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The Effects of Family Patterns on Social Anxiety and Differentiation in Emerging  
Adulthood

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### Abstract

This research examined the relationships between family patterns, differentiation, and social anxiety. Cohesive, conflictive, and expressive patterns of family interaction were examined within a sample of 98 undergraduate students ( $M = 21$  years). Differentiation was measured in terms of current residency of students, as measured by miles that students live from their families of origin and the amount of contact students have with their families. Although the specific hypotheses of this research were not supported, results indicated a relationship between expressive and cohesive family interactional patterns and a negative correlation between cohesive and conflictive family patterns. Significant differences emerged among white and minority families involving the amount of conflict and cohesion experienced in the family system. Implications are discussed.

## The Effects of Family Patterns on Social Anxiety and Differentiation in Emerging Adulthood

One way to understand individual development during the transition from adolescence to adulthood is to examine the context of the family (i.e., family patterns) as it influences different domains of development. As evidenced in the attachment literature (Ainsworth, 1985; Radke-Yarrow, Cummings & Kuczynski, 1985), a great deal of research in developmental psychology has emphasized the relationship between a child's primary caregiver and developmental outcomes. In contrast, some researchers have moved beyond looking at dyadic relationships to consider the family as a system (Burt, Cohen & Bjorck, 1988). Specifically, the relationship between family patterns and children's social development in arenas outside of the familial home has garnered great interest among researchers in recent years. Such work addresses whether or not family interaction styles "teach" individuals how to navigate and interact with others in the larger social world (Burt, Cohen, & Bjorck, 1988; Craddock, 1983).

Johnson, La Vole and Mahoney (2001) assume that family interactions are related to the personal development of adolescent offspring. They suggest that family interactions provide a framework for social interactions outside of the family. In their work, late adolescents who reported a conflicted relationship with their family of origin reported more loneliness than adolescents who maintained expressive relationships with their families (Johnson, Le Vole & Mahoney, 2001). Within the college population of emerging adults, conflictive, over-involved families are linked to problems with adjustment and psychological separation during the college years, as compared to differentiated families. This work suggests that family context plays a role in how young

people adjust to the separation from their family during the transition to college (Lopez, 1988).

Another area of research examines the relationship between family patterns and mental health (i.e., social anxiety). Numerous studies have linked cohesive, enmeshed and conflicted family relationships to the emergence of social anxiety among family members at various points of development (Johnson, La Vole & Mahoney, 2001; Craddock, 1983). Enmeshment or cohesion refers to the degree to which members of a family are linked, connected, and involved in the family system. Craddock (1983) conducted research among college students, which indicated that a sample of students displaying symptoms of social anxiety also appeared to have a high prevalence of enmeshed relationships with their family of origin. In addition, previous research conducted by Ora Peleg-Popko (2001) examined the interaction of parental marital quality, family patterns, and social anxiety symptoms present in children. Results of this research suggest that there is a greater risk of social anxiety and fear associated with children raised in rigid, fused families (Peleg-Popko, 2001).

Although research has examined the relationship between family patterns and social anxiety (Johnson, La Vole & Mahoney, 2001; Craddock, 1983), and family patterns and adjustment during the adolescent and college years (Johnson, Le Vole & Mahoney, 2001; Lopez, 1988), there are still many questions regarding how family patterns relate to differentiation during the transition to adulthood. Moreover, it is unclear how this developmental period relates to social anxiety. This study will begin to examine these issues.

### *Emerging Adulthood*

One area worth studying is that of family patterns of emerging adults as they transition into the social world of adulthood. Emerging adulthood is typically characterized by the transition from adolescence to adulthood, occurring between the ages of 18-25 (Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). This time period presents young people with various opportunities and challenges. Dynamic in nature, this is a time of personal growth which encompasses identity formation and self focus. Much attention during this stage of life is placed on work, relationships, and worldviews (Cheah & Nelson, 2004). This is a transitional time when young people begin to psychologically separate from their families of origin and establish themselves as individuals. The intent of the current research is to gain insight into the factors present in family relationships that may contribute to this shift and separation.

### *Differentiation in Emerging Adulthood*

Emerging adulthood is an unstable time that typically involves decisions regarding when an individual should and can move away from his or her family of origin to live independently (Arnett, 2004). To some extent, such decisions largely involve processes of differentiation, the degree to which a person is psychologically separated from the family of origin. Bowen (1972) defines self-differentiation in terms of the extent to which a person is able to separate his or her thinking and feeling processes, and the degree to which a person has been able to separate from their family of origin, balance the continuing dynamic tension between forces of togetherness and closeness, and forces of separateness or autonomy. One aspect of this involves geographical separation from the family of origin.

While geographic separation is not necessarily required to achieve high levels of differentiation, it is one element worth observing in terms of its effects on the developing self in the individuation process. Previous research on the residency of college students examined the perceptions of family relationships described by students who were either currently living with their parents or residing away from home (Flanagan, 1993; Wilson, 1987; Dragow, 1958). This research suggests that students living away from home often perceive more parental support, mutual respect, and independence when compared with students who reside with their family of origin. In this work, students currently living with their families more often felt that their parents viewed them as less mature. They also described conflict that is more ongoing than the geographically separated group of students (Flanagan, 1993). Other research regarding living arrangements of college students observed that students residing on campus demonstrated higher rates of adjustment to college than students residing at home; those students who lived at home were more likely to report parental over-involvement (Wilson, 1987).

