming from single-parent families. The basic information of the students anonymously participating in the questionnaire is shown in Table 1. This test gained approval from the LPU-B Research Ethics Review Panel, and all 576 students participated voluntarily and signed the informed consent.

Table 1 shows the basic information of 576 valid participants, including gender, age, grade, major, place of birth, monthly household income, family type, whether living with family, whether only child or not, love experience and number of times in love. As can be seen from Table 1, there are 234 college students from single-parent families, which account for 40.6% of the total. Among them, 167 students from divorced families, accounting for 29%, 67 students from widowed families,

accounting for 11.6%.

Table 1: Respondent's Demographic Profile (n=576)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage %
Sex		
Male	293	50.9
Female	283	49.1
Age		
18yrs old and below	146	25.3
19-20yrs old	295	51.2
21-22yrs old	132	22.9
23yrs old and above	3	0.5
Grade level		
Freshman year	121	21.0
Sophomore year	186	32.3
Junior year	165	28.6
Senior year	104	18.1
Major		
Natural sciences	306	53.1
Humanities and Social Sciences	207	35.9
Arts and Sports	63	10.9
Types of families		
Dual parent families	342	59.4
Divorced families	167	29.0
Widowed families	67	11.6
Whether living with family		
living with mother and father	345	59.9
living with mother	128	22.2
living with father	75	13.0
Living with other family members(eg. grandparent or other relatives)	28	4.9
Monthly household income		
2000 yuan and below	38	6.6
2000 -5000yuan	230	39.9
5000 -10000yuan	237	41.1
10000 yuan and above	71	12.3
Place of origin		
Urban	302	52.4
Rural	274	47.6
Whether only child or not		
Yes	327	56.8
No	249	43.2
Love experience		
Yes	466	80.9
None	110	19.1
Number of times you have been in love		
None	106	18.4
Once	283	49.1
Two times	150	26.0
Three times	33	5.7
Four times or more	4	0.7

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Adult Attachment Scale

In this study, the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) revised by Collins in 1996 was utilized, which is commonly used to evaluate adult intimacy and possesses good reliability and validity in China.This scale consists of three subscales, namely, proximity, dependence, and anxiety. The Proximity Scale is utilized to measure the extent to which an individual is at ease with intimacy. The Dependency scale evaluates the level of an individual's ability to depend on others effectively when requiring help. The anxiety scale is utilized to measure the extent of an individual's fear of being abandoned or disliked. There are 6 items in each subscale, totaling 18 items in all. A five-point Likert scale was applied, with the options ranging from 1 (completely inconsistent) to 5 (completely consistent). It is important to note that questions 2, 7, 8, 13, 16, 17, and 18 are reverse-scored. Eventually, these dimensions are translated into attachment styles.

2.2.2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Rosenberg in 1965, was used in this study. This scale consists of 10 measurement items in total, including 5 forward scoring items and 5 reverse scoring items, and is classified into 4 levels ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale has good reliability and validity. The highest score on this scale is 40 points and the lowest score is 10 points. The score is positively correlated with the personal self-esteem, which means, the higher the score, the greater the subject's self-esteem.

2.2.3. Psychological Maturity Scale for College Students in Love

This study adopted the psychological maturity scale in love for college students compiled by Li Zhuang (2011, China), which is based on the love psychological model composed of four factors: caring, interest, views on marriage and love, and coping with love stress. The scale has ideal reliability, validity and differentiation. The results of the scale not only explored the kind of love that the participants were involved in, but also evaluated their level of psychological maturity in love. The scale consists of 26 questions in total, including 8 items in the "caring" dimension, 6 items in the "interest" dimension, 5 items in the "views on marriage and love" dimension, and 7 items in the "coping with love stress" dimension. Each question was rated on a scale from 1 completely inconsistent to 6 completely consistent.

