Separation–Individuation, Adult Attachment Style, and College Adjustment

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The authors examined the relationship between separation–individuation, adult attachment styles, and college adjustment. One hundred fifty-six young adults completed the Psychological Separation Inventory (J. A. Hoffman, 1984; J. A. Hoffman & B. Weiss, 1987), 2 subscales from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (R. W. Baker & B. Siryk, 1989), a measure of pathology of separation–individuation (R. M. Christenson & W. P. Wilson, 1985), and assessments of adult attachment style (K. Bartholomew & L. Horowitz, 1991). College adjustment was positively associated with secure adult attachment and counterindicated by fearful and preoccupied attachments. Implications for counseling practice and directions for future research are discussed.

Separation–individuation is a normative developmental task that is presumed to have significant adaptational consequences for adolescents and young adults. Although this process has been variously conceived in both the evolving object relations tradition (Blos, 1979; Josselson, 1988) and family systems theory (Allison & Sabatelli, 1988; Gavazzi & Sabatelli, 1990), there is an emerging consensus that it minimally involves a renegotiation of family relationships in such a way that independence and autonomy are attained within a context of ongoing relationships with caregivers. The press toward individuation requires the young adult to shed parental dependencies, yet this should not come at the expense of close familial ties. Rather, the goal of individuation is *relational autonomy,* whereby independence and self-governance are affirmed within the context of continuous, mutually validating relationships (Josselson, 1988). Hence, the developmental task for the young adult is to flexibly manage the ongoing dialectic between separation and connectedness, while avoiding the undesirable outcomes of fusion and enmeshment, on the one hand, and complete detachment and isolation, on the other.

One factor that may influence how well this task is managed is the attachment style of the young adult. According to traditional attachment theory, the child constructs internal working models of what the self is like ("I'm lovable") and what one can expect from relationships ("Loved ones are trustworthy") on the basis of his or her first relationship with caregivers. These models are then carried forward into new relationships as the child develops, functioning as a template by which to appraise and interpret subsequent relational experiences. Once established, working models are said to be "core features of personality that are then carried into new relationships" (Collins & Read, 1994, p. 56). Indeed, one may seek out partners that conform to one's internal working model of the self-in-relationship (Collins & Read, 1990). For this reason there is growing interest in using attachment theory and the notion of internal working models to understand variations in the quality of dating and marital relationships (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Feeney, Noller, & Patty, 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1989; Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Simpson, 1990; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992).

Many assessment strategies now exist for measuring individual differences in adult attachment styles, using categories that parallel the attachment status classifications used in research on infancy. According to the fourfold scheme developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), the *secure* attachment style is characterized by a working model of the self as positive and an expectation that others are trustworthy, reliable, and available. An individual with a secure attachment style is comfortable with both autonomy *(separation)* and intimacy *(connectedness)*. Furthermore, secure individuals do not depend on others for their sense of self-regard (deriving it from internal sources), although they do not avoid close, intimate relationships. In contrast, individuals with a *dismissing* attachment style also have a positive working model of the self, and they also tend to have low dependency needs, but they are otherwise disdainful of close, intimate relationships. This avoidance of intimacy is thought to be a self-protective stance against rejection and disappointment. An individual with a *preoccupied* attachment style has a working model of the self as unworthy or unlovable, although others are regarded positively.

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Indeed, close relationships are highly desired in order to gain acceptance. This results in strong dependency needs and a tendency to become enmeshed in relationships. Finally, individuals with a *fearful* attachment style also have a working model of the self as unworthy and unlovable, and they also show strong dependency needs, but they tend to avoid intimate relationships because of their working model of others as rejecting, untrustworthy, and unavailable.

Although these working models of attachment are assumed to be relatively stable, they are, nonetheless, open to periodic revision, and the revision of internal working models of attachment may be what is at stake in the separation–individuation process. In other words, separation–individuation can be conceptualized as a process whereby internal working models of the self-in-relationship are updated or reconstructed in light of new relational experiences of separation and connectedness. Although others have similarly argued that the psychological separation process is perhaps better understood in terms of attachment theory (e.g., Eagle, 1984; Lopez & Gover, 1993), empirical studies of the relationship between separation–individuation and attachment style are rare (see Mayseless, Danieli, & Sharabany, 1996, for an exception).

