How attachment relates to college students' achievement, motivation, and drinking behaviors

Hailey Marjorie Ratliff
James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.libjmu.edu/honors201019

Recommended Citation
Ratliff, Hailey Marjorie, "How attachment relates to college students' achievement, motivation, and drinking behaviors" (2013). Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current. 466.
https://commons.libjmu.edu/honors201019/466

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
How Attachment Relates to College Students’ Achievement, Motivation, and Drinking Behaviors

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Health and Human Behavior
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

by Hailey Marjorie Ratliff

December 2013

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Psychology, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Project Advisor: Monica Reis-Bergan, Ph.D.
Professor, Psychology

Reader: Jeffrey Andre, Ph.D.
Professor, Psychology

Reader: William Evans, Ph.D.
Professor, Psychology

HONORS PROGRAM APPROVAL:

Barry Falk, Ph.D.,
Director, Honors Program
How Attachment Relates to College Students’ Achievement, Motivation, and Drinking Behaviors

Hailey M. Ratliff

James Madison University
Table of Contents

List of Tables 3
Acknowledgements 4
Abstract 5
Introduction 6
Method 12
Results 14
Discussion 17
References 23
List of Tables

Tables

1 Summary of Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Subscales of PAQ and Attachment Overall v. Reported Academic Achievement and Predicted Academic Achievement 15

2 Summary of Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Subscales of PAQ and Attachment Overall v. Questions Indicating Parent Influence on Motivation 16

3 Summary of Correlations, Mean and Standard Deviations for Subscales of the PAQ and Attachment Overall v. Drinking Habits 17
Acknowledgements

I would like to take the time to thank everyone who helped me throughout this entire honors thesis process. First, I would like to thank Monica Reis-Bergan, Ph.D., for agreeing to be my honors thesis advisor. Although she already had so much going on, she took the time to give me the opportunity to complete a thesis under her supervision. She pushed me to become a better student, helped me work through the difficulties I experienced while completing the project, and was constantly patient with me as she aided me in understanding the research process. Words cannot describe how much I appreciate everything she has done for me. Dr. Reis-Bergan made my experience in the Department of Psychology a unique and profound one.

I would also like to thank Jeffrey Andre, Ph.D., and William Evans, Ph.D., for agreeing to be on my thesis committee. Thank you both for taking the time to work with me throughout the process and for being patient through changing schedules and last-minute meetings. I know you both had busy schedules and I greatly appreciate the time you put in to reading my thesis and helping me complete this project.

The Department of Psychology funded my research through a grant. I want to thank the department for giving me the funding necessary to make enough copies to survey all my participants and allowing me to use classroom space in Miller to meet with participants. Lastly, I would like to thank the Honors program for giving students the opportunity to create their own thesis and gain an unique experience that helps students to grow as thinkers and researchers within their field.
Abstract

Parental attachment, the initial bond between parent and child, has the potential to influence relationships and other aspects of behavior throughout the lifespan. Past research supports the idea that parent attachment is a positive influence on academic achievement, motivation to succeed in school while being negatively associated with high-risk drinking behavior. The current study examined parental attachment scores, reported and predicted grades, parent influence on academic motivation, and drinking habits of 99 female college students in their first semester. Contrary to predictions, there were no significant relations between grades and attachment, a negative correlation was found between seeking motivation from parents and attachment, and a positive correlation was found between risky drinking behaviors and attachment. Future research is needed to examine students’ perceptions of parent expectations about the college experience and to replicate the current findings.
How Attachment Relates to College Students’ Achievement, Motivation and Drinking Behaviors

One of the reasons human behavior is such an intriguing subject is the hidden forces influencing that behavior. Others can see the products of thoughts and decisions, but they can only predict what causes these individual differences. One possible source of behavior is the way people are raised and their attachment style. Over the years, researchers have been examining the relationship between parent and child and how other aspects of life can be affected by this bond known as attachment. An important time to study attachment is during college, when many young adults are first on their own and in a setting that requires them to form new relationships. Recent studies discussed below compared attachment to different aspects of college life and their findings support that this theory may influence social and academic behaviors.

