

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY AND STUDENTS'  
ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

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PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY AND STUDENTS'  
ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

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## VITA

Heath Alan Willingham, son of John Willingham and Judy Flowers Stalcup, was born July 2, 1974 in Birmingham, Alabama. He graduated from Bradshaw High School in Florence, Alabama, in 1992. After graduating from Auburn University in 1997 with a Bachelor of Science in Family and Child Development, he received a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee in 1999 and completed a Master of Science in Community Counseling from the University of South Alabama in 2003. He is also a Licensed Professional Counselor. Heath married Shanna Leigh (Cates) Willingham, daughter of Paul Cates and Janet Cates, May 29, 1999. They have two children, Sophia and Sara.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT  
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY AND STUDENTS'  
ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

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The purpose of the current study was to examine the possible relationship between an individual's perceptions of emotional availability from their parents and their adjustment to college. Differences in parental roles and gender of participants were also discussed. Participants included 153 males (64) and females (89) from one private university and one public university in the Southeastern United States. Their class standing ranged from freshmen to juniors and age ranges were 18 to 21. Participants were asked to complete instruments asking about their perceptions of parental emotional availability (LEAP) and their adjustment to college (SACQ). Regression and correlational analyses were used to analyze the data.

The current study found both positive and negative relationships between the variables of emotional availability and college adjustment. Some of these relationships were found to be statistically significant. The most noteworthy finding in the current study was that female participant's perception of mother's emotional availability was significantly related to their social adjustment to college.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Emotional Availability

Emotional availability is a relatively recent concept that has evolved from the original foundations of attachment theory (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982). Although the practical application of emotional availability is more reciprocal in nature than attachment theory, many of the relational constructs identified in the context of emotional availability are consistent with those identified in attachment theory (Emde, 2000). In fact, research suggests that a strong connection exists between attachment and emotional availability and that the two concepts are very closely related (Biringen, 2000; Biringen, Damon, Grigg, Mone, Pipp-Seigel, Skillern, & Stratton, 2005; Biringen & Robinson 1991; Bretherton, 2000; Emde, 2000; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985).

The conceptualization of emotional availability, including its definition has changed over time with a number of researchers studying and adding to the concept (Biringen, Robinson & Emde, 2000a; Biringen, Robinson & Emde, 2000b; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985; Lum & Phares, 2005). Primarily, emotional availability describes the quality of mutual emotional expressions within a relationship between an individual (traditionally an infant or toddler) and their primary care giver (Biringen & Robinson, 1991; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). This includes four characteristics of parental behavior and two characteristics of child behavior.

The first parental characteristic, parental sensitivity is a term that refers to the process of a parent's responsiveness to their child's emotional signals and interactions. The parent is accepting of their child's emotional states and needs, and is flexible enough to be creative and sensitive in ways they respond to their children. The second characteristic is parental structuring. Parental structuring refers to the structural quality of parent's interactions with their child. Compared with Vygotsky's (1962) concepts of scaffolding and zone of proximal development, the parent provides guidance and creates the foundation and framework for their children to learn and explore their environment. Third, parental non-intrusiveness, describes the parent's ability to be available to their child without intruding or thwarting the child's sense of autonomy so the child can experience the world in an age-appropriate way. The fourth characteristic of parental behavior is parental non-hostility. This characteristic is rated on a continuum and can range from non-existent hostile behavior to midpoint behaviors including impatience and discontent, and overt hostility including threats and abuse (Pipp-Siegle, 1998; Biringen, et al., 2000).

The first characteristic of child behavior is child responsiveness. This term refers to a balance of the child's behavior between responding to the parent during activities and participating in activities independently. When the parent engages the child, the child responds with interest but without a sense of coercion or necessity. The second characteristic, child involvement, refers to the child's engagement of the parent into their play and interactions. Optimally, this engagement is emotionally positive, comfortable and free flowing. (Pipp-Siegle, 1998; Biringen, 2000).