One purpose of this study was to explore this relationship using assessments of adult attachment style and of separation–individuation. We hypothesized that young adult college students who exhibit a secure attachment style would also report a greater degree of psychological independence from parents. Similarly, young adults with a dismissing attachment style were also hypothesized to show a pattern of psychological independence from parents. This hypothesis follows from the claim (Bartholomew & Horowtiz, 1991) that both secure and dismissing styles are characterized by low dependency needs (although they differ on issues of intimacy and connectedness). Individuals with fearful and preoccupied attachment styles, in contrast, would be expected to show greater psychological dependency on parents.

A second purpose of this study was to explore the adaptational consequences of separation–individuation and attachment style. Indeed, the implications of separation–individuation (Robbins, 1989) and attachment (Bartholomew & Thompson, 1995; Lopez, 1995; Pistole, 1989) for counseling theory and practice have come into sharper focus within the past decade. It is now recognized, for example, that separation–individuation (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Friedlander & Siegel, 1990; Hoffman, 1984; Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989; Rice, 1992) and dysfunctional parental attachment (Bartholomew & Thompson, 1995; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Kenny & Hart, 1992; Kenny & Rice, 1995) may well underlie many of the presenting problems often seen in university counseling centers. For many young adults, attending the university is one of the first major life transitions. This transition poses important challenges to separation–individuation and attachment. With respect to separation–individuation, the young adult must often physically separate from parents, confront identity and career options, and manage the important daily responsibilities that accompany the more independent collegiate lifestyle. Consequently, issues of self-governance, dependency, and relational autonomy are likely to be acute concerns of the young adult. Similarly, university life is often said to be a naturally occurring analog of the well-known "strange situation" that is used to assess attachment behaviors in infancy (Kenny, 1987, 1990; Lapsley, Varshney, & Aalsma, 2000; Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, & Gibbs, 1995). In the strange situation technique, infants are exposed to a cumulative stress experience that involves separation from caregivers in a novel environment in the presence of a stranger. Similarly, the transition to college challenges students with the sort of analogous experiences (e.g., separation from parental attachment figures, negotiating novel physical and social environments, initiating and maintaining social and romantic attachments) that are likely to evoke the attachment behavioral system as well. For these reasons, the influence of separation–individuation and attachment on college adjustment has been an important focus of research within counseling and psychology.

There are, however, at least two limitations in this literature. First, although some dimensions of separation–individuation predict adjustment to college (Hoffman, 1984; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Lapsley et al., 1989; Rice et al., 1995), there is more equivocal evidence as well (Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1988; Rice, Cole, & Lapsley, 1990). One possible reason for this discrepancy is that extant measures of separation–individuation (e.g., the Psychological Separation Inventory) are not sensitive enough to detect more serious symptom patterns that might accompany dysfunctional separation–individuation (Rice et al., 1990). Fortunately, a measure has been developed that purports to assess "pathology" of separation–individuation (Christenson & Wilson, 1985). This measure, denoted here as PATHSEP, was originally designed to detect three outcomes of dysfunctional separation–individuation: difficulty in differentiation from others, splitting, and relational disturbances. In their study, Christenson and Wilson found that individuals with very high scores on this measure were typically diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. In the current study, we examine the relationship between PATHSEP and various aspects of college adjustment, attachment style, and to another measure of separation–individuation. We hypothesized that individuals who showed greater dysfunctional separation–individuation should evince a poorer profile of college adjustment, a tendency toward insecure attachment styles, and lower scores on indices of normal separation–individuation. We also hypothesized that PATHSEP would be a stronger predictor of college adjustment than would indices of normal separation–individuation. Both hypotheses have an important implication for counseling practice. Showing that PATHSEP is a strong predictor of college adjustment would add to the diagnostic tools available to counselors who work in university settings. This is particularly important given the fact that college counseling centers are reporting an increase in the number of clients who present with more serious psychopathological symptoms (Robbins, May, & Corrazzini, 1985). Furthermore, these data would better allow counselors to dif-

ferentiate those aspects of separation–individuation that are within the normal tolerance of ego development from those that are of clinical significance.