Attachment

The theory of attachment was developed by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). Bretherton wrote that Bowlby’s influences included watching infants living in hospitals, Harry Harlow’s experiments with infant monkeys’ separation from their mothers, and from expanding upon (and later contradicting) the popular Freudian theories of the time. Bowlby’s overall message was that children needed a loving and permanent connection to the mother or mother figure that would be beneficial to both parties involved (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth built upon this theory through her studies of mothers’ sensitivity towards their infants in Uganda. Together they were responsible for developing a theory explaining the mother-child bond that has been supported by numerous studies since its inception.

Parental attachment is the initial relationship between parent or any other caregiver and child which later affects how the child forms friendships and romantic relationships (Kolkhorst
et al., 2010). After Bowlby created the theory of attachment, Mary Ainsworth developed an assessment of the parent-child bond known as the “Strange Situation” where she found three overall patterns: secure, ambivalent and avoidant reactions during the reunion with the mother (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Securely attached children receive the highest and most consistent amount of care from their parents, which gives them the ability to form healthy and comfortable relationships with others later in life. Ambivalent children have parents who are inconsistent in their care of the children and will likely have difficulty with trust in future relationships. Children of the avoidant nature experience neglect from their parents and will avoid forming relationships with others (Gore & Rogers, 2010). More recent scales, such as the Kenny’s *Parental Attachment Questionnaire* (1987), measure attachment on a continuum instead of dividing it into the former strict categories. Instead, this scale divides the overall attachment score into three sub-categories: Affective Quality of Relationship (AQR), Parents as a Source of Support (PSS) and Parents as Facilitators of Independence (PFI). This breaks down attachment into important subscales that influenced Ainsworth’s original findings in order to see how these areas are applied to the lives of college students (Kenny, 1987). The Parental Attachment Questionnaire also allows for moderate results to be displayed more accurately rather than being put into a category that subjects barely qualify for. Regardless of how it is measured, attachment may be a key predictor of success in college and throughout the lifespan.

**Academic Achievement and Attachment**

A child’s attachment style persists and reveals itself in relationships throughout the lifespan. During college and transitioning to independence, attachment can play a vital role in the relationships and confidence being formed. When students arrive at college, they are immediately tested by a new and more intense curriculum. Without a system of support either
back home or in their new environment, it is possible that their success as students may suffer.

In the study by Kolkhorst, Yazedjian, & Toews (2010), 2,459 college freshmen of multiple ethnicities were sent an online survey which measured parent-child attachment, college adjustment and academic achievement. Their grade point average, or GPA, was found to be positively correlated with higher ratings of attachment to their parents during the first and third year of college. In an earlier study by Navarro, Toews and Yazedjian (2009) with the same student sample, a significant positive relation existed between GPA and attachment as measured by the PAQ. This was found only within the white sample of college students. GPA was only found to be significantly correlated to Hispanic students’ adaptation to school (Navarro, Toews & Yazedjian, 2009). Using two different scales, Cutrona et al (1994) sought to find relations between social support and academic performance. Cutrona et al defined social support using the *Social Provisions Scale*, which measures how well parents support their children, and the *Family Environment Scale*, which looks at disagreement within the family and how parents measure success and achievement. They found a significant positive correlation between college undergraduates’ GPA and scores of parental support (Cutrona et al, 1994). Each of these studies may indicate the strength of a young adult’s attachment to their parents as a potential indicator of academic success.

**Motivation to Succeed and Attachment**

High academic performance can be achieved if students are willing to work for the grades. This willingness, or motivation, mainly comes from within themselves at the college level, but parents may be a driving force behind them by expecting good effort and grades to match. Parental attachment may influence how much students desire to succeed in school.

Gore and Rogers (2010) defined motivation as “Reasons for Studying” and separated
these reasons into two overall sources: autonomous and controlled. Autonomous reasons have intrinsic value to the individual, and controlled reasons define what is required by the individual in order to be successful. The autonomous category can be further broken down into reasons influenced by others, known as relationally autonomous reasons (RARs) and reasons that only reflect the individual’s desires, or personally autonomous reasons (PARs). Sheldon and Elliott (1999) gathered responses from 169 undergraduate psychology students on their sources of motivation and found that students with autonomous or self-concordant reasons for studying were more likely to be highly motivated and successful.

