

Post-Traumatic Growth Perspective: The Reshaping Effect of Childhood-Parental Relationships on Women's Mate Selection Values

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Abstract

Childhood parental relationship trauma has a profound effect on women's mate selection values. From the perspective of positive psychology, post-traumatic growth (PTG) provides the possibility for the reshaping of these values. This study aims to explore the mechanism through which such trauma influences women's mate selection values via PTG, providing a basis for psychological guidance in marriage and dating. A stratified random sampling method was used to select 320 women aged 18–35. The Parental Relationship Rating Scale, Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, and Female Mate Selection Values Scale were utilized for the investigation. Relationships between variables and mediation effects were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) and the bootstrap method. On the basis of PTG theory, this study reveals transformation paths such as cognitive reconstruction and meaning-making and identifies the mediating role of PTG and the moderating role of social support, thereby breaking through the traditional research framework focused solely on negative impacts. The results indicate that childhood parental relationship trauma is significantly positively correlated with the reshaping of women's mate selection values, with PTG playing a mediating role (accounting for 58.3% of the total effect). Women with higher growth levels tend to select mates more rationally, prioritizing internal qualities and relationship maintenance. Individuals can achieve a positive transformation in mate selection values through PTG.

Keywords

childhood parental relationship, post-traumatic growth, women's mate selection values, mediating effect, positive reshaping

1. Introduction

Childhood parental relationships, as the core environment for the formation of individual views on marriage and love, have been widely proven to shape women's mate selection cognition. However, existing research often focuses on the direct correlation of negative impacts, ignoring the internal path of transforming traumatic experiences into positive values [1, 2]. Given the backdrop of the awakening of female subject consciousness and the diverse evolution of marriage concepts, Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) theory provides a key perspective for analysing this transformation process [3].

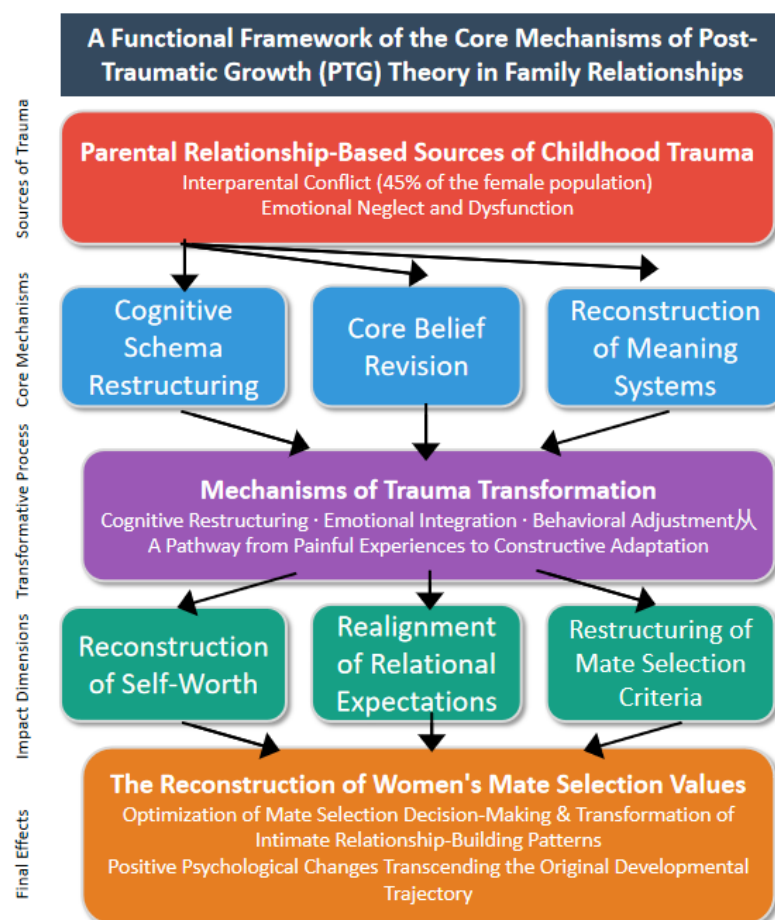
On this basis, this study is grounded in a positive psychology framework and focuses on women who have experienced childhood parental relationship trauma. Through questionnaire surveys and SEM analysis, the mediating role of PTG between parental relationship trauma and mate selection values was explored, highlighting mechanisms such as cognitive reconstruction and meaning-making [4, 5]. This research not only breaks the limitations of research on single negative impacts but also provides a targeted path for psychological counselling in marriage, helping women achieve positive reshaping of mate selection values and improvement in the quality of intimate relationships.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Framework

