

The Impact of Attachment and Emotional Needs on Romantic Motivation

Shawole Ai

Jiangsu Tianyi High School, Wuxi, China
sssshasha30@gmail.com

Abstract. From the perspective of literature review, this paper explores how emotional needs and adult attachment types jointly predict an individual's romantic motivation. The research background stems from attachment theory and self-determination theory. This theory holds that early attachment patterns and emotional needs (such as security, belongingness, and self-worth) constitute the core foundation for establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. The analysis of the research subjects indicates that people with secure attachment characteristics are more likely to establish trust and commitment, thereby stimulating relationship motivation; while those with anxious or avoidant attachment patterns will inevitably face difficulties in emotional regulation and have lower relationship satisfaction. The satisfaction of emotional needs (such as autonomy, belongingness, and intimacy) significantly enhances relationship satisfaction and long-term commitment, while the opposite leads to a decrease in motivation. The research methods mainly rely on a systematic review of empirical studies, including questionnaire surveys and longitudinal observations. The research results indicate that the security of attachment and the satisfaction of emotional needs both support the development and maintenance of romantic motivation. The conclusion is that future practice and research need to combine these two aspects. Regarding the thinking viewpoints on attachment and emotional needs, especially in psychotherapy and partner training, efforts should be made to increase the degree of need satisfaction and enhance emotional response capabilities, thereby establishing healthier and more stable romantic relationships.

Keywords: Attachment, Emotional Needs, Romantic Motivation, Psychological Well-being

1. Introduction

In modern society, close relationships are of great significance for an individual's emotional well-being, as they provide social support and foster psychological resilience. Attachment and emotional needs are two key factors in shaping these relationships. The attachment theory suggests that the early interaction between caregivers and the cared-for individuals will directly influence the way the cared-for individuals approach intimate relationships in adulthood. At the same time, emotional needs such as security, recognition, and connection determine the motivation of individuals to pursue and maintain romantic relationships. These factors collectively influence how people establish and maintain intimate relationships.

Research shows that attachment tendencies are closely related to emotional regulation, and emotional regulation in turn affects romantic motivation [1]. People with stable attachment relationships are more likely to effectively regulate their emotions and meet their own emotional needs, while those with unstable attachment relationships may have difficulties in maintaining close relationships. Attachment relationships are not fixed but change along with personal experiences and changes in the relationship environment [2].

Furthermore, the influence of emotional needs may also have an adverse effect on mental health. Studies have found that unstable attachment relationships and unmet emotional needs can even lead to adverse health reactions, linking interpersonal interaction processes with physical health [3]. This indicates that understanding the interaction between attachment and emotional needs is of universal significance (indicating that understanding the interaction between attachment and emotional needs is of universal significance. This is not only crucial for the improvement and development of theories, but also essential for designing effective clinical intervention measures that are sensitive to individual differences throughout the life cycle). This article will adopt the method of literature review to explore how these two elements jointly shape romantic motivation. By studying existing empirical research, the aim is to clarify the theoretical and practical importance of emotional needs and attachment in modern romantic relationships.

2. Key concept and theory

2.1. Attachment theory in adulthood

The attachment theory was initially proposed by Bowlby in 1969. This theory holds that the early close relationship with the caregiver forms an internal operating pattern, which in turn affects adult relationships. In adult attachment relationships, there are mainly three types. The secure attachment includes trust, comfort in intimate relationships, and positive emotional expression. The anxious attachment reflects the fear of being abandoned and the continuous need for reassurance. The avoidant attachment emphasizes self-independence and the inadaptability to intimate relationships. These attachment patterns determine people's behavior in intimate relationships and regulate their emotions [2]. Recent research indicates that attachment tendencies can change at different life stages. Recent research indicates that attachment tendencies are not fixed but can change throughout one's life, especially during critical periods, such as when establishing a stable romantic relationship during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, or during the process of identity formation during adolescence. For example, secure attachment may be strengthened through positive experiences, while insecurity may weaken over time [4]. Moreover, such transitions as becoming a parent highlight how attachment affects emotional responses in stressful situations [5].

