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Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



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A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL OF
PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE,
INFERIORITY, AND COPING
STYLE BETWEEN ADULT
ATTACHMENT STYLE
AND SOCIAL ANXIETY
AMONG CHINESE
COLLEGES STUDENTS
IN GANSU CHINA



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WANG QIN CHAO

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FORA DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study explores the moderating effects of psychological resilience, feelings of inferiority, and coping style between adult attachment styles and social anxiety among undergraduate students in Gansu, China. Using PLS-SEM and multi-stage cluster sampling, the research analysed data from 1,371 students using the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale and Adult Attachment Scale. The study's findings articulate a negative direct effect of adult attachment on coping styles ($\beta = -0.064$, $T = 4.802$, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, there is a positive direct effect of adult attachment and social anxiety ($\beta = 0.08$, $T = 2.057$, $p = 0.020$). Coping style is a significant negative predictor of social anxiety ($\beta = -0.163$, $T = 3.384$, $p < 0.001$). Most notably, feelings of inferiority as a moderator positively effect social anxiety ($\beta = 0.384$, $T = 11.979$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, psychological resilience demonstrated a strong negative moderating effect with social anxiety ($\beta = -0.292$, $T = 8.46$, $p < 0.001$). Indirect effects further revealed that both feelings of inferiority and psychological resilience's impact on social anxiety were moderated by attachment style (inferiority x attachment: $\beta = -0.052$, $T = 1.811$, $p = 0.035$; psychological resilience x attachment: $\beta = -0.046$, $T = 1.942$, $p = 0.026$). Additionally, a mediating effect of coping on the relationship between attachment and social anxiety was identified ($\beta = 0.01$, $T = 2.755$, $p = 0.003$). This study explores how adult attachment styles influence anxiety in university students through coping styles, psychological resilience, and feelings of inferiority. It emphasizes the importance of adaptive coping and resilience in reducing anxiety, and shows that feelings of inferiority can exacerbate its effects. These findings provide new insights into the psychological mechanisms of social anxiety, particularly among Chinese undergraduates.





MODEL MEDIASI TERMODERASI BAGI KETAHANAN PSIKOLOGI, RASA RENDAH DIRI, DAN GAYA DAYA TINDAK ANTARA GAYA KELEKATAN DEWASA DAN KEBIMBANGAN SOSIAL DALAM KALANGAN MAHASISWA DI GANSU CHINA

ABSTRAK

Kajian kuantitatif ini meneroka kesan pemoderasian daya tindak psikologi, perasaan rendah diri, dan gaya penyesuaian dalam hubungan antara gaya kelekatan dewasa dan kebimbangan sosial dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah di Gansu, China. Menggunakan pendekatan PLS-SEM dan kaedah pensampelan kelompok berperingkat, kajian ini menganalisis data daripada 1,371 pelajar menggunakan Skala Kebimbangan Sosial Liebowitz dan Skala Kelekatan Dewasa. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan kesan langsung negatif gaya kelekatan dewasa terhadap gaya penyesuaian ($\beta = -0.064$, $T = 4.802$, $p < 0.001$), manakala kesan langsung positif diperoleh antara gaya kelekatan dewasa dan kebimbangan sosial ($\beta = 0.08$, $T = 2.057$, $p = 0.020$). Gaya penyesuaian merupakan peramal negatif yang signifikan terhadap kebimbangan sosial ($\beta = -0.163$, $T = 3.384$, $p < 0.001$). Perasaan rendah diri sebagai pemboleh ubah pemoderasi menunjukkan kesan positif yang ketara terhadap kebimbangan sosial ($\beta = 0.384$, $T = 11.979$, $p < 0.001$), manakala daya tindak psikologi menunjukkan kesan pemoderasi negatif yang signifikan terhadap kebimbangan sosial ($\beta = -0.292$, $T = 8.46$, $p < 0.001$). Kesan interaksi selanjutnya menunjukkan bahawa pengaruh perasaan rendah diri dan daya tindak psikologi terhadap kebimbangan sosial dipengaruhi oleh interaksi antara pemboleh ubah tersebut dengan gaya kelekatan dewasa (interaksi perasaan rendah diri dan kelekatan: $\beta = -0.052$, $T = 1.811$, $p = 0.035$; interaksi daya tindak psikologi dan kelekatan: $\beta = -0.046$, $T = 1.942$, $p = 0.026$). Selain itu, gaya penyesuaian didapati memainkan peranan sebagai pemboleh ubah pengantara dalam hubungan antara gaya kelekatan dewasa dan kebimbangan sosial ($\beta = 0.01$, $T = 2.755$, $p = 0.003$). Kajian ini menjelaskan bagaimana gaya kelekatan dewasa mempengaruhi tahap kebimbangan dalam kalangan pelajar universiti melalui gaya penyesuaian, daya tindak psikologi, dan perasaan rendah diri. Dapatan ini menekankan kepentingan gaya penyesuaian adaptif dan daya tindak dalam mengurangkan kebimbangan, serta menunjukkan bahawa perasaan rendah diri boleh mempertingkatkan tahap kebimbangan. Hasil kajian ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang mekanisme psikologi yang mendasari kebimbangan sosial, khususnya dalam konteks pelajar prasiswazah di China.



