Group and Personal Attachments: Two Is Better Than One When Predicting College Adjustment

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The current study applied Smith, Murphy, and Coates’ (1999) group attachment measure to college adjustment using 109 college students. Prior researchers have found that adult dyadic attachment styles predicted college adjustment. This article is the first to explore the relationship between both group and dyadic attachment styles and college adjustment as measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that personal attachment anxiety, not avoidance, accounted for the most variance in college adjustment. Group attachment avoidance also accounted for a significant amount of variance, above and beyond dyadic attachment styles, in the prediction of college adjustment. This study supports the importance of exploring both dyadic and group attachment styles in studying overall adjustment to the transition to college life. Implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: group attachment, dyadic attachment, college adjustment

The attachments that individuals maintain with others provide a resource to cope with life’s many challenges (Bowlby, 1969, 1980, 1982, 1988). Attachment theorists argue that early attachment experiences with significant caretakers provide the initial internal models that facilitate the development of the self and relationships with others (Bowlby, 1969; Fonagy, 1999). The attachment styles that evolve from early childhood into adulthood are fairly consistent and predict how well adults cope with stress (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998), regulate affect (Lopez & Brennan, 2000; Mikulincer, 1998), maintain self-esteem (Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996), relate to romantic partners (Collins, 1996; Mikulincer, 1995), and cope with developmental milestones such as adjusting to college (Kenny & Rice, 1995; Lopez & Gormerly, 2002; Lopez, Mitchell, & Gormerly, 2002; Mallinkrodt & Wei, 2005; Wei, Russell, & Zahalik, 2005).

Dyadic Attachment

Bowlby’s (1969, 1982) original theory described how early infant attachments provided a framework for understanding the self in relation to others. He argued that early attachment experiences become internalized as “working models” of relationships that evolve into powerful, affect-regulating schemas that guide interactions in intimate relationships. His theory was first applied to attachment styles in children (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and later to adult romantic relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three distinct infant attachment styles that evolve into adulthood: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. These styles develop over time based on the interactions between the primary caretaker and the infant, and they facilitate the infant’s navigation of relationship experiences. The child relies on the primary caretaker to provide safety and internalizes a set of expectations regarding personal relationships. The child also learns when to approach and avoid important others to maintain personal safety. Children who develop secure internal models of others recover more quickly from stressful sit-
uations, report less distress and anxiety, and are better able to develop social relationships than children who develop insecure attachments (Cassidy, 1994; Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended the attachment styles of infants with their caregivers to the attachment styles of adults in romantic relationships. Much of the research on adult attachment has used a three category classification system; however, current researchers argue that a dimensional approach is more accurate and descriptive of human relationship styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998; Simpson et al., 1992). The two adult attachment dimensions that have been empirically supported are attachment anxiety and avoidance. Attachment anxiety corresponds with anxious or fearful preoccupation with relationships while attachment avoidance corresponds to dismissal, need for independence, and avoidance of dependency in relationships (Brennan et al., 1998; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Mikulincer and Florian (1998) argue that secure adult attachments also function as an inner resource to help individuals cope with distress. Insecure attachments, on the other hand, are risk factors that may get in the way of effective coping.

**Adult Attachment and College Adjustment**

The experience of moving away from home and adjusting to college is a developmental milestone. It is also more stressful and challenging for some individuals. Lopez, Mitchell, and Gormley (2002) found that individual differences such as attachment style influence how well students were able to integrate and adapt to this new experience. Students with more secure attachment styles, those who have more trust in others and greater security in themselves, were best able to cope with the adjustment to college. Students with more insecure styles had difficulty in relationships, inconsistent self views, and greater difficulty adjusting to college life.

There were many possible reasons behind the significant relationship between attachment style and college adjustment. For example, those with less secure attachment styles had more academic distractions that may inhibit adjustment such as relationship difficulties (Kenny & Rice, 1995; Lopez & Brennan, 2000), poor coping strategies (Lopez, 2001; Lopez, Mitchell, & Gormley, 2002; Lopez & Gormley, 2002), more frequent physical illness (Feeney & Ryan, 1994), and increased feelings of depression and anxiety (Kemp & Neimeyer, 1999; Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996). Individuals with less secure attachments tended to be highly attentive to their own emotional states and tend to use social support ineffectively. These students also tended to use avoidant coping strategies, which have been linked to less successful adjustment to college (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992).