2.3. Data Analysis

In this research, the quantitative analysis techniques were adopted. Firstly, the original data of the collected questionnaires were preliminary statistically processed using SPSS 22.0 based on the integration criteria of the three scales including the "Adult Attachment Scale", the "Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale", and the "Psychological Maturity Scale for College Students in Love". Secondly, descriptive statistics were employed to gain an understanding of the basic features of adult attachment, self-esteem, and psychological maturity in love, such as percentage, frequency,mean, and standard deviation. Participants' profiles can be described using frequency and percentage, while significant differences between variables were statistically analysed using independent sample t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).Eventually, the Pearson product difference correlation approach was employed to investigate the presence of a relationship between adult attachment, self-esteem and psychological maturity in love among college students from single-parent families. The significance of the results was verified using a two-tailed test, with a

significance level of α = 0.05.

3. Results

3.1. The Evaluation of the Participants' Attachment Relationship of College Students from Single-Parent Families

Table 2 presents that college students from single-parent families reported a proximity level of 2.8947, suggesting an ambiguous interpretation. The findings from the proximity scale suggest that these students may have encountered varying degrees of parental love and support, leading to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Furthermore, participants assessed their level of dependency, resulting in an average score of 2.7851, indicating uncertainty. This could be linked to the necessity for children from single-parent households to develop self-reliance early on, given the potential lack of dual parental emotional and financial support. This heightened sense of self-reliance may have reduced their reliance on others for aid. Additionally, participants displayed an average anxiety level of 2.5629, signaling a relatively lower inconsistency level. This suggests that students from single-parent families might harbor fears of parental abandonment. The combined average score, calculated from the sum of proximity and dependency levels, is 2.8398, with an unclear connotation. This outcome may be connected to the nature of the student's relationship with their parents.

Table 2: Attachment Relationship among the Respondents(n=234)

Sub-Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
Proximity	2.8947	0.29009	1	Uncertain
Dependency	2.7851	0.37089	3	Uncertain
Anxiety	2.5629	0.76557	4	Uncertain
Composite Proximity+Dependency	2.8398	0.21734	2	Uncertain

Legend: 1.0-1.49 — Completely inconsistent, 1.5-2.49 — Less inconsistent, 2.5-3.49 — Uncertain, 3.5-4.49 — More consistent and 4.5-5.0 — Completely consistent

3.2. The Evaluation of the Participants' Self-Esteem of College Students from Single-Parent Families

Additionally, Table 3 presents the assessment of self-esteem among college students from single-parent families, revealing an average score of 26.5990, which aligns with the overall average self-esteem level. This observation suggests that not all children from single-parent households experience low self-esteem. Some individuals may demonstrate resilience and possess the capacity to nurture positive self-esteem despite facing adversity. This resilience could stem from personal characteristics such as temperament, effective coping mechanisms, and supportive social networks comprised of friends and peers. However, these students may have also grappled with the significant impacts of divorce or loss on their social and emotional growth, potentially impeding their ability to form and maintain friendships, cultivate healthy social interactions, and regulate their emotions effectively. These obstacles might lead to diminished confidence and a weaker sense of self-worth, inhibiting the cultivation of robust self-esteem.

Table 3: Self-Esteem among the Respondents (n=234)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Self-Esteem	26.5990	1.25411	Average Self-Esteem

Legend: --If total score is between 10 and 16, it indicates a low level of self-esteem. --If total score is between 34 and 40, it belongs to high self- esteem. --If total score is between 17 and 33, it

belongs to average self-esteem.

3.3. The Evaluation of the Participants' Psychological Maturity in Love of College Students from Single-Parent Families

The data presented in Table 4 displays the mean scores of participants across four aspects of psychological maturity concerning love. The findings reveal that the scores for coping with love stress, caring, interest, and views on love and marriage are 3.5496, 3.6497, 3.5642, and 3.5101, respectively. These figures suggest a lack of consistency, potentially stemming from uncertainties surrounding relationship stability and commitment. Witnessing their parents' marital discord may have instilled doubt and anxiety regarding the resilience and durability of relationships within these individuals. Such apprehensions could hinder their ability to build trust with partners, cultivate secure attachment styles, and maintain realistic expectations for enduring partnerships and marriage. Nonetheless, a subset of respondents may have made more mature decisions influenced by their unique growth trajectories, ultimately shaping their attitudes toward love and marriage.