A second limitation of the college adjustment literature is that virtually all of the studies that address the implications of attachment theory have been restricted to studies of parental attachment and adjustment. Consequently little is known about the relationship between adult attachment styles and college adjustment, even though difficulties in dating relationships, with social support, and with the quality of interpersonal relationships are frequently causes for therapeutic intervention in university counseling centers. Indeed, adult attachment styles might prove a better target for intervention in such settings than would the quality of parental attachments. In this study, then, we provide the first evidence on the relationship between college adjustment and adult attachment styles. Attachment theory suggests that individual differences in attachment security should predict individual differences in adjustment. On this basis, we hypothesized that young adults with a secure adult attachment style would show a better profile of adjustment than would students with insecure adult attachment styles.

In sum, this study addressed three research questions. First, what is the relationship between separation–individuation and adult attachment styles? Second, what is the relative contribution of the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI; Hoffman, 1984; Hoffman & Weiss, 1987) and PATHSEP (Christenson & Wilson, 1985) measures of separation–individuation to the prediction of college adjustment? Third, what is the relationship between adult attachment styles and college adjustment?

METHOD

Participants

One hundred fifty-six young adults (102 women, 54 men; $M = 20.24$ years, $SD = 1.79$) who attended a small university attended by commuters in the Canadian Midwest participated in this study. The ethno–racial composition of the sample was as follows: Approximately 87% were Caucasian, 5% were aboriginal/First Nations, 5% were Asian, 3% reported "other." This distribution mirrors the demographic characteristics of the small Canadian city (population 40,000) where the university was located. Most participants (96%) were unmarried. The percentage who lived with parents (47%) or independently (53%) was comparable. Most participants were freshmen (36%), sophomores (30%), and juniors (24%) who were sampled from elective courses that typically draw students from numerous academic majors throughout the university. Participants received nominal course credit for their participation.

Instruments

Separation–individuation was measured by the PSI (Hoffman, 1984; Hoffman & Weiss, 1987). The PSI defines psychological separation with reference to four dimensions: Functional Independence (FI, the ability to manage and direct one's own affairs without parental intervention); Attitudinal Independence (AI, the image of oneself as being unique and having attitudes, beliefs, and opinions at variance with parental attitudes); Emotional Independence (EI, freedom from excessive need for approval, closeness, and emotional support); and Conflictual Independence (CI, freedom from excessive guilt, resentment, and anxiety). These four dimensions are derived as subscales and are reported independently for mother and for father. The Mother and Father scales each have 69 statements (13 statements FI; 17 statements EI; 25 statements CI; and 14 statements AI) that are responded to along a 5-point Likert continuum. High scores represent "better" psychological separation from mother and from father. This widely used scale seems to have acceptable factor structure, internal consistency, and temporal stability (see Hoffman, 1984). There is also strong evidence of construct validity for the PSI (see Lopez & Gover, 1993, for a review). In the present study internal consistency (coefficient alpha) was uniformly strong. Coefficient alphas for psychological separation from Mother were FI, .89; EI, .91; CI, .91; AI, .87. Coefficient alphas for psychological separation from Father were FI, .89; EI, .90; CI, .90; AI, .88.

Christenson and Wilson (1985) designed a 39-item scale (denoted here as PATHSEP) to assess manifestations of pathology in the separation–individuation process. Scale items reflect difficulty in differentiating self from others (e.g., "Often, when I am in a close relationship, I find that my sense of who I am gets lost"), splitting of self and other representations into "good" and "bad" (e.g., "I find that people either really like me or they hate me"), and relationship disturbances (e.g., "When people really care for someone, they often feel worse about themselves"). In preliminary research, this scale demonstrated satisfactory internal reliability and a unitary factor structure. It also discriminated normal controls from a sample of patients diagnosed with borderline personality (Christenson & Wilson, 1985). In the present study, internal consistency was $\alpha = .89$.

Adult attachment styles were assessed with the methodology designed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). Four attachment styles are described by brief statements, and participants are required to endorse the one statement that is most self-descriptive. The secure attachment style is characterized by a positive sense of self-worth plus an expectation that others are trustworthy, reliable, and available. The secure statement is "It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me." The dismissing attachment style is characterized by a positive working model of the self, but a highly negative model of others. The dismissing statement is "I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It is very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient, and I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me." The preoccupied attachment style is characterized by a model of the self as unlovable or

unworthy, but a positive model of others. The preoccupied statement is "I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them." Finally, the fearful attachment style is characterized by a sense of self-unworthiness and a view that others are rejecting, untrustworthy, or unavailable. The fearful statement is "I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them. I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others." After endorsing one of these classifications, participants are also asked to rate the self-descriptiveness of each of the four attachment classification statements along a 7-step continuum (1 = *not at all like me* to 7 = *very much like me*). This *dimensional* rating (as it is called in the literature) provides a continuous score for each participant on each of the four attachment styles.