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A Survey Items by Psychological Scale



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to examine the influence of adult attachment styles on social anxiety among college students in Gansu, China, by investigating the mediating role of coping style and the moderating effects of psychological resilience and feelings of inferiority.

This chapter begins by presenting the background of the study, highlighting the growing need to address social anxiety among college students in the region. It then outlines the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the study are explained in the subsequent section. Finally, the chapter concludes with definitions of key operational terms, the purpose of the study, its significance, and its limitations.



1.2 Background of the Study

The college years are critical for the rapid development of cognition, emotion, and behaviour in students. Interpersonal communication plays an increasingly vital role in their academics, daily lives, and future employment. Yet, difficulties in interpersonal communication have emerged as a prevalent psychological issue among modern college students, with social anxiety being a significant factor affecting their studies and overall life. Social anxiety refers to negative emotional experiences such as anxiety, tension, and fear caused by excessive worry about being evaluated by other people in interpersonal communication (Morrison & Heimberg, 2013).

According to the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders”, social anxiety or social phobia is characterized by fearful or anxious feelings and avoidance of social interactions, in which an individual may be judged by other people. For instance, people might develop social anxiety when they meet new people, being observed while eating or drinking, and perform in front of others. In other words, individuals fear embarrassment, negative evaluation, humiliation, rejection, and similar experiences (Institute of Mental Health, 2022).

As a chronic, stable condition, social anxiety disorder (SAD) may negatively affect a patient’s daily functioning in the long term (Beesdo-Baum et al., 2012; Jia Xuan, 2022). The 12-month prevalence of SAD is around 7% in the United States while a lower 12-month prevalence of SAD of approximately 0.5% - 2.0% is reported in other parts of the world; the median prevalence in Europe is 2.3%. The 12-month prevalence of SAD in children and adolescents is comparable to those in adults. The prevalence of SAD tends to decrease with age (Institute of Mental Health, 2022). In China, studies



have found that the proportion of moderate and severe social anxiety among college students is as high as 22.4% in China (Y. S. Luan et al., 2022).

Anxiety disorders and social anxiety disorders are common in childhood; they frequently become chronic if left untreated and are associated with emotional distress as well as impairments in social and academic functioning (Alkozei et al., 2015). Studies indicate that adolescents with social phobia face significantly increased risks of depression, suicide attempts, substance abuse, severe social restrictions, early school dropout, lower educational attainment, and victimization (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2014; Ranta et al., 2012). Social anxiety has been shown to seriously impair individuals' social functioning and is evident to have affected college students' academic performances (Brook & Willoughby, 2015), interpersonal relationships (Davila & Beck, 2003), interpersonal efficacy (C. Zhao & Dai, 2016), and physical and mental health (X. Wu et al., 2015).