Traditionally, in the context of emotional availability and attachment, research has identified the primary caregiver as the individual's mother (Biringen & Robinson, 1991; Egeland & Erikson, 1987; Egeland & Farber, 1984; Emde, 1980; Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Parker, Tupling & Brown, 1979; Schafer, 1965). However, researchers have also included fathers in much of the literature concerning emotional availability and attachment (Baumrind, 1991; Biringen & Robinson, 1991; Fox, Kimmerly, & Shafer, 1991; Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier & Contreras, 2000; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999; Lovas, 2005; Lum & Phares, 2005; Phares & Renk, 1998; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994) though the father has rarely been considered the primary caregiver. Regardless of which parent is considered the primary caregiver, research suggests that both the presence of emotional availability as well as its absence is a factor in an individual's psychological health (Easterbrooks & Biringen, 2000; Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Ziv, Aviezer, Gini, Sagi, & Koren-Karie, 2000), quality of their attachment to parents, significant others, and other types of relationships (Aviezer et al., 1999; Bretherton, 2000). This research includes several assessments created to identify the mother's and father's level of emotional availability and attachment. Specific to emotional availability, Biringen et al. (1991/1998) developed the Emotional Availability Scales to assess the quality of emotional availability in relationships between caregivers and infants, toddlers, and elementary aged children using the criterion mentioned above (Pipp-Siegle, 1998).

More recently, Lum and Phares (2005) have developed a psychometrically sound emotional availability scale to assess children's, adolescent's and college student's perception of their parent's emotional availability. This scale, known as the Lum

Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP) measure, was created using previous emotional availability scales, (Biringen, Robinson, & Emde, 1998) as well as emotional availability and attachment research (Lum & Phares, 2005). The LEAP is a self-reporting measure that includes 30 items (15 for mother and 15 for father) involving an individual's perception of their parent's emotional availability. Each parent is rated using a 6 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always) with the highest score possible being 90 for each parent and 180 for both. Higher scores on the LEAP correlate with higher ratings of emotional availability from parents.

#### Student Adjustment to College

The transition to college is a new experience for all those attending classes and for many individuals it is a period that can be somewhat tumultuous. There are decisions and challenges that have never been faced before, expectations to be met (both academically and socially) as well as personal struggles that can manifest both mentally and physically (Lustman, Sowa, & O'Hara, 1984). For some this transition is not overcome and the individual will either transfer to another institution or drop out completely. However, there are also those individuals who make the transition with relative ease and continue to function within their college or university context without the manifestation of any academic or psycho-social issues (Robbins, Lese, & Herrick, 1993).

Related to attachment theory, the transition to college has been likened to the Strange Situation discussed in Ainsworth et al. (1978). Kenny (1987) described the transition to college as a naturally occurring separation that triggers attachment responses. As with infants in the Strange Situation studies, college students are leaving their secure base and also exploring, discovering and mastering a new environment.



Among other things, this new environment includes academic adjustments, beginning new relationships, organization of time and energy, identity development and a growing focus on career development. (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Kenny & Rice, 1995). This can be a daunting task to an unprepared underclassman. Reactions to feelings of apprehension and insecurity can make a significant difference in how successful an individual is at adjusting to and completing college (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003).

It is important for anyone attending college to be prepared for the pressures they will face. So what makes the difference in how individuals are prepared? What factors contribute to a student's adjustment and success in college? It has been suggested that an individual's adjustment to college has more to do with emotional health rather than academic factors (Szulecka, Springett, & de Pauw, 1987) and other research supports this perspective (Leafgran, 1989; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Emotional health has been associated with student performance, both academically and socially, and with retention and success rates in college (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Rice & Mirzadeh, 2000; Szulecka, et al., 1987).

As mentioned above emotional availability from an individual's parents promotes emotional health and the connection between emotional availability and attachment is solid. Conversely, studies concerning adjustment to college have provided evidence that a secure attachment to an individual's parents is an accurate predictor of college adjustment and success (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Kenny, 1990; Mattanah, Hancock & Brand, 2004; Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley & Gibbs, 1995). Therefore, it is possible that higher levels of emotional availability from an individual's parents, because of the clear links

with attachment, may also provide the security for an individual's successful adjustment to college.