Students with more secure attachment styles were more likely to seek out and to benefit from their relationships to others (Priel & Shamai, 1995, Rice, Cunningham, & young, 1997). For example, Wei, Russell, and Zahalik (2005) found that personal attachment anxiety was predictive of loneliness and decreased ratings of social support in college students. Students with greater attachment security appeared to have the added buffer of social skills that facilitates their college adjustment.

Mallinkrodt and Wei (2005) argued that the primary predictors of social competencies, social self-efficacy, and social support were personal attachment anxiety and avoidance. According to these researchers, group-related factors such as social support were solely derived from the personal identity, and these social factors influence adjustment by moderating the relationship between personal attachment style and college adjustment (Wei et al., 2005). Worchel and Coutant (2003) offered a different perspective that described how the individual identity and group identity were separate but equally critical aspects of the self. They argued that group aspects of the self can influence the personal aspects, and there is a reciprocal influence rather than a unidirectional relationship. Group researchers have empirically supported this perspective and have found evidence to support the powerful influence that group aspects of the self have on personal aspects of adjustment and well-being (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

**The Group Identity and College Adjustment**

Group researchers and those researchers studying minority student adjustment have em-
pirically supported the benefits of a group identity in college students (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Cameron, 1999; Lee & Robbins, 1998; Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). Cameron (1999) found that students’ perceptions of their university identity directly influenced their hope for the future and indirectly related to their self-esteem, life satisfaction, and depression. Ethier and Deaux (1994) studied Hispanic students who were entering an Anglo university setting. They found that the stronger the involvement in their ethnic group prior to college, the less threatening the experience of college was rated. Students with a stronger ethnic background were also more involved with similar campus ethnic groups, and they were able to find new links to campus to replace earlier links to home. Researchers have suggested that not only is the individual’s personal attachment style related to college adjustment but that students’ ability to make attachments to groups are also important to college adjustment. The research to date has focused on personal attachment style and how attachment anxiety and avoidance relate to social factors such as social competency and social self-efficacy (Mallinkrodt & Wei, 2005; Wei et al., 2005). There has been little attention to anxiety and avoidance of group identities.

**Attachments to Groups**

Smith, Murphy, and Coates (1999) argued that we not only have individual attachment styles, but we also have group attachment styles that are distinct from social competency and social self-efficacy. Group attachments are defined as internal representations of groups based on our group/family experiences that generally govern our expectations about a new or previously unknown type of group. These researchers found that there is some correlation between an individual’s personal and group attachment styles, yet they appear to be statistically distinct. For example, Smith et al. (1999) found only modest correlations between group attachment and relationship attachment in their first study and no correlation between romantic relationship attachment and group attachment in their third study. They described how an individual could have a secure romantic attachment style but a different type of attachment to an important group. For example, someone could be able to form meaningful romantic attachments with adults but believe that he or she does not need to depend on groups or he or she believes that groups are abusive or rejecting. Such complex internalizations have significant consequences for the individual, especially when he or she is forced to depend or interact in social situations.

Smith et al. (1999) stated that they suspected that close personal attachments were more central to many people’s lives and should have stronger implications than group attachments for self-esteem and life satisfaction. The researchers further suggested that although group attachments were less critical to the self, they impacted the ways that individuals join and function within groups.

Smith et al. (1999) described two dimensions of group attachment, similar to dyadic attachment theory, group attachment anxiety, and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998). Individuals with greater group attachment avoidance tended to dismiss groups and were more likely to consider leaving the group. Those with greater group attachment anxiety reported fewer and less satisfying social supports within a group and tended to be preoccupied with either being accepted by the group or being rejected by the group. Similar to dyadic attachment, group attachment anxiety indicated a preoccupation with being attached to the group while group attachment avoidance indicated a withdrawal from groups and denial of needs for group affiliations.

These researchers found that group avoidance was significantly related to group identification. This means that individuals who were high on group avoidance tended to avoid closeness in groups and did not seek groups for social support. Nor did they report fears of being rejected or criticized by groups. Those individuals with more group anxiety tended to be more fearful of rejection in the group and were focused on their emotional reactions to group that often include anxiety, fear, and disappointment (Rom & Mikulincer, 2003; Smith et al., 1999). Holtz and Marmarosh (2003) applied group attachments to group therapy members and found that group therapy members’ group attachment was related to group cohesiveness and group therapy collective self-esteem. Marmarosh, Franz, Kolo, Majors, Rahimi, Ronquillo, Somberg, Swope, and Zimmer (2006) also examined group attachments in therapists to see if
group attachment anxiety was related to the avoidance of group referrals. They found that therapists with more group attachment anxiety had greater perceptions that clients would have negative expectations about joining therapy groups compared to more securely attached therapists.