If parents are a source of pressure to succeed in school, the student’s attachment to them could influence their motivation. If the student cares about the parental relationship and has a more secure attachment to parents, there may be a greater desire to please them. In contrast, students with a poor attachment relationship may seek motivation elsewhere. In a study conducted by Moller, Elliot and Friedman (2008), researchers explored academic motivation in terms of self-reported goals for an upcoming exam and a perceived closeness to parents scale to assess attachment. Using regression analyses, they found that students had higher motivation to master the exam when they reported feeling closer to their parents (Moller et al, 2008).

The relation between attachment and academic performance may appear years before a student enters the college level. A Canadian study with younger adolescents and teachers as the participants examined attachment and motivation using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) and the Academic Motivation Scale (Keeves, 1974; Duchesne & Larose, 2007). The results of the regressions showed a significant positive association between attachment to the mother and academic motivation (Duchesne & Larose, 2007). These studies each support the idea that motivation to succeed in school and parent
attachment may be related.

**Alcohol Behavior and Attachment**

If having a more secure attachment to parents can have such positive benefits, it follows that a less secure one may lead to some negative consequences. College students may face decisions that are detrimental to their health and well-being. Alcohol is a substance heavily used by college students and may have an adverse effect on success in college (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012). Adopting risky drinking behaviors, such as binge drinking or drinking multiple days per week, can hinder the transition to college life and school responsibilities as well as lower students’ chances of success in school (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012). Students who drink multiple drinks within a short time period multiple days per week are at the highest risk (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012).

It is expected that if a student has a strong relationship to his or her parents, he or she may be more inclined to please them by not engaging in excessive drinking behavior. Labrie and Sessoms (2012) examined drinking motivations and habits in 139 college freshmen using a self-report method to assess parental attachment using the *Kerns Security Scale* (Kerns et al., 1996). The researchers found students reporting higher attachment to the mother were, on average, less likely to drink, and had less undesirable effects from alcohol six months later (Labrie & Sessoms, 2012). A similar study by Molnar, Sadava, DeCourville and Perrier (2010) compared 696 college students who reported some drinking to their attachment style in relationships, measured by the *Relationship Scales Questionnaire* (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) in which participants read and rated phrases that reflect either anxious or avoidant attachment. The results showed that students whose ratings indicated anxious or avoidant attachment styles were more likely to encounter negative alcohol consequences.
Unfortunately, deviant alcohol use can begin at an age far below what is legally permitted. Henry, Oetting and Slater (2009) surveyed 1,000 middle school students over the course of two years about their alcohol use and attachment to school, parents and peers. They found that each time the survey was taken, if students had high amounts of alcohol use, they were more likely to report a negative attachment to their parents. A similar study by Cavendish, Nielsen and Montague (2012) followed middle school students for six years and found that the more times a student had been drunk, the lower their parental attachment score.

**Current Study**

Attachment may be associated with many aspects important to college students and their success. Students in their first semester may rely on parental attachment more than other students because they are in a new and unfamiliar situation. Previous research has typically included different levels of undergraduate students. In the current study, I specifically surveyed female students in their first semester of college about their perceived parental attachment, current grades in school and predicted grades for the end of the semester, how much they view their parents as sources of academic motivation, and drinking behaviors. Students in their first semester are likely to be influenced by the attachment environment that they recently came from, perhaps more so than upperclassmen. As they initially encounter the adjustment period from entering college, they may be more likely to rely on their parent relationship and support from home. Their attachment scores may indicate how successful they are in school and the extent to which they avoid unsafe behaviors. Consistent with previous research, I expected that students who reported a more positive attachment would be performing better in college as indicated by their reported and predicted grades. I also anticipated that individuals who reported parents as a source of academic motivation would be more likely to report a higher attachment score. Finally,
I predicted that self-report of parent attachment would be negatively associated with drinking behaviors, such that those students who reported higher attachment indicated fewer episodes of binge drinking as well as lower frequency and amount of alcohol consumption.

**Method**

**Participants**

The study consisted of 99 young women in their first semester at a four-year college (83 18-year-olds, fourteen 19-year-olds, and one 20-year-old). The ethnicity of the sample consisted of 87% White, 2% Asian, 3% Black/African-American, 1% Hispanic/Latino, and 6% “mixed” or multiple ethnicities. Students were recruited through the participant pool for their general education psychology courses. They received class credit after participating.