In contemporary society, everyone is faced with challenges of drastic economic and social changes. Good interpersonal relationships can improve the physical and mental health of individuals and are effective protective factors for individuals in the face of stressors (Siette et al., 2017). Worldwide, individuals with social anxiety account for up to 7% of the population (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015), a figure that warrants attention. Many studies on social anxiety focused on how the fear of negative evaluation affects how people with social anxiety relate to unfamiliar people (Afram & Kashdan, 2015). Considering that socially anxious people evaluate social situations and interactions as threatening, they must cope with stressful situations. Coping is a key element for mental health because how people cope with stress can reduce or enhance the effects of traumatic life events. Coping is further defined as a multidimensional





concept that consists of cognitive and behavioural regulatory processes to manage the internal and external demands during a specific stressful situation (Doron et al., 2013). It has been a central focus in many studies on stress.

According to the transactional model of stress, the coping process includes actions taken to manage a stressor and reduce its intensity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Various approaches have been proposed to assess the coping process. For example, Lazarus' and his colleagues introduced the 'problem-focussed versus emotion-focused coping dichotomy'. Later, Endler & Parker (1990) expanded this model by adding 'avoidance-oriented coping' to this dichotomy. Adaptive coping includes efforts directed at solving the stressor (active and problem-focused coping style) while maladaptive coping style includes passive and emotion-focused style. They are typically less efficient at mitigating stress than adaptive coping styles (Lechner et al., 2006).

Previous studies have indicated that parental attachment security is associated with social anxiety which in turn is connected to the quality relationship (Parade et al., 2009). One of the factors proposed by the attachment theory that may impact social anxiety is attachment quality (Vertue, 2003). The level of social anxiety among college students may be linked to early interpersonal experiences, especially attachment-related experiences (X. Guo, 2000). Securely attached individuals are more likely to have good social performances and ideal interpersonal relationships and thus have lower levels of social anxiety. Conversely, individuals with high attachment avoidance tend to use deactivating strategies to despise attachment needs and reject and avoid intimacy. This often results in lower level of acceptance, liking and positive evaluation from others,





thus making individuals more prone to experiencing social anxiety in interpersonal communication (Hummel & Gross, 2001).

However, individuals with high attachment anxiety tend to use transition activation strategies, have a strong desire for closeness, rely excessively on others, and worry excessively about being rejected and abandoned by others because of their negative self-representation. These tendencies may make them more vulnerable to social tension in interpersonal communication, hence lead to having social anxiety (Riggs & Kaminski, 2010; Wei & Huo, 2009). Studies have discovered that higher levels of both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety are associated with more severe social anxiety symptoms (Dai, 2012; McCarthy et al., 2012) discovered that college students' attachment quality to their parents and peers is significantly but negatively predicted to cause social anxiety.



Lazarus and Folkman (1984) pointed out that coping styles can adversely affect an individual's physical and mental health through three pathways: First, coping may affect the neurochemical response, involving its frequency, intensity, duration, and pattern. Second, the use of coping methods that involve excessive use of harmful substances or activities that are life-threatening will hurt physical and mental health. Third, the avoidance or rejection of certain coping styles may hinder adaptive healthy behaviours. Additionally, several studies have also discovered that coping styles, as a key mediating variable between stress and mental health, play an important role in an individual's mental health level. Positive coping styles can effectively reduce stress intensity and improve mental health, while negative coping styles do the opposite. It is undeniable that every individual possesses great potential. However, people have different reactions when encountering difficulties, pressures, or setbacks. Some people





will become more and more courageous, while others may feel overwhelmed or resort to inappropriate methods to deal with problems. Every individual has a certain degree of psychological resilience, and individuals with strong psychological resilience are more likely to recover from adversity or difficulty. This shows that individuals with high psychological resilience not only have less gushing and shelling reactions but also show faster growth.