Historically, living arrangements appear to influence students' college experiences. Research conducted at the midpoint of the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated that students residing at home reported staying in college for a shorter time than students residing on college campuses (Dragow, 1958). More recently, Leondari and Kiosseoglou (2000) examined the relationship between separation and parental attachment within the college population. Securely attached students displayed higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of reported loneliness compared to insecurely attached students. According to Leondari and Kiosseoglou (2000), secure attachments with parents were more likely to produce freedom from guilt and anxiety; these children harbored less resentment and

anger regarding their families of origin. This research assumes that the occurrence of individuality fostered in family relationships contributes to functioning and emotional well being during early adulthood (Leondari and Kiosseoglou, 2000).

### *Cultural Influences*

When examining family interaction it is important to explore differentiation of emerging adults in the context of different cultural groups. According to Bandura (2002), orientations in individualistic cultures (including most Western cultures such as American and British cultures) are centered on self-sufficiency and out-group membership apart from families of origin. In contrast, collectivistic cultures (including most Eastern cultures such as Asian, Arabic and Islamic Cultures and Southern cultures such as the Latin cultures) are highly communal and focus on in-group membership (Bandura, 2002). Florian, Mikulincer and Weller (1993) also suggest that individual cultures promote self-achievement, competition, and a desire for self improvement, as compared to collectivist cultures where social emphasis is placed on concern for others and family security. Such differences have obvious implications for how differentiation will be experienced.

The characteristics of emerging adulthood in individualist cultures may appear distinctively different compared to collectivist societies. To examine the perception of adulthood, Cheah and Nelson (2004) investigated the perceptions of aboriginal (native) Canadians and European Canadians during emerging adulthood, as they ascribe to collective and individualistic cultures respectively. Research findings suggest that aboriginal emerging adults identified with traditional collectivist views of adulthood (interdependence, maintenance of the family) compared to European Canadian young

adults who perceived adult status based on individualistic factors such as personal advancement. Nelson, Badgar and Wu (2004) reported additional support of the cultural differences present in determining the presence of emerging adulthood. Results of this research revealed that Chinese college students mark the presence of adulthood through culturally specific criteria and maintain collectivistic beliefs, values and behaviors that appear to differ from those present in individualistic cultures. These studies demonstrate the distinctively different criteria used among individuals living in individualistic or collectivist cultures in defining the roles of emerging adults.

Traditionally, marriage has marked the transition to adulthood in many collectivist and Western cultures. According to Arnett (1998), the current cultural trends in the United States have been for individuals to reject marriage as the quintessential transition into emerging adulthood and place greater emphasis on individualistic factors. Within this framework, the goal of this transitional developmental period is to gain independence and form a separate individuated self apart from one's family of origin. Arnett (1998) has determined three main factors present during this transition, including accepting responsibility for one's self, becoming financially independent, and making independent decisions (Arnett, 1998). The implications of this research suggest that the roles of emerging adults are changing within American society such that a greater emphasis is placed on the individual's level of autonomy and differentiation. How this transition is negotiated within different cultural and racial groups within the United States has yet to be explored.

*Mental Health in Emerging Adulthood*

Given the stressors associated with emerging adulthood, researchers have begun to explore the degree to which this developmental stage presents unique challenges to the mental health of young people. Of particular interest has been the prevalence of depression and substance abuse among emerging adults (Arnett, 2005; White, Laouvie & Papadaratsakis, 2005).

White, Laouvie and Papadaratsakis (2005) investigated the increase in substance abuse during the transition from high school to adulthood. Results of this research indicated an increase in substance abuse during post high school years. Non-college students reported higher levels of marijuana and cigarette use when compared to peers of the same age who attended college. In addition, non-college students appeared to display long-term risks associated with alcohol and drug related problems when compared with college students who demonstrated a time-limited risk marked by a decline in alcohol intake after the college years. Arnett (2005) hypothesizes that substance abuse may become more prevalent within the population of emerging due to several factors, including individuals' struggles with identity exploration, instability, and self focus. Arnett's (2005) argument suggests that substance abuse occurs during identity exploration as emerging adults partake in a wide range of experiences and behaviors. In addition, instability and self-focus, coupled with the absence of obligations and responsibilities, may also increase the risk and likelihood that emerging adults will engage in behaviors such as substance abuse.

In addition to the prevalence of substance abuse, emerging adulthood is also marked by the increase in depression. In 2003, The American College Health Association

reported that 10% of students were diagnosed with depression (Berry, 2004). Research conducted by Jewell and Stark, (2003) and Kenny and Sirin (2006) attempts to provide a link to depression during the years of emerging adulthood and family relationships. Jewell and Stark (2005) link parental over-involvement and enmeshment during early childhood to the presence of depression during early adulthood. Kenny and Sirin (2006) examined the current relationship between parental attachment among parents and emerging adults and the prevalence of depression. Results of this research reveal a relationship between secure parental attachment and positive self image, with a lower reported frequency of depression. Family interaction in its current form and in the context of earlier developmental periods appears to play a role in the presence of depression in emerging adults (Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Jewell & Stark, 2005).