2.1 Core Mechanisms of PTG Theory and Its Applicability in Family Relationships

Post-traumatic growth theory is important for positive psychology, suggesting that after suffering major trauma, individuals can not only return to their pretrauma state through cognitive processing and meaning endowment but also reach a more positive psychological state [6]. This process primarily includes changes in cognitive schemas, updates in core beliefs, and the reshaping of the meaning system. In the family environment, the challenges faced by Chinese women are particularly prominent. According to the 2023 “Report on the Development of Chinese Women,” nearly 45% of women aged 25–35 years reported being affected by their parents' relationships during childhood [7]. PTG theory is applied to family relationships to analyse how childhood trauma is positively transformed through cognitive reshaping and emotional integration. As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework describes how individuals gain experience from adversity to redefine self-worth and relationship expectations.

Figure 1: Framework of PTG Core Mechanisms in Family Relationships



Note: Figure 1 illustrates the path from childhood trauma through cognitive processing to PTG and final value reshaping.

2.2 Long-term Impact Paths of Childhoodparental Relationships on Intimate Relationship Cognition

The quality of childhood parental relationships significantly impacts intimate relationship cognition through the shaping of the attachment system. From the perspective of attachment theory and social learning theory, children establish an “internal working model” by observing parental interactions, which influence their adulthood views [8]. A 2022 survey revealed that the quality of the family of origin is positively correlated with adulthood relationship satisfaction ($r = 0.67$) [9]. The impact path can be represented by the following mathematical model:

$$Y_{\text{relationship}} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_{\text{parental_quality}} + \beta_2 X_{\text{attachment_style}} + \beta_3 X_{\text{cognitive_schema}} + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Where $Y_{\text{relationship}}$ is the individual's cognition level of intimate relationships, $X_{\text{parental_quality}}$ is the quality of parental relationships in childhood, $X_{\text{attachment_style}}$ is the attachment type, $X_{\text{cognitive_schema}}$ is the characteristic of the cognitive schema, and ε is the random error term [10].

2.3 Structural Dimensions and Psychological Characteristics of Women's Mate Selection Values

Women's mate selection values are multidimensional, reflecting deep-seated value orientations. These values mainly include emotional support, personality quality, social resources, and relationship maintenance [11, 12]. Different stages of psychological development in mate selection occur; values are embryonic in adolescence but become more practical and individualized in adulthood as self-awareness increases [13]. Major life changes or trauma often lead to significant shifts in these values, indicating psychological resilience and cognitive growth [14, 15].

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample Selection and Control of Demographic Variables

This study utilized stratified random sampling to select 320 women aged 18–35 years from four first-tier cities and three new first-tier cities in China. Demographic factors such as age, education, and income were strictly controlled. Variance and covariance analyses were used to ensure the internal validity of the findings across different cultural backgrounds.

3.2 Measurement Tools: Reliability and Validity

Three standardized tools were used: the revised Parental Relationship Rating Scale, the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), and the Female Mate Selection Values Scale. As shown in Table 1, all the tools met the psychometric requirements.