Similarly, psychological resilience affects the way individuals deal with problems. A study by Xu & Chen, (2014) investigated naval recruits and discovered that there is a significant positive correlation between the psychological resilience of naval recruits and mature coping styles and a significant negative correlation with immature coping styles. Apart from this, regression analysis showed that resilience had a significant predictive effect on coping styles, with an explanation rate of 23% for mature coping styles and 22% for immature coping styles. This tells us that if a person's psychological resilience is stronger, he is more inclined to adopt mature coping styles and; conversely, use immature coping styles.

The level of individual psychological resilience is related to many factors, among which social support and attachment are important protective factors for psychological resilience. On the other hand, if an individual has a secure attachment relationship when dealing with stress and difficulties, it provides individuals not only with emotional and material support but also provides a 'safe base' for them to make the individual believe in themselves more ability to deal with difficulties. Conversely, if an individual does not have a good social support system and secure attachment in life, he or she will be less resilient when dealing with setbacks in life. Jie et al (2014)



conducted a study among junior high school students and discovered that the level of psychological resilience of safe junior high school students was significantly higher than that of other insecure types, especially apathy and fear.

At the same time, college students are in adolescence, a unique stage of physical and psychological development. During this period, they tend to be more sensitive to various aspects of themselves, and their inaccurate self-perceptions often lead to self-doubt, self-belittlement and even self-abandonment. Feelings of inferiority have become a very common psychological issue among college students. Many studies have revealed that an inferiority complex is particularly prominent among college students.

Gansu Province, located in northwestern China, is characterized by its economic underdevelopment, educational inequality, and large populations of rural and "left-behind" youth. These conditions create a distinct psychosocial environment that intensifies vulnerability to mental health challenges, particularly among college students. Research indicates that students in such contexts are more likely to experience social anxiety, inferiority, and insecure attachment patterns, shaped by socioeconomic pressures, familial separation, and limited access to psychosocial support systems.

The phenomenon of social anxiety is particularly relevant in Gansu, where a strong emphasis on academic success, combined with traditional collectivist cultural norms, leads many students to fear negative evaluation and public scrutiny. According to Suryaningrum (2021), high levels of social anxiety among college students in similar environments are common, irrespective of gender or year of entry. Laldinpuii and Bhattacharjee (2023) further support this by identifying a high prevalence of social



anxiety among university students, particularly females—reflecting patterns that may also be present in Gansu.

A key contributor to this anxiety is inferiority, which has been linked to negative childhood experiences and limited familial support. X. Deng (2001) found that children raised in unsupportive environments are more likely to develop inferiority complexes and social withdrawal behaviours—both of which are prevalent issues among Gansu’s left-behind children and youth. Yu et al. (2021) also highlight that feelings of inferiority, shaped by socioeconomic adversity and separation from parents, significantly predict maladjustment, especially in students from under-resourced areas like Gansu.

In terms of adult attachment, insecure attachment styles—especially attachment anxiety—are known to be more prevalent among youth from disrupted or distant familial environments. In Gansu, where many students grow up in rural households with one or both parents working in distant urban areas (known as “left-behind children”), this dynamic is particularly pronounced. Vismara et al. (2022) and Read et al. (2018) confirm that insecure attachment styles are directly associated with anxiety and loneliness in youth, suggesting that students from Gansu may be at elevated risk for such psychological distress.

The coping style also plays a vital role in shaping how students in Gansu respond to academic and social pressures. Research by Liao et al. (2023) emphasizes that students with low self-esteem and social anxiety are more likely to adopt negative coping strategies, such as avoidance or emotional withdrawal—coping patterns that are likely intensified in isolated or low-support environments like Gansu. Kural (2021) further notes that problem-focused coping strategies can mediate the impact of





attachment anxiety, highlighting the need to promote positive coping mechanisms in mental health interventions for these populations.

Finally, psychological resilience—the capacity to adapt positively despite adversity—is a particularly critical protective factor for students in socioeconomically challenged areas. As Parpottas et al. (2024) and Sen (2016) argue, high resilience is associated with better emotional regulation and lower levels of anxiety. However, in provinces like Gansu, where access to mental health education and support is limited, resilience may not be sufficiently developed without targeted intervention, particularly among students with histories of insecure attachment or inferiority.