Several instruments exist for measuring an individual's adjustment to college. These instruments focus on academic adjustment (Borow, 1949) satisfaction with college, (Vinsel, Brown, Altman & Foss, 1980) academic, social, personal-emotional adjustment and goal and goal commitment-institutional attachment, (Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989) and the need for students to receive counseling or developmental support (Anton & Reed, 1991).

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989) will be used in the present research study due to the prominence of use in other studies and the already established connection between attachment and the SACQ (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

The SACQ is a 67 item inventory designed to measure adjustment to college through exploration of four main areas, 1) academic adjustment (24 items), social adjustment (20 items), personal-emotional adjustment (15 items), and goal commitment-institutional attachment (15 items). These items are rated on a Likert scale 1-9 with responses ranging from "Doesn't apply to me at all" and "Applies very closely to me." The SACQ has been found to be psychometrically sound for groups and individuals and takes approximately 20 minutes to complete (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992).

The authors of the SACQ had two goals in mind in developing the instrument. First they wanted to be able to assess "personality and environmental determinants" of college student adjustment and second they wanted to create a measure that would help

identify those who might benefit from remedial interventions such as counseling or academic tutoring (Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989; Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992)

### Purpose

The purpose of the present research study is to investigate whether or not emotional availability of parents is related to an individual's adjustment to college. Using the Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP, Lum & Phares, 2005) measure and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ, Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989) the present study will attempt to provide evidence of positive associations between the two variables. Previous research shows statistically significant positive correlations between attachment and adjustment to college (Gratz, Conrad, & Roemer, 2002; Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Kenny, 1990; Mattanah, et al., 2004; Rice, et al., 1995). Provided the connection between attachment and emotional availability, (Biringen & Robinson 1991; Biringen, 2000; Biringen, et al., 2005a; Bretherton, 2000; Emde, 2000; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985) it is plausible that the same correlations may be found between emotional availability and adjustment to college.

### Significance of Study

Maladjustment and dropping out of college is a problem for college faculty and staff, parents, and the students themselves. In addition, research suggests that although enrollment of college students in the United States is increasing, graduation rates are actually decreasing (Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 1996). If a relationship between emotional availability and adjustment to college can be found, college faculty and staff could be provided with an additional framework to address and mediate adjustment and retention related issues.

In the context of adjustment to college, the current study would also provide another perspective of how the influence of parent's behavior impacts college adjustment and/or success. Though the similarities between emotional availability and attachment have been a focus thus far, it is also important to understand the difference between the two ideas and how measuring emotional availability could enhance the understanding of how the more reciprocal process influences adjustment to college.

The findings from the current study may also further strengthen and provide a broader understanding of emotional availability and its connection to the attachment bond. The need for this research in emotional availability has been suggested in the literature due to its relatively recent conceptualization (Biringen, 2000; Emde, 2000; Lum & Phares, 2005; Reese, Kieffer, & Briggs, 2002). Also, if a significant relationship between scores on the LEAP and SACQ is found, more can be understood about the impact of emotional availability in parent-child relationships due to the already established connection between emotional availability and attachment and an individual's functioning in later life (Baumrind, 1991; Bretherton, 2000; Easterbrooks & Biringen, 2000; Lum & Phares, 2005).

Furthermore, to date, only one other research article exists using the LEAP measure (Renk, McKinney, Klein, & Oliveros, 2006). The current study could provide further validity to the LEAP measure in the professional literature and continue to add to the plethora of information about adjustment to college.

## Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the relationship between emotional availability and level of college adjustment?
2. Does the relationship between emotional availability and level of college adjustment differ according to parental role?
3. Does the relationship between emotional availability and level of college adjustment differ according to gender?