Rom and Mikulincer’s research (2003) provided a framework to understand how group attachment styles were activated in group experiences and hindered members’ ability to approach group experiences with a sense of security. They found that members with insecure group attachments revealed increased anxiety in groups that led to decreased likelihood that they would be able to successfully contribute to the group process. Bion (1959) stated long ago that group members who did not experience the group as safe, had an insecure attachment to the group and did not feel “contained” in the group, were unable to think in the group and reflect on the group process. Fonagy (1999) also argued that the ability to reflect on experience and understand oneself in relation to others is a critical aspect of attachment.

As one thinks about group attachments, one might ask what the difference is between the assessment of a social identity and group attachment styles. Smith et al. (1999) demonstrated that the group attachment measure predicted important group outcomes above and beyond measures of group identification. They reported that someone who scored low on avoidance and high on attachment anxiety scored fairly high overall on a measure of group identification. For example, a person who is strongly identified with the group could also experience the group as negative, have fears of being rejected, and feelings of being dissatisfied with the group. The authors argue that important aspects of this complex pattern would be missed if only a group identification measure was used.

One way to help clarify the difference between social identity and group attachment is to compare a similar difference between the measurement of self-esteem and dyadic attachment styles. For example, measures of personal self-esteem are different from measures of dyadic attachment because identity measures assess one’s self-perception. Dyadic attachment, although correlated to self-esteem, is more than one’s perception of oneself, it is the perception of oneself in relationship with important others—specifically, one’s openness, desire, or avoidance of closeness with others. The collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Smith et al., 1999) is often used as a measure of the group identity and asks individuals to rate how well they like their group, perceive belonging in their group, how they perceive others valuing their group, and how much the group is a part of their identity. The measure does not include how one approaches or avoids one’s own groups, denies depending on one’s group, or contains anxieties and fears of being rejected from an important group. Smith et al. (1999) argue that group attachment theory describes how one experiences one’s social identities and that a perceived strong social identity does not fully capture the complex internal representations of that group identity.

As one would expect, there is a relationship between perceived group identities and group attachments, similar to the relationship between self-esteem and dyadic attachments. The more you like your group and feel that it is important to your sense of self, the less likely you will devalue or dismiss your group. Although, liking and valuing your group does not necessarily mean you have a secure group attachment. It is quite possible to value one’s group membership and also live in constant fear of losing the group or feeling as though you never got all of your needs met in your group, indicating group attachment anxiety. Similarly, one could report high personal self-esteem and be dismissing of attachments with others. Measures of self-esteem and group esteem do not capture the approach/avoidance strategies that make up the internal working models of both dyads and groups. They also do not capture the complexity of interactions between these multiple identities.

Smith et al. (1999) addressed an important finding in their research, the finding that individuals had secure dyadic attachments and insecure group attachments at the same time. The possibility that there are multiple attachment securities influences how well we adjust to different relational experiences. It is possible to have more/less secure personal attachments and more/less secure group attachments, and individuals are influenced by both of these attachment histories. Cortina and Marrone (2003) argued that internalizing working models of our cultural group and family groups was as adaptive to human survival as the internal working
models we internalized as infants. Because individuals heavily relied on a primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1982) but also had a need to belong in a larger social context (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hogg, 2003), they relied on internal working models of both dyadic relationships and group memberships.

If we entertain the notion that both dyadic and group attachments are used to navigate multiple interpersonal experiences, then it is necessary to explore how internal working models of both dyads and groups influence different aspects of adjustment. For example, college students, who bring internal models of themselves and others as well as internal models of families/groups to the college experience, are likely to be impacted by all of these schemas. We know that one’s personal attachment style influences adjustment to college, and we know that group identities facilitate adjustment to college; however, we do not know how the personal and group attachments together account for variance in the prediction of college adjustment.