Taken together, the psychological profile of students in Gansu Province—marked by high levels of social anxiety, insecure attachment, maladaptive coping, low resilience, and inferiority—underscores the urgency of examining these interrelated variables. The region provides a significant and under-researched context in which to explore the psychological development of young adults navigating complex social and familial dynamics. Based on the previous discussion, it is evident that social anxiety is one of the more common psychological problems among college students, both abroad and at home. It is a psychological issue that colleges and universities must prioritise and work to address. The elements associated with social anxiety include adult attachment, coping styles, low self-esteem, and resilience.



1.3 Research Problem

Social anxiety is a pervasive psychological issue among college students, particularly in regions such as Gansu, China, where academic pressure and developmental challenges are pronounced. Research consistently reports a high prevalence of social anxiety in university settings (Suryaningrum, 2021; Laldinpui & Bhattacharjee, 2023), which can severely hinder students' academic engagement and social functioning. For example, Zhao & Dai (2016) found that 65.4% of students experienced moderate and 22.4% severe levels of social anxiety. These statistics reflect a serious concern for mental health in higher education.

Social anxiety, particularly among adolescents and young adults, is linked to disrupted interpersonal relationships, academic underperformance, and long-term psychological distress (Read et al., 2018; X. Zhang et al., 2022). Insecure attachment styles—*anxious* and *avoidant*—are strongly associated with higher levels of social anxiety (Manning et al., 2017; L. Guo & Ash, 2020). These attachment insecurities often stem from early caregiving experiences and persist into adulthood, influencing emotional regulation and self-perception (Bowlby, 1973). However, the mechanisms through which these attachment styles influence social anxiety remain unclear.

Existing studies have examined the relationship between adult attachment and emotional outcomes like anxiety, loneliness, or depression (Vismara et al., 2022; X. Zhang et al., 2022). However, fewer have explored the mediating role of coping styles or the moderating influence of individual traits such as psychological resilience and feelings of inferiority (Kural, 2021; Y. Yu et al., 2021). Coping styles—whether *problem-focused* or *emotion-avoidant*—have been shown to significantly affect

emotional outcomes (Liao et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2004), yet their role in mediating attachment-social anxiety links remains under-researched. Additionally, while studies show that psychological resilience can reduce social anxiety (Parpottas et al., 2024; Sen, 2016), the extent to which it moderates the effect of insecure attachment has not been clearly defined.

If left unaddressed, social anxiety can lead to chronic mental health issues, including depression, substance abuse, and social withdrawal, ultimately impairing students' academic and life trajectories (Remondi et al., 2023). Insecurely attached individuals often lack the coping resources necessary to manage these stressors effectively, which exacerbates feelings of inferiority and maladjustment (Y. Yu et al., 2021; X. Deng, 2001). Furthermore, research shows that social anxiety negatively influences students' self-esteem, perceived competence, and peer relationships (Y. S. Luan et al., 2022), all of which are critical to personal and professional development during emerging adulthood.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how adult attachment styles influence social anxiety among college students, mediated by coping styles and moderated by psychological resilience and feelings of inferiority. Specifically, the research seeks to uncover whether adaptive coping and resilience can mitigate the negative effects of insecure attachment on social anxiety, providing a foundation for more targeted intervention strategies.

This study is focused on undergraduate students in Gansu, China. It focuses on the variables of adult attachment, coping styles (positive and negative), psychological resilience, feelings of inferiority, and social anxiety. Other related factors such as

childhood trauma, clinical anxiety disorders, and family dynamics are acknowledged but not directly investigated. The study fills critical gaps in psychological literature by combining cognitive-behavioural and developmental theories to examine how internal factors interact to influence social anxiety. Drawing on recent empirical findings (Kural, 2021; Parpottas et al., 2024; Read et al., 2018), this research contributes to the growing field of attachment-informed interventions. Its findings will support universities and mental health professionals in designing resilience-building and coping-focused interventions tailored to students' attachment profiles.