There is extensive literature on the assessment of adult attachment classifications, necessitating numerous theoretical (e.g., Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Feeney & Noller, 1996) and methodological (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) reviews. Many studies have attested to the moderate temporal stability of the categorical assessment used here and to its considerable construct validity. One study showed, for example, that "the four attachment patterns were moderately stable over 8 months" (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994, p. 39), with nearly 70% of individuals reporting identical self-report classification over this time interval, a stability rate that is also reported for other categorical assessments of adult attachment (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999). The validity of the fourfold attachment categories has been demonstrated by theoretically relevant empirical relationships with self-concept and interpersonal functioning, with peer attachment relations, and with family functioning (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals with secure and insecure (preoccupied, fearful, dismissing) attachment styles report differential mental representations of parents (Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998) and can be distinguished on personality variables indicative of self-confidence, psychological well-being, and social functioning (Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998). Moreover, the insecure categories (especially the preoccupied and dismissing categories) have been associated with depression (Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1994), eating disorders (Brennan & Shaver, 1998), and dysfunctional coping (Brennan, Shaver, & Tobey, 1991). Secure adults, in turn, tend to show a consistently better profile of adjustment (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Bosson, 1998). It seems, then, that the adult attachment categories enjoy considerable convergent and predictive validity. Moreover, the categorical assessments of adult attachment probably underestimate the relationship between attachment and various outcomes (Crowell et al., 1999). This is because individual differences in attachment also vary by degree (dimensions) as well as by type. For this reason it is recommended that categorical assessments of adult attachment be supplemented with continuous dimensional ratings as well (Crowell et al., 1999), as is done in the present study.

The distribution of attachment styles in the present study was as follows: secure, $n = 72$ (46%); fearful, $n = 37$ (24%); preoccupied, $n = 21$ (13%); dismissing, $n = 26$ (17%). This distribution is highly similar to that reported for a sample of U.S. university students by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). In that study, 47% were classified as secure; 21% fearful; 14% preoccupied; and 18% dismissing.

College adjustment was assessed with two subscales from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989). The Social Adjustment (SA) subscale assesses how well students deal with the interpersonal experiences of university life (e.g., meeting new people, joining groups). The Personal-Emotional Adjustment (PEA) subscale assesses a student's experience of general psychological distress or the somatic consequences of distress. The construct validity of these scales has been widely attested (see Baker & Siryk, 1989, for a review). In this sample, the internal consistency of SA ($\alpha = .87$) and PEA ($\alpha = .78$) was adequate.

Procedure

Participants responded to these instruments in small group settings, according to standardized instructions. To control sequencing effects, the order of presentation was completely random for each participant. The time of testing ranged from 30 to 45 minutes.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports a matrix of correlation coefficients that address our first research question regarding the relationship between separation–individuation and adult attachment styles. Insofar as this large matrix also informs other research questions, we adopted the conservative strategy of only considering coefficients that are statistically significant at $p < .01$. As can be seen in Table 1, the dimensional ratings of the four adult attachment styles are largely uncorrelated with the various subscales of the PSI, with the exception of the Conflictual Independence measures. Here, Conflictual Independence from Mother (CI-Mother) was negatively correlated with fearful ($r = -.24$) and preoccupied ($r = -.31$) adult attachment. Similarly, Conflictual Independence from Father (CI-Father) was negatively correlated with fearful attachment ($r = -.24$).