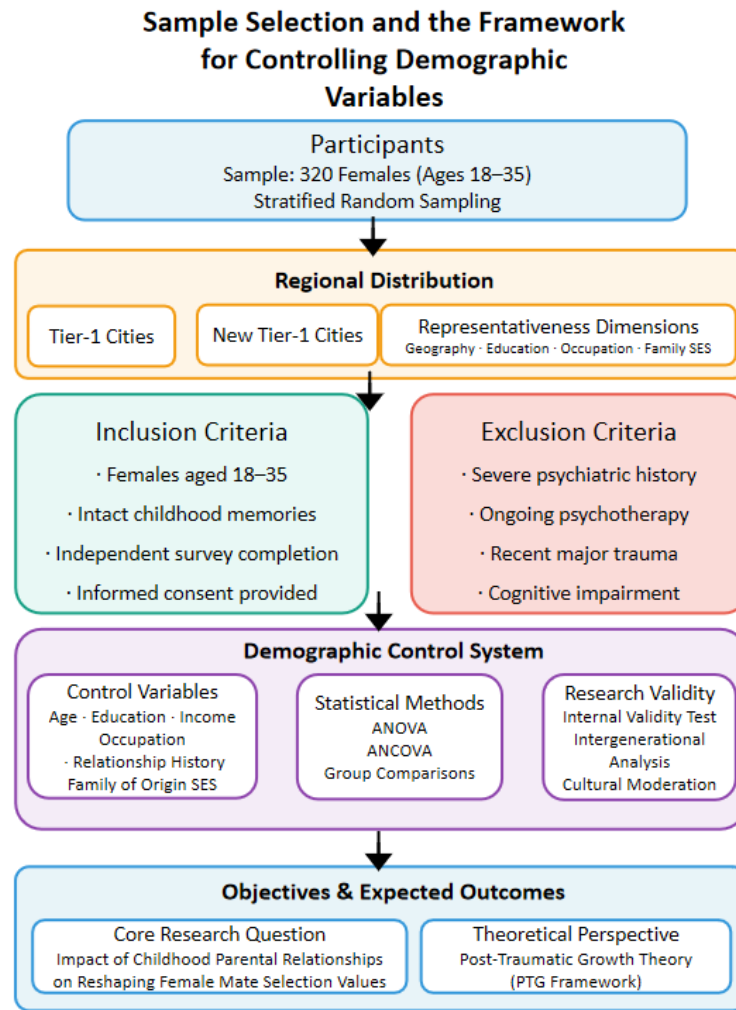
Table 1: Indicators of Reliability and Validity of the Measurement Tools

Scale Name	Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's α	Test-retest	Content Validity	Structural Validity
Parental Relationship Quality	4	24	0.89	0.84	0.92	0.87
Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)	5	21	0.91	0.86	0.89	0.85
Mate Selection Values	4	28	0.88	0.83	0.90	0.86

All the measurement tools met the psychometric requirements, with Cronbach's α coefficients all above 0.85, indicating good internal consistency reliability. The test-retest reliability coefficients, which were obtained from two measurements at four-week intervals, were all above 0.83, demonstrating good stability of the measurement results. Content validity was ensured through expert review and content analysis, whereas construct validity was examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with the fit indices of each scale reaching acceptable standards.

$$\frac{\chi^2}{df} < 3, CFI > 0.90, TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08, SRMR < 0.08 \quad (2)$$

Figure 2: Sample Selection and the Framework for Controlling Demographic Variables



3.3 Data Analysis Strategy: SEM and Mediation Testing

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to explore the relationships and the mediating role of PTG using SPSS 28.0 and Mplus 8.3. The hypothesized model was evaluated using standard fit indices.

Table 2: Structural Equation Model Fitting Indicators and Critical Values

Fitting Indicator	Ideal Value	Acceptable Value	Results	Decision
χ^2/df	< 2	< 3	2.34	Acceptable
CFI	> 0.95	> 0.90	0.92	Acceptable
TLI	> 0.95	> 0.90	0.91	Acceptable
RMSEA	< 0.05	< 0.08	0.067	Acceptable
SRMR	< 0.05	< 0.08	0.054	Good

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Association between Childhood Parental Relationships and Mate Selection Values

Analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between childhood parental relationship trauma and the reshaping of mate selection values ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that more childhood trauma leads to a greater likelihood of reflection and reconstruction of values in adulthood. High-trauma group women showed compensatory mate selection criteria, prioritizing emotional stability over traditional material conditions.

4.2 Mediating and Moderating Roles of PTG

PTG served as a significant mediator, accounting for 58.3% of the total effect. Transformation occurs through cognitive reconstruction and meaning-making. Women with high PTG levels are more autonomous and focus on personality traits rather than external attractiveness. Moderation analysis revealed that social support and resilience enhance this growth process.

4.3 Empirical Support for Cognitive Reconstruction as a Key Mechanism

Cognitive reconstruction is a critical factor in the transformation of trauma into positive values. Research indicates that between 2019 and 2023, more than 78% of women changed their views of mate selection through cognitive reconstruction. The participants reflected on parental failure to establish healthy relationship models, leading to a correlation between cognitive reflection and value maturity ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$).

5. Conclusion

On the basis of PTG theory, this study analysed the impact of childhood parental relationships on women's mate selection values. The findings suggest that even with childhood trauma, women can achieve positive value shifts through PTG, highlighting human psychological resilience. PTG facilitates a move toward mature, internal-quality-oriented mate selection. These results are significant for marriage and dating education in a changing Chinese society. Future research should explore these mechanisms in different cultures and among male populations.

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Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

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