Given the high prevalence and long-term consequences of social anxiety, particularly among students with insecure attachment, urgent research is needed to clarify its underlying psychological mechanisms. This study aims to address this gap by exploring a moderated mediation model involving adult attachment, coping styles, psychological resilience, and feelings of inferiority. The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for improving student mental health through targeted psychological and educational interventions.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the level of social anxiety among college students in Gansu Province in China.
2. To examine the mediating roles of coping styles in the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety among college students in Gansu Province in China,

3. To examine the moderating roles of inferiority between adult attachment and the level of social anxiety among college students in China, and
4. To examine the moderating roles of psychological resilience between adult attachment and the level of social anxiety among college students in China

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the level of social anxiety among college students in Gansu Province, China?
2. Do coping styles mediate the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety among college students in Gansu Province, China?
3. Does inferiority moderate the relationship between adult attachment and the level of social anxiety among college students in Gansu Province, China?
4. Does psychological resilience moderate the relationship between adult attachment and the level of social anxiety among college students in Gansu Province, China?

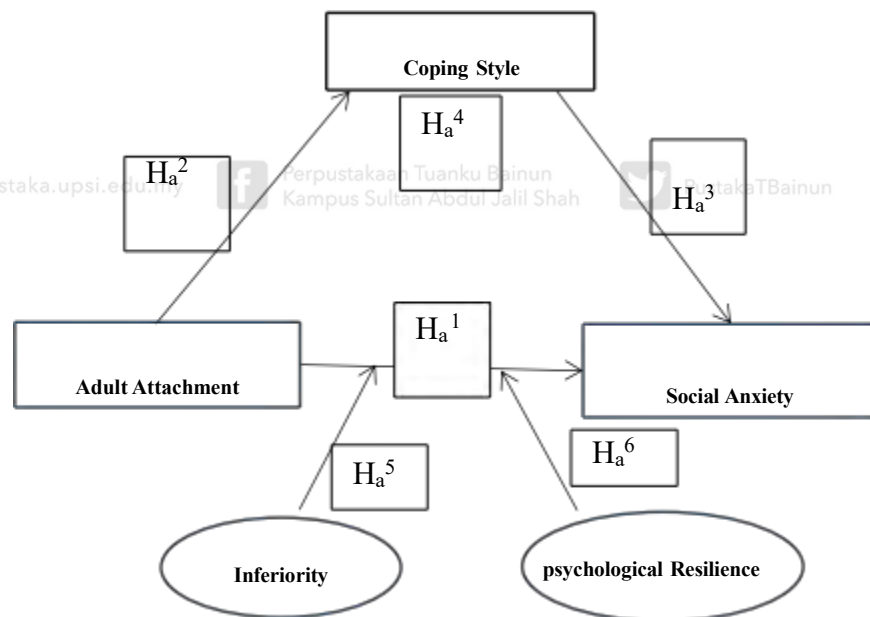
1.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning this study, which explores the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety among college students, incorporating both mediating and moderating variables. At the core of the model is the assumption that adult attachment significantly influences social anxiety (Ha1). This relationship is proposed to be mediated by coping style (Ha2 and Ha3), suggesting that

the way individuals manage stress plays a crucial role in the manifestation of anxiety symptoms. Furthermore, two psychological traits—feelings of inferiority (H_{a5}) and psychological resilience ($H_{a'}$)—are proposed to moderate the direct relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety, reflecting individual differences in vulnerability and protective capacity. Collectively, the framework offers a nuanced perspective on the psychological mechanisms underlying social anxiety and serves as a basis for hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework



The framework illustrates a model where adult attachment is proposed as the foundational element impacting social anxiety both directly and indirectly through various mediating factors. The direct influence (H_1) is strongly supported by attachment theory, which suggests that the nature of early attachment experiences shapes social interactions and emotional regulation throughout life. Insecure attachment

styles are often associated with heightened social anxiety, likely due to internalized fears of rejection.