The relationship between normal separation–individuation and adult attachment styles can also be explored by a test of means. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was calculated for psychological separation (conflictual, attitudinal, emotional, and functional independence) from mother and from father, respectively, among the four attachment styles. (Power considerations did not permit including gender as a factor.) A significant multivariate effect emerged for psychological separation from Mother (Pillai = .15, $F = 1.78$, $p < .05$) and from Father

TABLE 1

Correlations Among Measures of Separation–Individuation, Attachment Styles, and College Adjustment

Measure	Adult Attachment Styles				College Adjustment		
	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Social Adj.	PEA	PATHSEP
Separation–Individuation							
PSI							
AI–Mother	−.06	.07	.07	−.11	−.08	−.03	.07
CI–Mother	.18	−.24*	−.31*	.06	.32*	.25*	−.43*
EI–Mother	−.04	−.08	−.13	−.06	.13	.18	−.19
FI–Mother	−.06	−.04	−.09	−.05	.10	.10	−.15
AI–Father	−.07	.10	−.01	−.06	−.15	−.18	.13
CI–Father	.19	−.24*	−.19	.01	.32*	.42*	−.44*
EI–Father	.03	−.07	−.24*	−.03	.12	.06	−.09
FI–Father	−.08	−.07	−.15	−.04	.02	−.03	−.08
PATHSEP	−.39*	.43*	.45*	−.04	−.53*	.48*	1.00
College Adjustment							
SACQ							
Social Adjustment	.33*	−.42*	−.23*	.09	1.00	.50*	−.53*
PEA	.26*	−.29*	−.26*	−.09	.02	—	—

Note. Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI) subscales: AI = Attitudinal Independence; CI = Conflictual Independence; EI = Emotional Independence; FI = Functional Independence. PATHSEP = pathology of separation–individuation; SACQ = Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire; PEA = Personal-Emotional Adjustment.
*$p < .01$.

(Pillai = .22, $F = 2.58$, $p < .01$). Post hoc analyses using the Scheffé procedure showed that individuals with secure and dismissing adult attachments reported more conflictual independence from mother than did individuals with preoccupied attachments. Similarly, individuals with secure and dismissing adult attachments reported more conflictual independence from father than did individuals with fearful adult attachments. Means and standard deviations for these comparisons are reported in Table 2.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated for PATHSEP scores among the four attachment styles to determine mean differences in separation pathology among the four classifications of adult attachment style. A significant effect emerged for the attachment styles factor, $F(3, 142) = 13.75$, $p < .001$. As expected, post hoc analyses using the Scheffé procedure indicated that individuals with fearful and preoccupied adult attachment styles had significantly higher PATHSEP scores than did individuals with both secure and dismissing adult attachments. Means and standard deviations for these comparisons are also reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Significant Group Differences Among Adult Attachment Classifications

Attachment Classification	PATHSEP	CI–Mother	CI–Father
Secure			
M	107.17[1,2]	78.26[1]	78.00[1]
SD	29.04	12.85	15.65
Fearful			
M	143.51[1,3]	70.94	68.05[1,2]
SD	39.94	20.11	19.09
Preoccupied			
M	141.10[2,4]	66.70[1,2]	68.75
SD	34.04	14.40	17.02
Dismissing			
M	109.65[3,4]	80.20[2]	80.64[2]
SD	33.34	11.78	12.56

Note. CI = Conflictual Independence. PATHSEP = pathology of separation–individuation. Means that share a common superscript are significantly different from each other ($p < .05$).

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine the relative contribution of normal (PSI) and dysfunctional (PATHSEP) separation–individuation to social and personal-emotional adjustment to college. With the PSI, we restricted our analysis to the conflictual independence dimension because only this dimension of separation–individuation was significantly correlated with college adjustment. In these analyses, gender was entered first, followed by CI-Mother or CI-Father, then PATHSEP. The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, PATHSEP accounted for an additional 17% of the variance in social adjustment scores over the amount accounted for by CI-Mother and CI-Father, respectively. Furthermore, in the test of partial regression coefficients, only the coefficient for PATHSEP emerged as a significant predictor of social adjustment, after controlling for the other independent variables. Similarly, with respect to the PEA subscale, PATHSEP accounted for an additional 17% of the variance in PEA scores over the percentage accounted for by CI-Mother, and an additional 10% over the percentage accounted for by CI-Father. In the test of partial regression coefficients, PATHSEP was a significant predictor of personal-emotional adjustment after controlling for CI-Mother ($t = -5.79$, $p < .001$) and CI-Father ($t = -4.78$, $p < .001$). In addition, the partial regression coefficient for CI-Father was statistically significant ($t = 3.19$, $p < .01$) after controlling for PATHSEP.