**Materials**

**Attachment.** Attachment was measured using the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) (Kenny, 1985; *Parental Attachment Questionnaire*, n.d.). This survey consisted of 55 questions measured on a 5 point Likert scale to create an overall score and scores in three subscales. Kenny believed that these subscales mirrored important factors of the “Strange Situation” in young childhood, so I decided to include them in order to see if those categories were still relevant to overall attachment and influential in other areas of life for college students. The subscales included affective quality of relationship (AQR) (“In general, my parents are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled”), parents as source of support (PSS) (“When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make, I look to my family for support, encouragement, and/or guidance”), and parents as facilitators of independence (PFI) (“In general, my parents have provided me with the freedom to experiment and learn things on my own.”). A higher rating on questions suggested a strong relationship to
parents indicating more security in the attachment relationship. Reliability for the current study was .93 for AQR, .82 for PSS, .84 for PFI, and .94 overall.

**Academic Achievement.** To collect information about academic achievement in first year students, the following self-report questions were asked: “Please list the classes you are currently enrolled in. Please give your most recent test grade and the name of the class in which the test was given. Please give your best estimate of your final grade in the class reported above.” These self-report questions measured the approximate achievement level as well as the predicted level of achievement at the end of the semester. Higher reported and predicted grades indicated higher achievement levels.

**Academic Motivation.** Motivation was assessed using a modified version of the Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) developed by Ryan and Connell (1989). The original survey, geared towards elementary school children, contained four overall questions about reasons for trying in school with 32 responses to be rated on a 4 point Likert scale. For the purposes of this study, three of the main questions were included and modified to apply to college students: “Why do I study for my classes?”, “Why do I work on assignments?”, and “Why do I try to do well in school?”. The responses that involved “fun” or “rewards” were not included in this study. Answers that involved “teachers” or “rules” were changed to “parents”. The four-point Likert scale was changed to seven-point, but will be measured in the same way as the original study with each response given a value (not true at all = 1, very true = 7). We specifically looked at the questions involving parents (1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 12, 16, 18) as they relate to parental attachment. Example responses included “Because I want my parents to think I’m a good student”, “Because I’ll get into trouble with my parents if I don’t”, and “Because that’s what my parents say I’m supposed to do”. The coefficient alpha level for the questions involving
parents was .94.

**Drinking Behavior.** Drinking habits were measured by questions used by Labrie and Sessoms (2012). The selected questions examined frequency and amount of drinking alcohol. Higher scores on the nine point Likert scale indicated riskier drinking habits. The following questions were included: “How many days do you drink per month? (1 = never, 9 = every day) How many drinks on average do you consume each time you drink? (1 = none, 9 = 13 or more). How many drinks do you consume each week? (1 = none, 9 = 13 or more). What is the maximum number of drinks you consumed at one time in the past month? (1 = none, 9 = 22 or more). How many times have you consumed at least four (females) or five (males) drinks within a two-hour period over the past two weeks? (1 = none, 9 = 10 or more times).”

**Demographic Information.** Information about gender, age, ethnicity, place of residence, (off-campus or on-campus), and number of semesters completed was recorded. The ethnicity scale was taken from the University of Florida’s *Race and Ethnicity Survey* (“Race and ethnicity survey”, n.d.).

**Procedure**

The participants signed up for the participant pool online and chose a specific date and time to complete a paper survey with the measures listed above. Participants took the survey in a classroom setting on campus. Participants were given one hour to complete the survey. Upon completion, we provided a debriefing form to each participant.