Group and Personal Attachments and College Adjustment

Gaertner, Sedikides, and Graetz (1999) addressed the question of which aspects of self receive motivational primacy—the individual self, collective self, or the context. They argue that individuals rely on their personal self primarily and if that is threatened, turn to their group identities. Others have argued that there are multiple identities and different aspects of the self are retrieved depending on the situation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Collins & Read, 1994; Moreland & Levine, 1982, 1984; Worchel & Coutant, 2003). The adjustment to college is an example of a situation that involves multiple aspects of the self and multiple tasks that may trigger different internalized representations of the self, other, and group. Adjustment to college may be one situation that forces individuals to confront how they relate to fellow students one on one and how they relate to multiple others as groups. Studying the importance of group attachments and personal attachments is one way to begin to tease apart the different ways that group and individual attachments influence coping with college life.

Hypotheses

We predicted that students’ personal attachment anxiety and avoidance would positively correlate to the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). We also predicted that students’ group attachment anxiety and avoidance would positively relate to their adjustment to college. Specifically, the less the students personal and group attachment anxiety and avoidance, the more the students would report successful overall college adjustment.

In order to explore the unique variance accounted for by both personal and group attachment, we used hierarchical regression to examine the amount of variance that group attachment adds, above and beyond personal attachment, to the prediction of overall college adjustment. We expected that personal attachment anxiety would account for the most variance in the prediction of college adjustment given the amount of research relating personal attachment anxiety to symptom report of distress. However, we expected that group attachment anxiety and avoidance would both account for a significant amount of variance, above and beyond personal attachment, in the prediction of college adjustment.

Method

Participants

One hundred and nine undergraduate university students at a private university participated in the study. The average age of the participants was 18.94 (SD = 2.57). There were 44 males and 65 females. Two of the students were Native American, 8 were Asian American, three were African American, 5 were Latin American, 82 were Caucasian, 1 was international, and 8 were biracial. Ninety-one students (84%) were freshmen, 9 students (8%) were sophomores, 5 students (5%) were juniors, and 4 students (3%) were seniors.

All participants completed a packet that included Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form Scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998), a measure of adult attachment, the Social Group Attachment Scale (Smith, Murphy, & Coates, 1999), a measure of group attachment, and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1986; 1984), a measure of academic, social, and personal-emotional college adjustment.
Measures

Dyadic Attachment

Personal attachment. We measured romantic adult attachment using the Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form Scale (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). It is a self-report measure of adult attachment that measures two dimensions of attachment—anxiety and avoidance. The ECR a 36-item measure of attachment style that asks respondents to agree or disagree on a 7-point scale with items tapping attachment anxiety (e.g., “I worry about being abandoned,” “I worry that romantic partners will not care about me as much as I care about them”) and avoidance (e.g., “I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down,” “I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners” [reverse scored]). The construct validity of these scales in relation to predictions derived from attachment theory has been established in scores of studies (see review by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Brennan et al. (1998) reported Cronbach alphas of .94 and .91 for the Avoidance and Anxiety scales, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach alphas were .91 for Avoidance and .90 for Anxiety.

Group Attachment

Group attachment. The Social Group Attachment Scale (Smith, Murphy, & Coates, 1999) was used to measure the group attachment. Individuals were asked to complete the 25 item, 7-point Likert-type measure considering their membership in an important group. The scale is adapted from the individual attachment scales (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990) and asks individuals to consider their membership in a group that is extremely important to them and write it at the top of the measure. Individuals are instructed to consider this group when responding to each item. Items tap anxiety and concern about acceptance (e.g., “I often worry that my group doesn’t really accept me”) and measure rejection of intimacy (e.g., “I am nervous when my group gets too close”). In this study, the students were instructed to “respond to the following statements on the basis of how you feel about a group that is very important to you.” Participants selected six types of groups. Twenty students selected a club (i.e., choir, art club, and ROTC), 48 selected a sports team or athletic group (i.e., lacrosse, dance, basketball, swim team), five selected a fraternity or sorority, 17 selected a dorm or friendship group, three selected their family, and seven selected an ethnic minority group or religious group affiliation (i.e., campus ministry, prayer group, minority organization). Nine people did not write the name of the group on their form, so we were unable to identify which group they were considering when completing the measure. In the present study, Cronbach alphas were .90 for Avoidance and .88 for Anxiety.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from undergraduate courses in psychology. Students were given psychology credit in return for their participation in research. Students who agreed to partic-
ipate were given a packet of questionnaires. They were instructed to complete the questionnaires alone, seal the envelope, and return the packet to their lecturer the next week of class. The lecturer gave the research credit to students who returned the sealed packet. The information in the packet was kept confidential, and no identifiable information was requested from the participants.