TABLE 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Statistics

Variable	R^2	ΔR^2	B	*SE*	β	*t*	sig
Social adjustment							
Gender	.00	—	0.67	3.24	.01	0.21	.84
CI–Mother	.10	.10	0.18	0.11	.12	1.62	.11
PATHSEP	.27	.17	−0.27	0.04	−.46	−5.97	.00
Gender	.00		0.82	3.26	.02	0.25	.80
CI–Father	.10	.10	0.16	0.10	.12	1.56	.12
PATHSEP	.27	.17	−0.27	0.04	−.46	−5.92	.00
Personal-Emotional adjustment							
Gender	.02	—	−5.18	2.81	−.13	−1.84	.07
CI–Mother	.07	.05	0.05	0.09	.04	0.54	.59
PATHSEP	.24	.17	−0.22	0.04	−.45	−5.79	.00
Gender	.02	—	−4.08	2.73	−.10	−1.49	.14
CI–Father	.18	.16	0.27	0.08	.24	3.19	.00
PATHSEP	.28	.11	−0.18	0.04	−.36	−4.78	.00

Note. CI = Conflictual Independence; PATHSEP = pathology of separation–individuation.
*$p < .01$.

The third research question concerned the relationship between adult attachment styles and college adjustment. As can be seen in Table 1, social adjustment to college was positively correlated with secure adult attachment ($r = .33$) and negatively correlated with fearful ($r = -.42$) and preoccupied ($r = -.23$) adult attachment. Personal-emotional adjustment to college was also positively correlated with secure adult attachment ($r = .26$) and negatively correlated with fearful ($r = -.29$) and preoccupied ($r = -.26$) attachment styles. Dismissing adult attachment was not significantly correlated with college adjustment.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between separation–individuation and patterns of relational attachment among a university sample of young adults. This aim was predicated on the assumption that separation–individuation and adult attachment styles would be closely related insofar as the ego developmental challenges of young adulthood would normally entail the revision of internal working models of self and of others. We also examined the relative contribution of two measures of separation–individuation, and we attempted to provide the first evidence concerning the relationship between adult attachment styles and college adjustment.

Results for the first research question show that only the conflictual independence dimension of separation–individuation is consistently associated with adult attachment styles. As expected, young adults with secure and dismissing attachment styles reported more conflictual independence from mother than did young adults with preoccupied attachments, and more conflictual independence from father than did young adults with fearful attachment styles. This pattern was also evident in correlational analyses. Conflictual independence from mother and from father was negatively correlated with preoccupied and fearful adult attachment styles and positively correlated with secure adult attachment style, although the magnitude of these latter correlations was only marginally significant ($p < .05$). It seems, then, that young adults who are relatively free of excessive guilt, resentment, or anxiety in their felt sense of independence from parents (i.e., who exhibit conflictual independence) also tend to have styles of relating to others that are relatively free of anxious preoccupations about whether one is unlovable or unworthy (preoccupied attachment) or whether others are rejecting, untrustworthy, or unavailable (fearful attachment).

The bivariate relationship between conflictual independence from parents and adult attachment styles is congruent with recent research that suggests that there is a close relationship between attachment styles and representations of parents. According to Levy et al. (1998), for example, the capacity for individuation is facilitated by representations of parents as supportive and nurturing. Secure attachment to parents encourages separation–individuation. Thus, in their view, "attachment is a dynamic process that facilitates development by providing the emotional support necessary for healthy autonomy and relatedness" (Levy et al., 1998, p. 417). Hence the relational autonomy that is the goal of separation–individuation is best accomplished when parental attachment is secure and nurturing (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). The present data extend this conclusion by documenting a similar relationship between adult attachment and separation–individuation. The degree of conflict in one's separation from parents seems to be associated with the quality of one's relationship with others. Parental separation that is marked by resentment, guilt, and anxiety *(conflictual dependence)* is associated with patterns of insecure relationships with others. Similarly, the absence of such conflict is associated with secure attachment with others. Of course, the bivariate nature of this relationship precludes any causal interpretation of the direction of effect.