The presence of depression and substance abuse is notably increased in the population of emerging adults. Little is known, however, about social anxiety and emerging adulthood, particularly as it relates to family patterns.

### *The Current Study*

Based on previous research and theories of emerging adulthood, one interesting set of questions becomes: Is there a relationship between family patterns and when and how individuals chose to differentiate from the family home? Is such a relationship mediated or moderated by social anxiety? Are relationships related to cultural background? The current research seeks to answer these questions by examining the interactions of specific family patterns as they relate to the presence of social anxiety and current residential status of the students.

The goal of this study is to explore the link between family interactions, social anxiety, and students' level of differentiation in emerging adulthood. This study explores differences between college students who are geographically separated from their family of origin and those residing with their family of origin, while also considering amount of contact. The purpose of this comparison is to assess any relationships that may be present between living factors and family patterns and differentiation, as well as social anxiety.

Several expected outcomes guided this research, as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Students who live at home will report higher levels of social anxiety than students geographically separated from their families of origin.

Hypothesis 2: Students residing near their families of origin will demonstrate more cohesive or enmeshed family characteristics compared to the geographically separated group.

Hypothesis 3: Students living away from their families will report more expressive family systems that foster independence between family members.

Hypothesis 4: Students living with their parents will be more enmeshed and less differentiated and will exhibit higher rates of social anxiety than students residing away from their families of origin.

Within the framework of this research, socioeconomic status is examined as it relates to the student's decision to live with or live separately from their family of origin. Indications of differentiation and social anxiety in relation to family patterns are intended to provide insight into the overall functioning of the family of origin.

## Method

### *Participants*

This study included 98 participants, 26 males and 72 females. The ages of the students ranged from 18-24 ( $M = 21$  years). All participants were currently attending a State University in Upstate New York. The majority of students (63%) had parents who also attended college. This sample consisted of 75 White, non-Hispanic students, 9 White Hispanics, 8 African Americans, 3 Asian Americans and 4 who identified another ethnicity. The ethnic breakdown of this study is similar to the ethnic breakdown of the student body attending the state college during the 2006 academic year. Of the 98 students sampled, 20 were students living at home, while 78 were residing separately from their family of origin.

Within this sample, parental education ranged from less than a high school education to post graduate degree. The distribution of the parental education was skewed towards higher education, with approximately 65% of participants reporting that their parents had at least some college credits. Table 1 reports frequencies and percentages of parent's education.

Table 2 reports the frequencies and percentages associated with the current residency of student participants and the frequency of contact with their families of origin. Approximately 77% of participants reported living away from home. Distances ranged from one minute away to over two hours away. Contact ranged from daily interactions to contact once every four months, with the majority of participants (72% percent) reporting at least monthly contact. Twenty participants also reported currently residing with their families of origin. Table 3 reports the degree to which such living

arrangements are related to financial constraints. Of the 20 participants living with their families, approximately 80% reported that finances were only some or none of the reason they chose to live at home, while 20% reported that most of the decision to live at home was due to finances.

### *Measures*

*Liebowitz social anxiety scale.* The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (1987) contains 24 items that are designed to introduce situations that may be difficult for individuals experiencing social phobia. The scale contains 13 items that measure performance anxiety and 11 items related to social anxiety. The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale contains four subscales including: 1) performance fear (e.g., telephoning in public); 2) performance avoidance (e.g., avoidance rating of telephoning in public); 3) social fear (e.g., talking to people in authority); and 4) social avoidance (e.g., avoidance rating of talking to people in authority). Participants rate each fear separately on a scale of 0 (none) to 3 (severe). Participants also rate the frequency with which they avoid certain experiences on a scale that ranges from 0 (never) to 3 (usually). The Liebowitz Social anxiety scale was the first clinically designed scale to measure social anxiety across a wide range of situations. Sub-scales for fear and avoidance are summed separately creating two scores ranges from 0 (no social anxiety) to 72 (highest level of measured social anxiety).

Research examining the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale suggests that this measure possesses strong psychometric characteristics used to evaluate social anxiety and social phobia (Fresco, Coles, Heimberg, Liebowitz, Hami, Stein & Goetz , 2001). Heimberg, Horner, Juster, Safren, Brown, Schneier, and Liebowitz (1999) found

excellent internal consistency among the distribution of sub-scales measured. Convergent validity also appeared through significant correlations with other measures of social anxiety. This research suggests that the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scales appears to be a valid and reliable measure used to identify social anxiety (Heimberg, Horner, Juster, Safren, Brown, Schneire, & Liebowitz, 1999).