Results

Preparing the Data

Mean scores were used to calculate subscales in order to account for missing data. Then, the independent variables were centered to reduce multicollinearity. The four dimensions of the SACQ were added, and one overall college adjustment score was calculated. We chose to analyze the full scale of the SACQ because of high intercorrelations between the subscales and to reduce the chance of a Type II error, as the number of regressions was reduced.

Descriptive Statistics

Means and correlations between group and personal attachment and variables are in Table 1. Results revealed that there was a significant correlation between personal attachment anxiety and group attachment anxiety; however, there were no significant correlations between group attachment avoidance and personal attachment avoidance or group attachment anxiety and personal avoidance. Personal attachment anxiety correlated with personal attachment avoidance. Group attachment anxiety correlated with personal attachment avoidance and group attachment avoidance. The correlations between the college adjustment scale and attachment revealed significant correlations between group attachment anxiety and avoidance, as well as personal attachment and anxiety.

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to determine if there were any differences in academic adjustment related to gender or year in college. No significant differences were found, and these variables were not included in future analyses. In addition, 1-way ANOVAs were performed to examine the effect of group, the group selected when participants completed the group attachment inventory, on group attachment anxiety, avoidance, and the SACQ. Results revealed that there was no significant main effect for group type. Group avoidance and anxiety scores were the lowest for those selecting ethnic and religious group affiliations, although there was no statistically significant difference.

Regression Analyses

A 2-step hierarchical linear regression analysis was run to examine the amount of unique variance that personal and group attachment dimensions provided in the prediction of college adjustment, as measured by the SACQ. Personal attachment (anxiety and avoidance) was included in the first step of the regression, and group attachment (anxiety and avoidance) was added to the second step of the regression. College adjustment, the total score of the SACQ, was the criterion variable.

Table 1

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<th>Group attachment</th>
<th>Dyadic attachment</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Avoidance</td>
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<td>.467**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>(.95)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>(.98)</td>
<td>.629**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dyadic attachment</td>
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<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>(1.01)</td>
<td>.417**</td>
<td>.171</td>
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<td>(1.04)</td>
<td>.209*</td>
<td>.133</td>
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Note. Dyadic attachment = Experience in Close Relationship Measure; Group attachment = Group Attachment Questionnaire; SACQ = College Adjustment Measure.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Table 2 provides the results of the regression examining the amount of variance that personal and group attachment anxiety and avoidance offered in the prediction of college adjustment. The results revealed that personal and group attachment significantly predicted college adjustment, $p = .00$. Personal attachment anxiety and avoidance accounted for 26% of the variance in the prediction of college adjustment. Group attachment anxiety and avoidance accounted for an additional 15% of variance in college adjustment above and beyond individual attachment. Interestingly, when looking within the steps, personal attachment avoidance approached significance ($p = .075$), whereas group attachment avoidance was highly significant of college adjustment ($p = .00$). In addition, personal attachment anxiety was significant ($p = .00$), whereas group attachment anxiety was not significant ($p = .63$).

**Discussion**

The results of this study suggest that both dyadic and group attachments strongly influence college adjustment. As we predicted, dyadic attachment style accounted for the most variance in the prediction of student reported adjustment. These findings supported previous research (Lopez & Brennan, 2000; Lopez & Gormley, 2002; Lopez et al., 2002; Wei et al., 2005). Although personal attachment security was critical to college adjustment, this study supported our hypotheses that group attachments, above and beyond dyadic attachments, also significantly related to college adjustment, accounting for an additional 15% of the variance.

These results also add to Mallinckrodt and Wei’s (2005) research that explores the relationship among dyadic attachment, social self-efficacy, and college adjustment. Mallinckrodt and Wei (2005) argued that it was personal attachment, specifically attachment anxiety, that related to social self-efficacy, the use of social support, and loneliness in college students. These authors argued that personal attachment insecurity such as anxiety led to fears of rejection, social skills deficits, and isolation. Our study found support for this argument with a significant correlation between dyadic attachment anxiety and group attachment anxiety. This correlation supported the relationship between fears of being rejected in dyadic relationships and fears of being rejected in groups. In addition, dyadic attachment anxiety, but not group attachment anxiety, accounted for a significant amount of variance in the prediction of college adjustment. It is possible that anxiety related to groups overlaps with anxiety related to dyads and once anxiety is accounted for, group anxiety does not add a significant amount of variance to the prediction of college adjustment. The correlation between dyadic and group anxiety was .42, and the feelings of anxiety are likely to have a similar impact on college adjustment, such as loneliness, depression, or continued distress.