Coping style is hypothesised to mediate the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety (H4). This is based by the notion that attachment styles influence how individuals respond to stress. Those with secure attachments may develop healthier coping strategies, potentially mitigating the impact of attachment on social anxiety. Inferiority (H5) and psychological resilience (H6) are hypothesized to have a moderating effect. The perception of inferiority can exacerbate the relationship between insecure attachment and social anxiety, making negative outcomes more pronounced. Psychological resilience, conversely, may weaken the association between insecure attachment and social anxiety, offering a buffer that allows individuals to adapt and thrive despite challenges.

Finally, coping style is also hypothesized to affect social anxiety directly (H3). The ability to cope effectively with stress is fundamental in managing social anxiety; ineffective coping can exacerbate anxiety, while effective coping can ameliorate it. The framework suggests a comprehensive approach to understanding social anxiety, considering the interplay between longstanding personality factors like attachment style and more dynamic processes like coping and resilience.

1.7 Research Hypotheses

H1: Adult attachment has a direct impact on social anxiety among college students in China.



- H2: Adult attachment has a direct impact on coping styles among college students in China.
- H3: Coping styles have a direct impact on social anxiety among college students in China.
- H4: Coping styles play a mediating role in the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety among college students in China.
- H5: Inferiority plays a significantly moderating role in the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety among college students in China.
- H6: Psychological resilience plays a significantly moderating role in the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety among college students in China.

1.8 Significance of the Study



This study aims to explore the internal mechanisms of the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety. Adult attachment is a relatively stable and difficult-to-change trait of an individual. If its impact on social anxiety will be through coping styles, which are more malleable, it may be possible to reduce the level of social anxiety by training individuals to adopt more adaptive coping strategies. At the same time, the study also investigates whether feelings of inferiority and psychological resilience moderate this relationship. If so, interventions aimed at enhancing resilience and reducing inferiority may also help mitigate social anxiety. These insights can offer a new perspective for the psychological intervention and prevention of social anxiety.

It is undeniable that college students are the pillars of the future of a country. They are about to enter the society. In addition, they have to interact with all kinds of



people in work, study and life. If an individual has serious social anxiety problems, it will inevitably affect their physical and mental health and personal health. Therefore, this study focuses on college students as the participants, explores the current situation of social anxiety among them, and aims to contribute to efforts that support and improve the mental health of college students.

The significance of this paper lies in discussing it from many aspects and influencing factors. In terms of influencing factors, not only the influence of college students' personalities, but also the influence of their growth experience on social anxiety, and the influence of the attachment relationship with the main caregiver on their personality and behaviour pattern formation. It can provide reference for parents and schools, in terms of raising children and educating students.

1.9 Operational Definitions

1.9.1 Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is defined as a persistent and intense fear of social or performance situations in which an individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others. This fear is often accompanied by concerns about being negatively evaluated, leading to avoidance behaviours and significant emotional distress (Peng, 2001; DSM-IV, APA). In this study, social anxiety is operationally defined as the level of fear or anxiety experienced in social situations as measured by the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS), which assesses anxiety and avoidance across various performance and social interaction scenarios.

1.9.2 Adult Attachment

According to the developmental and cognitive school of thought, adult attachment refers to an adult's internalized memories and mental representations of their early relationships with caregivers, which form the basis of their attachment style in later life (Bowlby, 1973). In this study, adult attachment is operationally defined as individuals' recollected patterns of relationships with primary caregivers, measured using the Adult Attachment Scale – Revised Version (AAS-R), which captures dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance.

1.9.3 Coping Style

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the cognitive and behavioural efforts made by an individual to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources. In this study, coping style is operationally defined as the pattern of thoughts and behaviours used by individuals to manage stress or challenging situations, as assessed by a standardised coping style questionnaire, which categorises responses into positive (problem-focused) or negative (emotion-focused) coping strategies.