Historically the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale was developed as a clinician-administered measure. Adaptations of this scale into a self-report measure were derived in efforts to save time in administration. Fresco, Coles, Heimberg, Liebowitz, Hami, Stein and Goetz (2001) examined reliability issues related to the self-reported version of the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale. This research revealed few differences between the self-reported and clinically administered versions of the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, suggesting that this is a valid measure of social anxiety in the self-report format (Fresco, Coles, Heimberg, Liebowitz, Hami, Stein & Goetz , 2001).

*Family environment scale.* The Family Environment Scale (2002) is designed to measure the context of social relationships within the family system. The scale measures the degree to which families are perceived as cohesive, expressive and conflictive. This scale also measures the development of personal growth in terms of independence, achievement orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active-recreational orientation, and moral-religious emphasis. This measure is divided into 10 subscales that allow researchers and clinicians to create an overall family profile. Based on analysis of the subscales, families are grouped into categories based on the most salient characteristics.

The three sub-scales utilized in this study assess cohesive, expressive, and conflictive relationship dimensions. Participant's scores are summed for each sub-scale

on a range from 0-9 with higher scores representing more of the identified variable. The estimated time for administration of this scale is 10-15 minutes.

The Real Form (Form R) was utilized in this study to measure the respondent's perception of actual family environments. Internal consistency of reliability estimates for the Form R suggests that distinct characteristics of family environments are reasonably consistent. Test-retest reliability also suggests that the scales appear to be relatively consistent over time (Moos & Moos, 2002). A study conducted by Gehring and Feldman (1988) supported the test-retest reliability of this measure by examining the rating of adolescents on measures of cohesion and control. Longitudinal studies conducted by Moos, Finney, and Cronkie (1990) indicate moderately high family stability reports over a one-year time span. Form R profiles appear to remain stable over time while also reflecting the changes that occur within the family system.

Moos and Moos (2002) demonstrate face and construct validity through the use of clear statements regarding family situations relevant to each of the subscales. These statements are derived from formulated definitions of each specific construct, such as cohesion and enmeshment. Each item in this instrument was prepared based on the construct definitions related to each dimension. Comparative descriptions of various family situations including distressed and normal family samples provide construct validity for this measure. Dickerson and Coyne (1987) examined the Family Environment Scale in comparison to the Family Assessment Device and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation, finding high correlations of cohesion measures between the three scales. Bloomquist and Harris (1984) found The Family Environment Scale and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) appeared to similarly identify

predictable relationships assessing family problems, family disorder, and attachment.

Bloomquist and Harris (1984) and Dickerson and Coyne (1987) provide evidence for the validity of constructs measured by the Family Environment Scale in comparison to other reliably measures predicting distinct traits within the family system.

### *Procedure*

Participating students completed questionnaires in person. Students enrolled in undergraduate courses during the spring 2006 semester and summer sessions were recruited for participation in this research. Student participation was voluntary and no form of compensation was provided. Given the target population of emerging adults, students older than 24 and younger than 18 were excluded from participating in this research.

Recruitment took place on the college campus. The surveys were administered to participants on an individual basis. Prior to administration the researcher notified students that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The researcher also informed students that their responses to inquiries would remain anonymous. Consenting students were individually administered survey packets by the primary researcher. Each packet contained an informed consent form, a demographic information form, The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (1987), and the Family Environment Scale (2002), in respective order. The packet also contained a debriefing form in a sealed envelope which participants were instructed to open after completion of all other material. Upon beginning the study, students were presented with informed consent material followed by three separate questionnaire forms. Participants were asked to provide demographic information before they began either of the two measures. This inquiry included a self

report of the participant's demographic information including gender, race, age, and socioeconomic class. The distance of current residence measured in travel time from the participant's family of origin was recorded. In addition, participations were also asked to report the amount of contact they maintain with family members. These variables were included during analysis to measure the current level of differentiation in terms of separation and independence from the participant's family of origin.

The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (1987) was completed by participants after the demographic information form. This scale contained instructions necessary to complete this measure. After the participants completed the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (1987) they were instructed to complete the next assessment. The Family Environment Scale (2002) also contained instructions for completing this measure. After the participants completed the Family Environment Scale (2002) they were instructed to read the debriefing information form and return the other measures to the researcher. Research participation ceased when the survey material was returned to the researcher. All of the surveys returned to the researcher were completed in full by participants. Due to the self-completion method of this research, participants who decided not to complete this research were not required to return any material to the researcher, and were able to cease participation at any time.

## Results

Prior to analysis, mining of the data set detected three individuals with missing data. Individuals with missing data appeared as randomly distributed occurrences and were deleted before analysis. Histograms were used to detect outliers. The outliers that were detected were attributed to faults in data entry and were corrected.

*Correlations of Demographic Variables and Residency*

A series of Pearson Product Moment correlations were conducted between demographic variables. A significant relationship emerged between mothers' education and residency, ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ). These results suggest mothers' with higher education were more likely to have children who were living independently, apart from their families of origin. A significant relationship also emerged between gender and residency ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ); female students were more likely to report living apart from their families of origin than male students. While residency was correlated to gender and mother's education, the amount of family contact was not correlated with any demographic variables. An additional significant correlation emerged between gender and fear anxiety ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ), with female students exhibiting higher rates of social anxiety. Results of these correlations suggest that while female students are more likely to be living apart from their families of origin, they are also more likely to report higher levels of fear anxiety. Results are shown in Table 4.