**Results**

The overall attachment scores (PAoverall) for this sample were divided into three subcategories as cited above: Affective quality of relationship (AQR), Parents as Facilitators of Independence (PFI), and Parents as a Source of Support (PSS). Students reported their most
recent test grade and a prediction of what their grade would be at the end of the semester. I predicted that higher reported grades and higher predictions of final grades would be positively correlated with more secure overall attachment. There were no significant correlations between overall attachment and test grades (Test Grades) or predicted course grades (Predicted Grades). No significant correlations were found between the individual categories on the PAQ (AQR, PFI or PSS) and either category of academic achievement (See Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>PAoverall</th>
<th>PFI</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>AQR</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test Grades</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>85.46</td>
<td>7.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicted Grades</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>89.43</td>
<td>5.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic motivation was measured using the modified SQR-A. I predicted that more secure attachment ratings would be positively correlated with the responses that indicated parents as a higher source of motivation. Contrary to my prediction, stronger responses on scores indicating parents as a source of motivation (Parent Source of Motivation) were negatively correlated with PFI and PAoverall. There was no significant correlation between Parent Influence and AQR or PSS scores. (See Table 2).
Table 2

Summary of Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Subscales of PAQ v. Questions Indicating Parent Influence on Motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>PAoverall</th>
<th>PFI</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>AQR</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Source of Motivation</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Drinking behavior was measured using a series of questions assessing the amount and frequency of alcohol consumption. I predicted that higher scores on the drinking questionnaire would be negatively correlated with level of attachment. No significant negative correlations were found between any of these variables. However, higher scores in the PSS subcategory and PAoverall were positively correlated with the number of days students drink per month (Days per Month), the number of drinks students have per week (Drinks per Week), and the number of times students engaged in binge drinking over a two week period (Binge Drinking) (see Table 3).
Table 3

*Summary of Correlations, Mean and Standard Deviations for Subscales of the PAQ v. Drinking Habits*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>PAoverall</th>
<th>PFI</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>AQR</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days per Month</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Drinks</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks per Week</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max per Month</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge Drinking</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Discussion**

**Parental Attachment**

When Ainsworth first created the “Strange Situation” experiment, each child was placed in a specific attachment category based on the child’s response to separation and reunion (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Today, most measures used by researchers such as the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987) or the IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) consider attachment on a continuum that disregards the original categories and variables can be compared to results that are less rigid and more representative of human nature. However, the results of this study are largely contradictory to most of the previous research on attachment in relationships with achievement, motivation, or drinking habits, regardless of which measure was used. In the future, this study should be replicated using a variety of parental attachment measures in order to compare results.
Attachment and Academic Achievement

My hypotheses were largely unsupported by the results of this study. The research conducted by Kohlkorst, Yazedjian and Toews (2010) and Navarro, Toews and Yazedjian (2009) indicated that parental attachment was positively correlated with achievement in school. In the current study, no significant relation was found between the two variables, indicating that having a more secure attachment to parents has no significant effect on predicted grades in school. One possible explanation is the overall positive nature of the grade predictions (M = 89.43, Range = 70-100), despite lower overall reported test grades (M = 85.46, Range = 61-100). Students may have been more optimistic than accurate about their final grades, making their guesses higher than what their final grades would be. In future replications, surveys should be done at the beginning of second semester to compare predicted to actual final grades and see if any are significantly correlated with parental attachment. Another factor may be the adjustment period between high school and the first semester of college. Some students may perform poorly first semester simply because they are adapting to college life and being on their own. Parents of first semester freshmen may be aware of this adjustment time and place less emphasis on performing well academically during that first grading period so that students have the freedom to explore and learn how to be successful without their parents’ help. Because of this, grades may be less important to both students and parents, meaning that attachment may have little effect on academic achievement during first semester. Lastly, a more significant result might have occurred with a greater number of participants and both genders represented.
Attachment and Academic Motivation

When comparing parental attachment to motivation to succeed in school, Sheldon and Elliot (1999) found that students who had a more secure attachment reported intrinsic reasons for studying. Moller, Elliot and Friedman (2008) found that students with higher motivation overall reported a closer relationship to their parents. Based on this research, I believed that if students viewed their parents as a source of motivation, they would report a higher attachment relationship with them. Opposite to my prediction, there was a negative correlation between higher ratings on questions related to parents and the PFI subcategory as well as attachment overall. The correlation between PFI and parent influence questions likely existed because if participants reported their parents as giving them more independence, they would more than likely pull their academic motivation from other sources. The results for the PFI subscale potentially affected the overall attachment score, leading to a negative correlation.