Note that previous research has also shown that conflictual independence is the one dimension of separation–individuation

that is most strongly related to various adaptational outcomes (e.g., Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Lapsley et al., 1989; Lopez et al., 1988). Rice et al. (1990) reported, for example, that conflictual independence loaded onto a latent factor that reflected "positive separation feelings," while the remaining dimensions (attitudinal, emotional, and functional independence) loaded onto an independence from parents factor. Only the former was consistently related to college adjustment. Similarly, in the present study, the best correlational predictor of adult attachment style and college adjustment was the presence of positive separation feelings regarding separation *(conflictual independence)*, rather than one's sense of attitudinal, emotional, or functional independence from parents. Indeed, it seems that attitudinal, emotional, and functional independence from parents has few adaptational consequences in early adulthood and is therefore of little practical significance for counselors, a conclusion that is supported elsewhere (Rice et al., 1990).

Of course, it is also possible that there is such a close psychological connection between internal working models of adult attachment and separation–individuation that one notices a relationship at all only in the breech, that is, only when there is evidence of dysfunctional separation. Indeed, Bowlby (1978) has argued that in healthy development, the attachment behavioral system becomes less readily activated over time and is not evident at all whenever the attachment figure is either physically or psychologically available. Hence, in normal separation–individuation, one might have fewer reasons for activating attachment-related representations. But when psychological separation is more problematic, its influence on the attachment system is more evident. This would perhaps explain why PATHSEP is the more robust predictor of the various attachment styles than are the dimensions of "normal" separation–individuation. Indeed, although there was a pervasive relationship between dysfunctional separation–individuation and adult attachment styles, only the conflictual independence dimension of normal separation–individuation was linked to adult attachment.

A second aim of this study was to examine the relative contribution of the two measures of separation–individuation to the prediction of college adjustment. The results indicated that PATHSEP is a stronger measure with clear utility for counselors. For example, PATHSEP demonstrated strong internal consistency. It differentially predicted secure and insecure (fear and preoccupied) adult attachment. It was negatively correlated with the conflictual independence dimension of normal separation–individuation and negatively correlated with personal–emotional and social adjustment to college. Similarly, in tests of means, young adults with fearful and preoccupied attachments had significantly higher mean PATHSEP scores than did young adults with secure attachments. Furthermore, PATHSEP seemed to be a much stronger predictor of social and personal–emotional adjustment to college than was conflictual independence from parent, as indicated by regression analyses. These results suggest that PATHSEP would be a useful addition to future counseling research on the dynamics of ego development in early adulthood. But PATHSEP also holds promise as a clinical screen in the assessment of the relational foundations of presenting problems. Indeed, PATHSEP seems more useful in this regard than the conflictual independence dimension of normal separation–individuation, given the fact that PATHSEP was a more reliable predictor of college adjustment than was conflictual independence.

Furthermore, regarding attachment, PATHSEP was more strongly associated with adult attachment styles than were the dimensions of normal separation–individuation (including the conflictual independence dimension), as noted previously. This is perhaps because those aspects of relationships that are assessed by PATHSEP (e.g., self–other differentiation failure, splitting of representations of self and others into "good" and "bad") are more directly related to the internal working models of the self-in-relationship that underlie assessments of adult attachment styles than are indices of normal separation–individuation. That is, the assessments of separation pathology and of adult attachment style both focus on representations of the self in relationship, although they do so in different ways. Consequently, those aspects of relationships that are assessed by PATHSEP (e.g., self–other differentiation failure, splitting of self–other representations into "good" and "bad") would be better indicators of relational dysfunction (insecure attachment) in a client than would those aspects measured by the conflictual independence dimension of normal separation–individuation (e.g., degree of guilt, anxiety, resentment), which might instead fall within the tolerance of normal ego development. Consequently, a counselor would be advised to draw a diagnostic distinction between signs of separation pathology (e.g., self–other differentiation failure, splitting), as measured by PATHSEP, and signs of conflictual guilt, anxiety, and resentment, as assessed by the conflictual independence dimension of the PSI. The former seems to be of greater significance for relational adjustment than the latter.