*Residency and Social Anxiety*

The first hypothesis stated that students living at home would report higher levels of social anxiety than students geographically separated from their families of origin. A Pearson Product Moment correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between anxiety and residency. Correlations between residency (i.e., differentiation) and social anxiety were not significant. Relationships between social anxiety and contact were also not significant

Racial differences were also examined in regards to social anxiety and residency. Due to the small sample of minority groups among participants, the results were

collapsed. To examine ethnicity, participants were divided into white and non-white groupings. A Mann-Whitney  $U$  test and series of  $t$ -tests were conducted to determine differences among the white and minority groups in social anxiety and residency. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed significant differences in mean amounts of fear and anxiety among white and minority groups. The results of this analysis indicate that the mean amount of fear and anxiety experienced by minority groups ( $M = 28.85$ ,  $SD = 14.48$ ) was significantly greater than the mean amount of fear and anxiety experienced by the white group ( $M = 22.64$ ,  $SD = 11.39$ ),  $t(92)=2.04, p<.004$ . These results suggest that minority groups exhibit higher rates of fear and anxiety as compared to the white group. Table 5 illustrates the results of these findings.

A Mann-Whitney  $U$  test was conducted to compare the means of white and non-white groups in terms of residency. Results of this test did not reveal any significant differences.

#### *Family Patterns*

The second hypothesis predicted that students living closer to their families would be characterized as more cohesive. To address the second hypothesis a Pearson Product Moment correlation was conducted to determine if a relationship was present between cohesive families and residency. A significant relationship between cohesive family patterns and residency was not determined. In addition, A Pearson Product Moment correlation was also conducted to determine the relationship between residency and family expressiveness, to address the third hypothesis that expressive families would generate independent offspring residing further away from their families of origin in emerging adulthood. The correlation between expressive family patterns and residency in

emerging adulthood was not significant. In addition, there were no significant relationships between any of the dimensions of family patterns and contact.

An additional Pearson correlation was conducted to determine the presence of a relationship between the different types of family patterns. A significant relationship was determined between cohesive and expressive family patterns ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ). These results suggest that families that display cohesive characteristics also display expressive patterns. Furthermore, a negative correlation was present between cohesive and confliction family patterns ( $r = -.56, p < .01$ ), suggesting that highly cohesive families are less likely to be conflictive.

Gender and ethnicity were also explored in terms of family patterns. While no significant relationships emerged between gender and family patterns, significant relationships did emerge among ethnicity and conflictive and cohesive family patterns. A series of *t*-tests were conducted to determine differences among the white and minority groups in family patterns. The *t*-tests revealed significant differences between cohesive family patterns among the white and non-white groups. The results indicated that the mean for minority group ( $M = 5.57, SD = 2.25$ ) was significantly less than the mean for the white group ( $M = 7.05, SD = 2.11$ ),  $t(96) = -2.91, p < .004$ . These results suggest significantly higher rates of cohesion among white families as opposed to minority families. Moreover, a *t*-test examining the means of conflictive family patterns in the white and non-white groups also yield significant differences. The results of this sample indicated that the mean amount of conflict for white families ( $M = 3.19, SD = 2.32$ ) was significantly less than the mean amount of conflict for minority families ( $M = 4.83, SD = 2.23$ ),  $t(96) = 2.99, p < .01$ . These results suggest that minority families exhibit higher

rates of conflict than white families. No significant differences emerged between white and minority groups in terms of expressiveness within the family system. An analysis of the homogeneity of variance, however, revealed that the white group had significantly more variability than the minority of group. As such, conclusions from this particular analysis are difficult to interpret.

To address the racial differences found with in this sample in terms of family patterns and fear anxiety, a series of partial correlations were conducted controlling for ethnicity. The results of these correlations did not significantly change the correlation coefficients.

### *Regression Analyses*

The forth and final hypothesis stated that students living with their parents will be more enmeshed and less differentiated and will exhibit higher levels of social anxiety than student residing away from their families of origin. A multiple regression analysis was conducted with the following predictors: residency, gender, ethnicity, and cohesive, expressive, and conflictive family patterns to determine what predicts fear anxiety. The overall model was significant,  $F(5, 88) = 2.80, p < .02$ . The model accounted for 14% of the variance, however the only variable that significantly predicted fear anxiety was gender,  $t = 2.72, p < .008$ . A second multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictors of avoidance anxiety. Gender, ethnicity, residency and family patterns were entered into the equation to determine what predicts avoidance. None of the variables significantly determined what predicts avoidant anxiety.

### Discussion

This study examined the dimensions of family relationships, social anxiety, and individuation in emerging adulthood. Although the hypotheses of this research were not supported, other aspects of family relationships can be examined within the context of this research. In addition, further examination into possible explanations as to why the hypotheses were rejected may also provide insight into future areas of investigation.