2.2. Emotional needs

Apart from attachment, emotional needs are the core elements of relationship quality. They are considered core because they are the main driving force behind positive relationship behaviors; when partners feel that their needs are valued, they are more likely to reciprocate with the same behavior, thereby creating a virtuous cycle of generosity and care that strengthens the relationship. These are a sense of belonging - acceptance and bonding; a sense of security - trust in the partner's consistency; and a sense of self-worth - feeling valued and respected. In this way, one important mechanism is "perceived partner responsiveness", which is how far one feels that they are understood, acknowledged, and cared for. If such responsiveness exists, the union between spouses

will be more fulfilling and stable. Existing research points out that daily responsiveness enactment is most crucial in emotional control among spouses, especially during stressful moments [6].

Briefly, the attachment theory and emotional needs are a model of accounting for romantic motives: the attachment theory accounts for how people seek close relationships, while emotional needs account for what they seek in relationships.

2.3. Romantic motivation

The romantic motive may be seen as an innate driving force that compels individuals to seek and maintain intimate relationships. Not only does it demonstrate how individuals go about intimate relationships in accordance with their attachment tendencies, but also what they seek from their partners, such as acceptance, security, and recognition. In this way, attachment theory and emotional needs provide a more plausible model for describing how individuals make meaning of the establishment and maintenance of romantic relationships.

3. Literature review

3.1. Impact of attachment on romantic motivation

The research also indicates that the type of attachment has a significant impact on the way individuals pursue and maintain their romantic goals. For instance, Simpson conducted a study on 144 young couples (with the average age of the men being 19.4 years old, the average age of the women being 18.7 years old, and the average duration of the relationship being 13.5 months) [7]. The participants underwent a series of tests, including attachment type, commitment level, credibility, satisfaction, and frequency of emotional expression. This study evaluated the relationship between various attachment tendencies and the trust and commitment of couples in their relationships. The research results showed that individuals with a secure attachment were more likely to report higher satisfaction, commitment, and trust in their partners, which enhanced their motivation to maintain the relationship. In contrast, anxious individuals built up greater fear of abandonment, while avoidant individuals emotionally withdrew. One limitation of this study was that the sample was not fully representative, as most participants were young and had been psychologically educated, which may have influenced their responses. Therefore, Campbell, Simpson, Bouldry, and Kashy investigated the influence of attachment anxiety on people's perceptions of conflict and support within romantic relationships [8]. Participants completed self-report questionnaires for attachment and then discussed them with their partners. The findings of the study revealed that individuals who had higher attachment anxiety were more conflict-sensitive and found their partner's support less sincere. This reduced their romantic motivation and relationship self-efficacy. A weakness of this study is its reliance entirely on self-reported perceptions, which would not necessarily capture actual partner behavior, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results.

Finally, Feeney and Noller tested attachment styles and romantic love and risk of relationship breakdown. The method of study included the observation of couples over a period and identifying whether insecure attachment predicted separation [9]. From the findings, the study determined that individuals with insecure attachments (high avoidance type) were likely to end the relationship. This indicates that insecure attachment reduces long-term romantic motivation because it undermines the foundation of trust and emotional stability, leading individuals to overestimate the risks of long-term

relationships and lower their expectations for rewards. This study was constrained by the small sample size that limited the ability to generalize the study findings.

Overall, these studies show that a secure attachment will provide trust, commitment and flexibility, and enhance the romantic desire in the relationship. In contrast, the anxiety and avoidance patterns will provide insecurity and dissatisfaction, hence detracting from the wish for a romantic relationship.