Although we did not find that group attachment anxiety accounted for unique variance in college adjustment, we did find that group attachment avoidance accounted for 15% of the variance.

![Table 2](image)
unique variance in college adjustment. In addition, we found that dyadic attachment anxiety was not correlated to group attachment avoidance. This is significant because it shows that dyadic attachment insecurity may not capture dismissing and devaluing group attitudes. In past research, dyadic attachment anxiety correlated to social anxiety and social self-efficacy (Mallinkrodt & Wei, 2005), but it may be less correlated to the denial of dependency on groups. It is possible that students can doubt their social skills and feel socially anxious but acknowledge needing groups that they belong to such as athletic teams, school organizations, or friendship groups (greater group anxiety). It is also possible that students can doubt their social skills but also reveal not caring about groups or their social identities (greater group avoidance). These findings suggest that it is important to not only focus on dyadic attachments and the perception of social self-efficacy and social anxiety, but also how college students can dismiss and reject group memberships when they join the university. This rejection of groups and dismissing attitude toward belonging in groups is also related to college adjustment and may not be displayed with distress or fears of being ostracized. Students with greater group attachment avoidance, similar to individuals with dismissing romantic attachment styles, may be completely void of affect toward groups, use groups for self motivated purposes, have little empathy for group members, and reject others who are members of groups.

Smith et al. (1999) argued that identification and satisfaction with groups related more to how much the individual wanted and valued closeness, group attachment avoidance, than to how much the individual feared rejection, group attachment anxiety. These authors argued that dissatisfaction with groups and plans to leave groups related to feeling suffocated rather than feeling rejected. Studying how group avoidance and dismissing attitudes toward groups influence the multiple aspects of college adjustment is important for future research. One wonders if group avoidance is related to other types of avoidant strategies that relate to difficulties in college, such as avoidance of seeking help, avoidance of relying on friendships, rejection of the university community, denial of social needs, or immersion in other activities that distract from group identifications such as addictions.

The application of group attachment theory to the understanding of the adjustment of minority students is also critical. We were not able to study the impact of minority status due to the small number of minority participants. Often minority group members face personal and group discrimination that interferes with their ability to succeed in college (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999). A number of researchers have correlated social or group factors with the adjustment of minority students (Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Crocker et al., 1994; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Lee et al., 2000) but there is has been less attention to how minority group members internalize prior group experiences and how that translates into an internal model of group attachments. Lee (2003) found that Asian American college students who relied on “other-group” orientations, were able to join another groups (i.e., join with the majority group), and were able to cope better with group discrimination. It is possible that individuals within minority groups internalize their group experiences differently and maintain different group attachments. Some minority students have secure group attachments and are able to feel accepted in a variety of groups, despite being a member of a stigmatized group. Future research is needed to gain a better understanding of group attachments, the impact of discrimination, and the adjustment of minority college students.

A number of limitations related to the methodology of the study are important to note. The self-report nature of the measures was an important limitation because we were limited to the participants’ self-perceptions. For example, we were unable to determine if self-reported academic adjustment was an accurate measure of students’ actual academic performance. Future research needs to address this issue by gathering additional data such as students’ GPA or observations from fellow students or peers. In addition, this study focused on the group memberships that were self-selected by students. This procedure was used to allow the students to select group memberships that were meaningful to them when completing the group attachment questionnaire. Although this allowed us to explore meaningful groups, we were comparing very different types of groups.
such as families and sports teams. In the future, the same type of group could be used to increase statistical power by reducing the error variance due to participants considering different types of groups.

The results of this study also encourage additional research that incorporates path models to predict how group and personal attachment predict different aspects of college adjustment. Future research that incorporates different statistical analyses is needed to explore how these factors relate to one another and how they relate to the complexity of college adjustment.

Overall, these findings suggest that students who have insecure dyadic attachments and who have more avoidant group attachment styles are more likely to struggle in college. Importantly, this study found that group attachment avoidance accounted for a significant amount of variance in college adjustment, after controlling for personal attachment style. Providing these students interventions that promote both interpersonal success and security within groups may be important for retention and overall college success.

References


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