The first hypothesis of this research dealt with residency and social anxiety. While a relationship did not emerge between residency and social anxiety, significant correlations did emerge between gender and residency, and gender and fear related anxiety. These correlations revealed elevated levels of fear and anxiety in females, in addition to more female students deciding to live apart from their families of origin. Although the females in this sample did report higher levels of fear anxiety, there was no correlation between gender and avoidant anxiety. These results suggest that although the fear is present, it was present in the absence of tendencies to avoid the feared stimuli. This may be why females in this sample, although anxious, were still able to live apart from their families of origin, instead of avoiding this experience. Another possibility is that once moved away, women are more likely to develop fear anxiety. Such an idea is supported by the work of Seiffge-Krenkle (2006) who demonstrated that students who leave home “on time” (i.e., by age 21) also display more internalizing and externalizing symptoms than students who continue to live with their parents. Although this seems counter-intuitive, this researcher suggests that there may be a price that comes along with autonomy including the burden of dealing with developmental tasks apart from their family of origin. Although beyond the bounds of this study, the results of this study suggest that women who move away from their family of origin may develop fear anxiety

in the absence a daily support system. Additional research based on college students and their non-college peers may provide further insight into this issue.

Males in this sample displayed lower levels of anxiety but were also less likely to live further apart from their families. This interesting finding may indicate that males are less anxious because they are deciding to stay at home. Further examination of this sample in future research may provide insight into the decisions male students make regarding residency during the college years.

Although the current research did not find significant differences in anxiety levels related to where students are living during the college years, there are several ways these results may be interpreted. One alternative explanation may be that a certain amount of anxiety may be a positive factor during college. Within this sample, the presence of higher levels of fear anxiety with an absence of avoidance anxiety demonstrates that some students were not avoiding the feared stimuli. The fear related anxiety may be related to a functional amount of anxiety optimal to motivate students to attend classes, complete assignments, and engage in other positive tasks within the college environment.

The second hypothesis of this research predicted that students residing near their families of origin would demonstrate more cohesive or enmeshed family characteristics compared to the geographically separated group. Results indicated no differences between students living at home or away in levels of family cohesion. Regarding this hypothesis, there are shortcomings that need to be considered when examining these results pertaining to the methodology used to assess this hypothesis. The cohesive subscale of the family environment scale (Moos & Moos, 2002) generated responses to inquiries about the closeness of family members. While this subscale determined the

closeness of family members, it appeared to reflect healthy close relationships as opposed to enmeshed, non-healthy patterns. Upon re-consideration of this methodology, a scale that specifically determined maladaptive enmeshment and cohesion would weed out participants with healthy close relationships. This may have been more appropriate for the purposes of this research. Future investigation utilizing a more nuanced instrument aimed at examining only maladaptive enmeshed families may provide more insight on this topic.

The third hypothesis of this research predicted that students living away from their families would report more expressive family systems that foster independence between family members. As discussed earlier, it appears that the cohesive subscale revealed the presence of close, yet healthy family relationships. That being said it is hypothesized that it would be difficult to weed out cohesive (close) and expressive (healthy) family patterns to determine differences in geographical separation. There seemed to be a great deal of overlap between the cohesive and expressive groups, with expressive families reporting high levels of closeness within the family. The intent of the research was not to measure the closeness of family systems but to instead determine the maladaptive results produced within cohesive/enmeshed families. The overlap between cohesive and expressive family patterns indicates that the measure did not get at what the study intended to measure. Such an overlap between the two groups makes it difficult to note differences in terms of social anxiety and differentiation. Since this research was looking to examine maladaptive patterns of enmeshment, these patterns could not also reflect healthy systems. Results of this research indicate that cohesive and expressive patterns are highly correlated. If the cohesive scale had assessed the presence of

maladaptive enmeshment, then altering levels of geographical separation could be explored among different family patterns of interaction.

The last hypothesis stated that students living with their parents will be more enmeshed and less differentiated and will exhibit higher levels of social anxiety than student residing away from their families of origin. Although not significant, cohesive families had the highest correlation to residency, and the lowest levels of social anxiety. As discussed previously, there are flaws in the measure of enmeshment in this research. Upon examination of the results, it is hypothesized that a more accurate measure of family enmeshment with maladaptive components would reveal altering levels of social anxiety and differentiation that those present in this research.

All four hypothesis deal directly with differentiation levels in terms of geographical separation among college students as a population. During the emerging adulthood years independence from one's family is extremely relevant, with the task to separate psychologically from one's family of origin and form one's own identity. By choosing to pursue educational interests, college students have already begun the processes of separating their thinking and aspirations from their family of origin. Since the participants in this study were all college students, it is likely that this sample would have higher rates of differentiation than the general population of emerging adults who are not students. Results yielded from a sample of college students and their same aged, non-student peers may provide a more accurate investigation of differentiation among emerging adults. These interactions could be examined in future research investigating the developmental transitions of emerging adults.