The third purpose of this study was to examine the continuity of adaptation between adult attachment styles and college adjustment. The data suggest that young adults who exhibited a secure adult attachment style also tended to be socially and emotionally adjusted to college. Similarly, college adjustment was counterindicated by fearful and by preoccupied attachments. Hence, these data affirm an important tenet of attachment theory, namely, that individual differences in attachment style predict individual differences in adaptational outcomes. Although support for this view is commonly reported in the literature with respect to parental attachment and various indices of adaptation, the present study extends the evidential warrant to include adult attachment styles as well. The results here are also congruent with recent research with younger adolescents (13 to 19 years of age). In a study by Cooper, Shaver, and Collins (1998), for example, differences in symptomatology, self-concept, and problem behaviors reliably varied by attachment style classification, with secure adolescents being the best-adjusted group and insecure (anxious and avoidant) adolescents showing poorer adaptational outcomes. Furthermore, these relationships were

similar across age, gender, and racial groups. Hence, attachment style processes "have important implications for adjustment across a broad range of psychological and behavioral domains during adolescence" (Cooper et al., 1998, p. 1395) and also during early adulthood, as the present study indicates.

What are the implications of the present data for counseling practice? We have already noted that the thematic content of PATHSEP might be a more reliable indicator of dysfunction than are the conflictual dependencies assessed by the PSI. Consequently, one clinical use of PATHSEP might be to use individual items as interrogatory probes during the initial interview with a client. In this way, the therapist gains valuable insight into a client's sense of self–other differentiation (e.g., "Does the sense of who you are tend to get lost when you are in a close relationship?") or into the extent of a client's splitting of self–other representations ("Do you find that people really like you or they hate you?") or relationship disturbance ("When you really care for someone, do you often feel worse about yourself?").

A second implication concerns the conflictual independence dimension of normal separation–individuation. This study adds to the growing literature that attests to the importance of conflictual independence for successful adaptation in early adulthood relative to other dimensions of psychological separation such as attitudinal, functional, and emotional independence. As noted earlier, these latter dimensions seem to have few adaptational consequences in early adulthood. This suggests that counselors, in addition to probing for evidence of separation pathology, might also probe for evidence of conflictual dependencies, that is, for the degree of guilt, resentment, or anxiety in a client's felt independence with parents. Indeed, the present data suggest a way to triage the relational dysfunctions that might confront the counselor in a university setting. A student presenting with a pattern of conflictual dependence on parents, for example, would indicate a much higher risk of adjustment difficulties than would a student who presents with attitudinal, functional, or emotional dependencies. In turn, evidence of self–other differentiation problems or of splitting would indicate a higher risk of adjustment problems than would a pattern of conflictual dependency.

Finally, assessing adult attachment style might prove to be a useful diagnostic screen or might otherwise aid in the assessment of presenting problems. In particular, clients who endorse fearful or preoccupied attachment styles are indicating ways of representing their relational field (including the potential relationship with a counselor) that are clearly dysfunctional, which may provide a starting point for therapeutic intervention. Bowlby (1978) made many useful suggestions regarding the clinical management of attachment-related dysfunctions.

Several caveats deserve mentioning. First, the nonexperimental nature of this project precludes any definitive statement regarding the direction of effect. For example, we are tempted to say on theoretical grounds that it is secure adult attachment that encourages college adjustment. Yet it is possible that it is both social and personal-emotional adjustment to college that encourage security of attachment in adult relationships. In addition, although the data follow theoretical expectations and replicate patterns previously reported in the literature, it is still desirable to examine the relationship among these constructs with a wider selection of samples. This is particularly true with measures of separation–individuation. For example, there is reason to believe that a traditional psychodynamic reading of individuation might be an inadequate way of describing mature relationships for individuals among certain cultural subgroups, where notions of enmeshment and connectedness would be considered relational ideals rather than as markers of dysfunction. Although the present study does not assume this traditional reading and, indeed, asserts its contrary (that mature separation–individuation must include a commitment to ongoing attachments; e.g., Josselson, 1988), it is nonetheless true that more studies of culturally diverse samples are needed. Construct validation is an ongoing project, and additional evidence for the construct validity of PATHSEP and other measures of separation–individuation must be sought in contexts other than the university setting. Furthermore, constructs in this study were measured with self-reports. Future research will need to supplement these findings with additional sources of information regarding the relational background of participants. For example, it would be desirable to assess not only the participant's attachment style but also the attachment style of his or her partner. Finally, longitudinal studies are desirable to examine the temporal stability of attachment classifications and to chart the adaptational consequences of separation–individuation over time.

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