Table 4: Psychological Maturity in love among the Respondents (n=234)

Sub-Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Interpretation
Coping with love Stress	3.5496	0.76128	3	Less consistent
Caring	3.6497	0.87801	1	Less consistent
Interest	3.5642	0.61701	2	Less consistent
Views on Marriage and Love	3.5101	0.69954	4	Less consistent

Legend: 1.0-1.49 —Completely inconsistent, 1.5-2.49 —More Inconsistent, 2.5-3.49 —Less inconsistent, 3.5-4.49 —Less consistent, 4.5-5.49 —More consistent and 5.5-6.0 —Completely consistent

3.4. Correlation analysis of Attachment Relationship, Self-Esteem and Psychological Maturity in Love

Table 5: Correlational Matrix for Attachment Relationship, Self- Esteem and Psychological Maturity in Love

Variable	Sub-Variable	Self-Esteem			Psychological Maturity in Love											
					Coping with love Stress			Caring			Interest			Views on Marriage and Love		
		r_{xy}	p-value	I	r_{xy}	p-value	I	r_{xy}	p-value	I	r_{xy}	p-value	I	r_{xy}	p-value	I
Attachment relationship	Proximity	.692**	0.000	S	.858**	0.000	S	.873**	0.000	S	.760**	0.000	S	.766**	0.000	S
	Dependency	.684**	0.000	S	.868**	0.000	S	.890**	0.000	S	.777**	0.000	S	.784**	0.000	S
	Anxiety	-.701**	0.000	S	-.883**	0.000	S	-.898**	0.000	S	-.794**	0.000	S	-.787**	0.000	S
	Composite Proximity+ Dependency	.706**	0.000	S	.886**	0.000	S	.905**	0.000	S	.789**	0.000	S	.796**	0.000	S
Self-Esteem					.688**	0.000	S	.730**	0.000	SS	.610**	0.000		.616**	0.000	S

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 illustrates the connection between respondents' attachment relationships, self-esteem, and psychological maturity in love. Analysis of the data in Table 5 indicates that all sub-variables related to attachment relationships are positively and significantly linked to respondents' self-esteem, with the exception of anxiety. This implies that attachment relationships play a predictive role in determining respondents' levels of self-esteem, higher levels of attachment relationships correspond to elevated self-esteem. Moreover, proximity and dependency within attachment relationships were

found to have a positive and significant correlation with psychological maturity in love, including aspects such as coping with love stress, caring, interest, and views on marriage and love. This suggests that proximity and dependency, particularly among Chinese students hailing from single-parent backgrounds, can serve as predictors of psychological maturity in love, with the exception of anxiety.

4. Discussion

4.1. Relationship between Attachment Relationship and Psychological Maturity in Love

Based on the seminal work of Bowlby, the Attachment theory asserts that early attachment experiences serve as the foundation for an individual's emotional growth and interactions with others[5].Patterns of attachment established in childhood significantly impact an individual's capacity to initiate and sustain romantic relationships, consequently shaping their psychological maturity and understanding of love. Secure attachment is associated with in psychological maturity in love, as individuals with secure attachment styles tend to have a healthy sense of self-worth, Trust, and emotional regulation. On the other hand, individuals with insecure attachment styles, such as anxious or avoidant attachment, may struggle with psychological maturity in love. Anxious individuals may have a fear of rejection or abandonment, leading to clingy or overly dependent behaviors avoidant individuals, on the other hand, may have difficulty with intimacy and closeness, often keeping their partners at arm's length. Developing a secure attachment style through therapy or self-awareness can help individuals improve their psychological maturity in love. This includes developing better communication skills, setting boundaries, and cultivating a deeper understanding of one's own needs and emotions, ultimately, building a secure attachment style can lead to healthier and more fulfilling relationships based on mutual respect, trust, and emotional support.