Additional factors relevant to the results of this research relate to the sample of participants. Although the sample of minority groups was small, cultural differences emerged in terms of fear, anxiety, and cohesive and conflicted family patterns. The majority of participants in this research described themselves as White, with a relatively small number of African American, Hispanic, and Asian participants. A series of independent *t*-tests revealed significant differences between white and non-white groups in terms of family patterns and fear related social anxiety. Minority groups on average reported higher levels of family conflict, and lower levels of cohesion and expression within the family. In addition, this research found a significant relationship between minority and white groups in terms of fear and anxiety within social situations. Although an overall link between family patterns and social anxiety has not been determined in this context, previous research among African Americans indicates a link between negative family interaction patterns and the development of anxiety in childhood and adolescents (Grover, Ginsburg, & Lalongo, 2005). Additional research provides a link between conflictive family patterns and depression in minority groups during the adolescent years (Constantine, 2006). It appears that in the context of the current research, cultural background is a factor in relation to the presence of family conflict and fear related anxiety for minority groups. Future investigation with a broader and more culturally diverse sample may generate additional insight into factors contributing to differentiation and social anxiety as a result of culturally determined family patterns.

Additional issues related to family conflict should also be considered. Although no significant differences were found between residency, family patterns, and social anxiety, findings from this study introduce several interesting possibilities. As discussed

previously, a certain amount of functional or positive anxiety and conflict may produce healthy offspring within a family system. Although students may experience conflict with caregivers from time to time, this conflict may have positive implications during emerging adulthood. For example, a certain amount of conflict is expected during the adolescent years as teenagers attempt to gain freedom by testing boundaries and the limits of parental control; this conflict may increase moralistic behavior and responsibility. Moreover, some types of conflict might teach young people to value their own minds as they learn how to develop and defend their own positions and ideas that differ from their parents' opinions. Presumably, this might "launch" emerging adults into the world as capable, high functioning individuals who can deal with challenges. On the other hand, high levels of negative conflict may push individuals out of the house as a means of escape, even when they have not learned how to effectively deal with conflict and difficulties. In contrast, family conflict may create low self-esteem and low self-confidence which "paralyzes" young people to remain at home. Clearly, such issues are complex and warrant future investigation. In particular, future qualitative research may provide further explanation of the factors contributing to a student's decision to reside with or apart from their family during the emerging adulthood years.

#### *Additional Findings and Future Implications*

Although this research did not support the initial hypotheses suggested, other interesting findings emerged upon analysis. One finding of this study indicated that maternal education is correlated to residency decisions in emerging adulthood. The associations between mother's level of education and the positive effects on their offspring have been demonstrated in other studies. Previous research indicates that

mother's level of education is significantly related to emotional well being and the quality of the parent-child attachment relationship in emerging adulthood (Kenny & Sirin, 2006). In addition, Zhan (2002) reported a significant relationship between mother's level of education and high school graduation rates. The results of the current study, in conjunction with previous research, support the notion that educated mothers may play a role in cultivating children who are secure and differentiated during the emerging adulthood period.

Expressive and cohesive family patterns also emerged as highly correlated in the context of this research. In addition, conflictive family patterns were negatively correlated with levels of cohesion within the family of origin. These results are two fold, suggesting that close-knit families tend to function in a healthy and supportive matter while avoiding conflict. As stated previously, it is suspected that the measure used in this research may not have accurately separated the two categories. Although this is a possibility, it is also important to explore similarities between cohesive and expressive patterns that emerged in previous research. One study links cohesive and expressive family patterns to positive psychological functioning in adolescents, whereas conflicted patterns were linked to negative functioning (Burt, Cohen & Bjorck, 1988). Furthermore, research suggests that college students from cohesive and expressive families are more likely to display lower levels of anger than students from conflicted families (Lopez & Thurman, 1993). Moreover, Albertson and Kagan (1988) found that college professors from cohesive and expressive families of origin were associated with opened ended and successful styles of teaching. While there are similar outcomes present among expressive

and cohesive families, it is speculated that within this research the two dimensions were not clearly delineated.

Within the context of this research it is also important to address elements of social anxiety. A significant relationship emerged between gender and social anxiety, suggesting that females in the emerging adulthood period experience higher rates of social anxiety than males during this period. These findings are generally supported by research on anxiety and gender differences. Higher prevalence rates of social anxiety are reported among women as compared to men (Dell'Osso, Rucci, Ducci, Ciapparelli, Vivarelli, Carlini, Ramacciotti, & Cassano, 2003). Additional research suggests that adolescent females report high levels of social anxiety than males in this age group (Inderbitzen & Hope, 1995). Furthermore, research also suggests that lifetime prevalence rates of social anxiety are higher in females than in males (Weinstock, 1999).

In conclusion, although the hypotheses of this research were not supported, interesting findings and further research questions have been generated as a result of this study. Supplementary interpretation and investigation into these elements of family life may provide further insight on this topic. In addition, further research on the differences between college students and their college-aged peers in differentiation and social anxiety may provide further knowledge on these subjects.