1.9.4 Psychological Resilience

Psychological resilience refers to the process through which individuals maintain or regain mental health despite experiencing adversity, trauma, or significant stress

(Masten, 2001; Bonanno & Mancini, 2008; Chen & Miao, 2015). In this study, psychological resilience is operationally defined as the individual's perceived capacity to adapt successfully when facing adversity, as measured by a validated psychological resilience scale, capturing two key elements: exposure to adversity and successful adaptation.

1.9.5 Inferiority

Inferiority is defined as a deep-seated feeling of inadequacy and low self-worth, often arising from perceived personal flaws or inability to meet internal or external expectations (Adler, 2012; Lin Chongde, 2004). In this study, inferiority is operationally defined as the degree of self-perceived inadequacy and insecurity reported by students, measured through a standardized inferiority questionnaire, reflecting attitudes toward one's competence, self-image, and perceived social value.

1.10 Scope and Limitations

Scope 1: For the research sample, this study is only for college students from four universities in Gansu Province, China. However, these students come from different cities in different provinces across the country. Such aspects will enable this study to cover a vast area of mainland China.

Scope 2: For social anxiety, this study focuses on the emotions and symptoms of social anxiety, and some subjects with social anxiety disorder are involved, which expands the research scope of social anxiety.



Scope 3: For adult attachment, this study focused on the relationship between insecure attachment styles and social anxiety and the predictive role.

Limitation 1: The sample range is subject to expansion. Although the representativeness of the sample is considered as much as possible in the sampling process, due to the limitations of time and conditions and the feasibility of the investigation, this study will only select college students from four universities in Gansu Province. However, the overall number of samples reached the statistical analysis despite certain limitations. The growth experiences and cultural backgrounds of college students in China are roughly the same, but there are still some differences in different regional cultures and economic development levels. At the same time, there is a selection bias of majors, grades, schools, etc. in the research objects, and the sample representativeness is not satisfactory. In future research, it is necessary to expand the scope and content of sample selection, enhance the representativeness of the sample, balance the factors of schools, majors and grades, and enhance the universality of this research.

Limitation 2: This study is only a cross-sectional study, and the conclusions drawn are essentially the correlation between variables. The causal relationship between social anxiety, coping style and various influencing factors of college students cannot be determined yet, and longitudinal research needs to be conducted. In addition, although this study analyses the comprehensive influence of various psychosocial factors on the social anxiety and coping style of college students, it does not take into account factors such as personality characteristics that play an important role in the anxiety process and need to be enriched and supplemented in future studies.





Appropriate use of longitudinal tracking methods enhances the effectiveness of the study.

Limitation 3: In the research method, it is necessary to expand, break through and innovate. The literature review method and questionnaire survey method are mainly used in this study. In addition to the use of factor analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis and path analysis, structural equation and other methods, there should be breakthroughs and innovations. As for the future, for college students' social anxiety, adult attachment and coping strategies, the investigation method and experimental method should be enriched, improved and innovated, especially the application of other research methods such as the interview method and psychological counselling in this field is a direction worth exploring. In short, in the future, we should try to apply different methods to conduct comprehensive research, so that the research results have higher reliability, validity and promotional value.

Limitation 4: Follow-up intervention studies are also needed. The factors affecting college students' social anxiety include social background factors, cultural background factors, and psychological factors and so on. This study lacks findings on the mechanism of university growth. As a cognitive factor affecting college students' social anxiety, its establishment and change is not an overnight achievement, but a long-term process. Therefore, it will have important practical significance and value to closely combine cognitive training with current college students' mental health education, sound personality development education and career planning.





1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced some important information about this study. The information includes the background of the study, and then refers to the reasons for conducting this study, which is mainly based on the premise that social anxiety is increasing among college students; it has become one of the psychological problems that plague college students. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the relationship between adult attachment and social anxiety, and to explore the mediating role of coping style, as well as the moderating role of inferiority and psychological resilience; accordingly, the research objectives and questions are formulated. The current study is expected to have practical implications for college students to find the causes of social anxiety and how to overcome and alleviate social anxiety. The chapter also includes definitions of terms such as social anxiety, adult attachment, coping styles, inferiority and psychological resilience.