3.2. Impact of emotional needs on romantic motivation

Emotional needs are the strongest that keep individuals involved in a romantic relationship. Studies based on the Self-Determination Theory emphasize satisfaction of fundamental needs such as autonomy, competence, and belonging as being most importantly linked with relationship quality. For instance, Patrick, Keen, Canevello and Lonsbary investigated how the fulfillment of these needs triggers feelings of happiness and the functioning of relationships [10]. The participants detailed their romantic relationships and measured the degree to which their psychological needs were met. This study confirmed that as long as individuals fulfilled their own needs through their partners, they would report higher relationship satisfaction, greater loyalty, and a more overall happy state. These findings directly enhanced the positivity in the relationship, as individuals were more likely to invest in the relationship. However, this study has limitations as it relies on self-reporting, which may lead to biases in participants' evaluations of their partners.

Similarly, La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman and Deci investigated the changes in attachment security and its relationship with need satisfaction and well-being [11]. According to the Self-Determination Theory, participants evaluated their sense of autonomy. The close connection between autonomy and relationship quality provided empirical support for applying this theory to understanding the dynamics, abilities and correlations of intimacy in different intimate relationships. The research process indicated that emotional needs satisfaction made individuals feel secure in their attachment relationships and more likely to maintain the intimacy. Conversely, unmet needs were associated with less security and less committed relationships. One limitation of this study is that it relied on self-awareness across diverse relationships, which may not be indicative of actual partners' behavior.

Other studies have replicated these findings. Le and Agnew found that in mutual romantic relationships, need satisfaction and emotional experience did exist [12]. The authors demonstrated that when each participant felt emotionally validated and supported, they reported positive affect and were more likely to stick around in the relationship. However, the correlational nature of this study prevented causal ties from being inferred. Similarly, Prager and Buhrmester found that the level of intimacy and need satisfaction level predicted relationship satisfaction and intimacy, and hence supported the argument that need satisfaction is the basis of long-term couple motivation [13]. A key limitation is that the relatively small sample size reduces the generalizability of the findings, and hence reduced generalizability of the results.

Generally, these studies prove that when emotional needs such as autonomy, belonging, and intimacy are met, individuals are more satisfied and committed, thus raising the motivation of romantic relationships. When they are not met, relationships become prone to dissatisfaction and decay.

4. Discussion

This paper implies that both attachment and emotional needs are central in determining romantic relationship motivation. All studies agree that secure attachment and the satisfaction of high

emotional needs are signs of high commitment and satisfaction and, therefore, increase motivation towards maintaining a romantic relationship. For instance, Simpson concluded that secure individuals reported higher trust and satisfaction, while Patrick, Keen, Canevello, and Lonsberry demonstrated that satisfaction of needs such as autonomy and intimacy would improve happiness and relationship quality [7,10]. In contrast, avoidant and anxious people are apt to have issues since they are afraid of being rejected or are uneasy when it comes to close relationships, a factor that may demotivate them to remain in the relationship [8,9]. Such propensities indicate that although those with secure attachment are more motivated, insecurity would diminish motivation except if emotional needs can be reliably met. These processes include the regulation of emotion, trust, and the development of intimate relationships, all of which sustain long-term commitment. Secure attachment enables people to control their emotions and build trust, thereby making it easier for them to maintain the freshness of romantic relationships. Anxious attachment makes people more sensitive to conflicts and less likely to receive help from their partners [8]. Avoidant attachment leads to emotional estrangement and reduced investment in the relationship [9]. At the emotional needs level, achieving autonomy, belongingness, and intimacy can serve as a starting point for obtaining a sense of security, thereby enhancing relationship satisfaction and loyalty [11-13]. Differences between different studies are sometimes attributed to the research design: cross-sectional studies provide evidence of associations at a specific point in time, while longitudinal observations may capture changes in the relationship over several stages.