4.2. Relationship between Attachment Relationship and Self-Esteem

The attachment relationship we form in early childhood can have a significant impact on our self-esteem. Attachment theory suggests that a secure attachment style, characterized by a consistent and reliable caregiver, can promote the development of a positive self-concept and healthy self-esteem [6-7].Children who experience secure attachments tend to develop a sense of worthiness and confidence in themselves. They feel valued and loved, which provides a foundation for developing a positive self-image as they grow older. These individuals are more likely to view themselves as capable and deserving of love and respect from others. On the other hand, individuals with insecure attachment styles may struggle with low self-esteem. Those with anxious attachment styles may constantly seek reassurance and validation from others, doubting their own worthiness and feeling insecure in relationships. Individuals with avoidant attachment styles may develop a defensive self-reliance, minimizing the importance of relationships and avoiding emotional intimacy, resulting in potential self-esteem issues. However, it is important to note that attachment styles can be influenced and modified over time through experiences and therapeutic interventions. By working on developing a secure attachment style, individuals can improve their self-esteem. This involves developing self-awareness, challenging negative beliefs about oneself, and building healthier relationships based on trust and support.

4.3. Relationship between Self-Esteem and Psychological Maturity in Love

Self-esteem and psychological maturity in love are closely intertwined concepts that play significant roles in the quality of romantic relationships. Self-esteem refers to the overall subjective

evaluation and perception of one's own worth and value. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to have a positive self-image, confidence in their abilities, and a sense of self-worth [8-9]. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem may struggle with feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and insecurity. Psychological maturity in love involves emotional intelligence, effective communication skills, empathy, and the ability to navigate complex emotions within a romantic relationship. Maturity in love is characterized by a willingness to compromise, respect boundaries, take responsibility for one's actions, and maintain a healthy balance of independence and interdependence in the relationship. There is a strong relationship between self-esteem and psychological maturity in love. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to exhibit psychological maturity in their romantic relationships. They are better equipped to communicate their needs, set boundaries, and express emotions in a healthy and constructive manner. High self-esteem can also foster a sense of self-assuredness that allows individuals to approach love with openness, vulnerability, and authenticity. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem may struggle to exhibit psychological maturity in love. They may experience difficulties in expressing their needs, maintaining open communication, and setting healthy boundaries. Low self-esteem can lead to behaviors such as jealousy, possessiveness, or emotional dependence, which can impact the quality of the relationship. Ultimately, developing a healthy level of self-esteem and cultivating psychological maturity in love are important aspects of creating fulfilling and sustainable romantic relationships. Working on enhancing self-esteem, improving emotional intelligence, and building healthy relationship skills can contribute to a greater sense of well-being and satisfaction in romantic partnerships.

5. Conclusion

This study uncovered that the majority of the participants are male sophomores, aged 19-20, majoring in natural sciences. They come from urban areas, have a dual-parent family, live with both parents, possess a monthly household income of 5,000-10,000 yuan, are the only child, have experience in love, and have been in love only once. Students from single-parent families tend to exhibit attachment relationships of the refusal type, characterized by a preference for independence and reluctance to seek closeness. They have an average level of self-esteem. The respondents' levels in the four dimensions of psychological maturity in love, such as coping with love stress, interest, caring, and views on love and marriage, exhibit verbal interpretations that are relatively inconsistent. This inconsistency may stem from their uncertainty regarding the stability and commitment of the relationship. Moreover, there are noteworthy differences in the respondents' responses concerning attachment relationships, self-esteem, and psychological maturity in love, based on the criteria of family type, living arrangement, monthly household income, place of origin, love experience, and the number of love experiences, with the exception of age, gender, major grade, and whether they are an only child. With the exception of anxiety, which pertains to the attachment relationship, both the attachment relationship and self-esteem demonstrate positive and significant correlations with psychological maturity in love. The framework established from these findings implies that the attachment relationship, particularly in terms of proximity, dependency, and anxiety, together with self-esteem, act as predictors of psychological maturity in love, encompassing the aspects of coping with stress, caring, interest, and perspectives on marriage and love.

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