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Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages of Parental Education*

| Education                | Mother    |            | Father    |            |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|                          | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| No High School           | 2         | 2.0        | 0         | 0          |
| Some High School         | 4         | 4.1        | 7         | 7.1        |
| High School Degree       | 22        | 22.4       | 23        | 23.5       |
| General Education Degree | 6         | 6.1        | 5         | 5.1        |
| Some College             | 21        | 21.4       | 15        | 15.3       |
| Bachelor Degree          | 24        | 24.5       | 21        | 21.4       |
| Post Graduate Degree     | 19        | 19.4       | 27        | 27.6       |

Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages of Residency and Contact*

| Residency                                 | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Living at Home                            | 20        | 20.4       |
| Living 1-30 Minutes Away                  | 7         | 7.1        |
| Living 31-60 Minutes Away                 | 11        | 11.2       |
| Living 61-90 Minutes Away                 | 6         | 6.1        |
| Living 1 hour and 30 minutes-2 hours Away | 21        | 21.4       |
| More than 2 hours Away                    | 33        | 33.7       |
| Contact                                   | Frequency | Percentage |
| Daily                                     | 22        | 22.4       |
| Weekly                                    | 12        | 12.2       |
| Monthly                                   | 37        | 37.8       |
| Every Two Months                          | 15        | 15.3       |
| Every Three Months                        | 7         | 7.1        |
| Every Four Months or More                 | 5         | 5.1        |

Table 3

*Frequency and Percentages of Students Living at Home Due to Finances*

| Amount of the decision to live<br>at home based on finances | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Most of the decision  | 4         | 20         |
| Some of the decision  | 10        | 50         |
| None of the decision  | 6         | 30         |

Table 4

*Correlations among Measures*

| Measure              | 1  | 2    | 3     | 4    | 5     | 6    | 7     | 8    | 9     | 10     | 11   | 12    |
|----------------------|----|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|--------|------|-------|
| 1. Age               | -- | -.14 | .60** | -.15 | -.09  | -.09 | -.10  | .04  | .02   | .04    | -.17 | -.17  |
| 2. Gender            |    | --   | .13   | -.07 | .08   | .29* | .16   | .09  | .02   | -.01   | .26* | .13   |
| 3. Credits           |    |      | --    | -.13 | -.04  | .10  | .12   | .07  | -.02  | -.01   | .03  | -.09  |
| 4. Mother's Ed       |    |      |       | --   | .42** | .24* | .19   | .04  | .01   | -.11   | -.11 | -.11  |
| 5. Father's Ed       |    |      |       |      | --    | .10  | .09   | -.02 | -.06  | -.15   | -.06 | -.03  |
| 6. Residency         |    |      |       |      |       | --   | .77** | .11  | .01   | -.09   | -.07 | -.13  |
| 7. Contact           |    |      |       |      |       |      | --    | .11  | .04   | -.10   | -.12 | -.10  |
| 8. Cohesive          |    |      |       |      |       |      |       | --   | .35** | -.56** | -.18 | -.15  |
| 9. Expressive        |    |      |       |      |       |      |       |      | --    | -.16   | -.14 | .02   |
| 10. Conflictive      |    |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |       | --     | .15  | .14   |
| 11. Fear Anxiety     |    |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |        | --   | .73** |
| 12. Avoidant Anxiety |    |      |       |      |       |      |       |      |       |        |      | --    |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 5

*Mean Differences among Racial/Ethnic Groups*

| Ethnicity Grouping | Non-White |       | White |       |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    | M         | SD    | M     | SD    |
| Cohesive           | 5.57      | 2.25  | 7.05  | 2.11  |
| Expressive         | 5.58      | 2.07  | 5.04  | 1.30  |
| Conflictive        | 4.83      | 2.23  | 3.19  | 2.32  |
| Fear or Anxiety    | 28.85     | 14.48 | 22.64 | 11.39 |
| Avoidance          | 25.64     | 11.58 | 21.36 | 11.05 |

## Appendix A

**Demographic Information:**


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**Gender:** *(please circle one)*                      Male                      Female

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**Age** \_\_\_\_\_                      **College Credits Completed** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Highest level of education completed by your mother (or guardian):***(Please Circle One)*

Some High School                      High School Degree                      General Education Degree

Some College                      Bachelor Degree                      Post Graduate Degree

**Highest level of education completed by your father:***(Please Circle One)*

Some High School                      High School Degree                      General Education Degree

Some College                      Bachelor Degree                      Post Graduate Degree

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Which of the following best describes your ethnic identity:

*(Please circle one)*

African American                      Asian American                      White, non-Hispanic

White, Hispanic                      Middle-Eastern American                      Eskimo

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please estimate the distance in time it would take to drive from your current residence to the current residence of a parent or guardian:

*(Please circle one)*

0 minutes (living with family)                      1-30 minutes                      31-60 minutes

60 minutes-1 hour and 30 minutes    1 hour and 30 minutes-2 hours                      More than 2 hours

**Approximately how often do you see your parent(s) or guardian?**

Everyday                      Weekly                      Monthly

Every Two Months    Every Three Months    Every Four Months or More

**If living at home:****How much of your decision to live at home was based on financial restraints?**

(1) Most of the decision    (2) Some of the decision    (3) None of the decision

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