The modified SRQ-A was used for the first time in our study because of a lack of an established academic motivation scale for young adults. Because the original SRQ-A was used for assessing children, the language of the questions may have been too simplistic and vague for college level students. For example, responses such as “Because that’s what my parents say I’m supposed to do” may not be appropriate for college students because parents are not present to make sure their college students are doing their homework. Questions in this scale also tend to categorize parents as more strict or harsh than average and could poorly define the nature of the parent-child relationship. Parents may be disappointed when their college student does not make top grades but that is not the same thing as “getting in trouble. In the future, it would be beneficial to change some of the wording to match the academic level and experiences of college students. I would also add more questions about parent influence to distinguish between a desire
to do well in order to make parents proud and being required to meet a certain standard to please them. If academic motivation is influenced by parental attachment, this distinction may have an important effect on future results. This measure needs to be used more often in the future to assess the reliability, validity, and precision of the questions.

**Attachment and Drinking Behavior**

Much of the research done on drinking behavior in comparison to attachment (Henry, Oetting, & Slater, 2009, Labrie & Sessoms, 2012, Molnar, Sadava, DeCourville & Perrier, 2010, Musgrave-Marquart, Bromley, & Dalley, 1997) found a negative relationship between alcohol consumption habits and parental attachment. The current study found the opposite relationship: students who reported more secure attachment overall and were more likely to view their parents as a source of support (PSS) were more likely to drink multiple days per week, have more drinks per week, and report binge drinking. These results are contradictory to my hypothesis and the previous research.

College student culture tends to promote excessive drinking behavior and parents are more than likely aware of this trend. It may be that students who feel supported at home feel a sense of trust from their parents and freedom to explore all that college has to offer, even if the behaviors could put the students at risk. Many parents also engage in drinking behaviors that may be passed on to their offspring and encouraged at home as well as in school. Students with heavy drinking habits also may have substantial support financially and not be required to get a job as a second source of income. This may leave the student with more free time and fewer consequences for excessive drinking. In future research, I would add questions about what students believe their parents know about their drinking behavior, if parents approve or disapprove of their child’s drinking habits, whether drinking is encouraged in their home, how
much their parents drink in front of them, and how much financial support they receive from their parents. These questions may further clarify what is responsible for this interesting relationship between positive attachment and riskier drinking behaviors.

**Limitations**

As mentioned before, the modified Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire may need to be further examined. It should also be compared with academic achievement to see if it is accurate as a predictive measure. The timing of the study prevented me from obtaining final grades and required me to measure grade predictions instead. These predictions were positive overall and may not have been an accurate measure of each student’s academic achievement. Surveying students at the beginning of their second semester would allow students to report their first semester final grades without allowing too much time to pass that may affect their attachment scores. In future research, both genders should be studied to see if any differences exist. Some of the results might have occurred due to the lack of cultural variety, so a more diverse sample should be examined to see if anything changes. It may be helpful to compare different grade levels and how the results differ as time passes.

**Implications**

This study has important implications for how researchers view parental attachment in comparison to other behaviors. Although it still has some influence, it does not appear to have the impact that it has had in past studies. As mentioned previously, this may be partially due to different attachment scales used in previous research and this study should be replicated using other attachment measures to compare results. In the current study, different subscales of attachment seemed to have separate impacts on behavior. Academic motivation seemed to be more heavily influenced by the amount of independence parents give their children, and drinking
habits were impacted by students feeling supported by their parents. These two subscales should be studied in comparison to different areas to see if they consistently impact separate areas of behavior. Finally, having higher attachment scores may not mean what it used to in regards to risky behaviors, especially when students are experiencing a culture of expectation that promotes reckless drinking. University-wide values and reputations may lead to parental assumptions about their child’s drinking activities and acceptance of risky drinking behaviors. Parents may be more supportive of drinking and see it as a rite of passage into adulthood, or they may drink with their sons and daughters in order to bond with them. Further study is needed to determine whether drinking and attachment are commonly related positively and if this is a sign of changing societal norms.
References


Parental Attachment Questionnaire (n.d.). Retrieved from Boston College website:
https://www2.bc.edu/maureen-kenny/PAQ.html

Race and ethnicity survey. (n.d.). Retrieved from University of Florida website:
http://www.hr.ufl.edu/eeo/race_survey.pdf