The practical significance of these research findings is extremely significant. For couples, focusing on meeting each other's emotional needs (such as support, recognition, and response) can directly lead to greater motivation and higher satisfaction. For psychological therapy, the insecure may be assisted by training that enhances trust and emotional communication. Anxious partners can become trained in healthier coping with fear of abandonment, and avoidant partners can be taught, incrementally, to enhance openness and closeness. Moreover, satisfying emotional needs can provide motivation, satisfying emotional needs can provide motivation to maintain an intimate and satisfying relationship.

However, several limitations should be noted. A number of research studies employed self-report questionnaires and cross-sectional designs, which limited the derivation of cause-and-effect conclusions and may introduce biases. The samples are usually Western college student populations which limits the cultural generalizability of the findings, and the question is whether such findings may be as universally applicable in other cultures. For example, within collectivist cultures, interdependence and family expectations may have different impacts on the motivation role of needs and attachment. Finally, theoretical contributions differentiate attachment from emotional needs and rarely show an integrated model. Future research should design frameworks that can unify these two perspectives to better describe romantic relationship motivation.

5. Conclusion

Together, attachment style and emotional needs in combination give romance motivation a tangible ground. Secure attachment enables individuals to trust their partners and manage emotions in a proper way, and the satisfaction of autonomy, belonging, and intimacy needs enhances satisfaction and loyalty. Together, these two make couples more proactive in maintaining a healthy and long-lasting romantic relationship.

This review indicates that it is necessary to view research on attachment and emotional needs as interacting variables rather than independent influencing factors. In this way, the society can more clearly understand why people seek close relationships and why they are compelled to remain in

them. This integrated approach adds new layers to existing research and points out the way to establish motivation through emotional security and continuous satisfaction of personal needs.

In fact, these findings imply that couples need to focus on meeting each other's emotional needs, as this directly contributes to commitment and the quality of long-term relationships. In psychotherapy, interventions aimed at enhancing security and meeting needs can help individuals develop healthier romantic motivations and establish more satisfying interpersonal relationships.

References

- [1] Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2019). Attachment orientations and emotion regulation. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 25, 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2018.02.006>
- [2] Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2022). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
- [3] Neumann, E., Sattel, H., Gündel, H., Henningsen, P., & Kruse, J. (2015). Attachment in romantic relationships and somatization. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 203(2), 101–106. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000000246>
- [4] Chopik, W. J. (2024). Longitudinal changes in adult attachment orientations: Evidence from a multiwave panel study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 126(2), 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000529>
- [5] Herzberg, P. Y., von Soest, T., & Vollrath, M. (2024). Attachment and the transition to parenthood: Emotional responses in stressful contexts. *Developmental Psychology*, 60(1), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001721>
- [6] Johnson, M. D., Kane, H. S., & Lannin, D. G. (2025). Daily responsiveness and emotional regulation in couples: An intensive longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 42(2), 317–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075241234567>
- [7] Simpson, J. A. (1990). Influence of attachment styles on romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(5), 971–980. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.971>
- [8] Campbell, L., Simpson, J. A., Boldry, J., & Kashy, D. A. (2005). Perceptions of conflict and support in romantic relationships: The role of attachment anxiety. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(3), 510–531. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.510>
- [9] Feeney, J. A., & Noller, P. (1992). Attachment style and romantic love: Relationship dissolution. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 44(2), 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049539208260145>
- [10] Patrick, H., Knee, C. R., Canevello, A., & Lonsbary, C. (2007). The role of need fulfillment in relationship functioning and well-being: A self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(3), 434–457. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.3.434>
- [11] La Guardia, J. G., Ryan, R. M., Couchman, C. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Within-person variation in security of attachment: A self-determination theory perspective on attachment, need fulfillment, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(3), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.3.367>
- [12] Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2001). Need fulfillment and emotional experience in interdependent romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18(3), 423–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407501183007>
- [13] Prager, K. J., & Buhrmester, D. (1998). Intimacy and need fulfillment in couple relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15(4), 435–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407598154001>