## Definition of Terms

1. Emotional Availability: This term refers to the degree to which parents and children express emotions and are responsive to the emotions of the other (Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). This includes interdependent levels of responsiveness, sensitivity and emotional involvement between parent and child (Biringen & Robinson, 1991). In the current study emotional availability will be measured by scores on the LEAP measure.
2. Caregiver: This term refers to the individual that provides the most amount of care to an infant or toddler and to whom the infant or toddler acknowledges as a preferred figure of attachment. Throughout the literature the term caregiver is usually associated with an individual's mother; however it is also used synonymously with the term attachment figure which could identify the father or anyone to whom the individual becomes attached (i.e. step-parent, adoptive parent). When given the LEAP measure to identify emotional availability,

participants who did not live with their parents were be asked to answer the question based upon who they considered their primary caregiver(s).

3. Adjustment to college: This term refers to a developmental and transitional process (Huff, 2001) in which an individual becomes more adept at navigating and succeeding in the new college environment. For the purpose of this study adjustment to college will be defined by the ability of the students' to adjust to academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional expectations. Level of adjustment will be measured by the SACQ.

### Summary

This chapter includes a summation of the current study. The concepts of emotionally availability and adjustment to college are discussed and briefly defined. Emotional availability has developed from the foundations of attachment theory and adjustment to college is an important factor in university programming and student retention. The concepts will be discussed further and compared to examine any possible relationship between the two. The purpose of the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study, measures used and definitions of terms are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, emotional availability has its roots in the concepts of attachment theory first presented by Bowlby (1969/1982) and later by Ainsworth (et al., 1978). From this foundation, emotional availability had developed into an invaluable construct, and through much research, has been found to be a valid predictor of performance in the lives of individuals.

The first mention of emotional availability in the context of the infant caregiver relationship occurred in Mahler, et al. (1975). It was in this work that emotional availability was used to describe the emotional relationship between a mother and her child characterized by supportiveness, comfort and emotional refueling (Mahler et al., 1975). Emde, who first began researching emotional availability in the 1980's, saw the potential for emotional availability to be used as a preventional construct in working with families at risk and encouraged further research on the topic (Emde, 1980). Later Biringer joined Emde in this research and, with the assistance of other colleagues, developed the concept further and created the first Emotional Availability Scales (EAS) for use in observation and research in 1988. From the early 1990's to present day, Biringer, with the accompaniment of several colleagues, began to explore more uses for the EAS and researched socioeconomic, psychosocial, and other multicultural variables

impacting the practical uses of emotional availability in research and development. This also led to a second and third edition of the EAS published in 1993 and 1998.

Over the past 25 years Biringen and several other researchers have elaborated on the construct of emotional availability and added new perspectives to the function and uses of emotional availability as well as the EAS. This process has recently culminated in Biringen's first book on the subject, *Raising a Secure Child*, published in 2004. As seen in *Raising a Secure Child* as well as past and present research on emotional availability, the years of observation, research and publication, have built upon the foundations of attachment theory which remain a secure base for study and research of emotional availability.

#### Attachment Theory

Many works were completed about human behavior and attachment prior to the publication of Bowlby's *Attachment and Loss* in 1969. However, this research only identified parts of behavior and attachment and made no connection to a whole workable theory. Bowlby incorporated this previous research as well as his own observations concerning evolutionary and ethological foundations into a theory of how infants and caregivers respond to each other in a myriad of circumstances that could be identified as a theory of attachment.

The basic premise of attachment theory is that an infant's desire to be with the caregiver is precipitated by specific behaviors known as attachment behaviors.

Attachment behaviors are defined as behaviors that are designed to bring the infant into closer proximity with the caregiver. These behaviors include smiling, rooting, sucking, crying, grasping, following, approaching, clinging etc. (Bowlby, 1969/1982).



From birth the infant becomes more adept at using these behaviors successfully and, as the infant matures, such behaviors become increasingly focused on the mother or primary caregiver (attachment figure) to bring the infant into proximity with the individual that the infant prefers to be closest to. The behaviors exhibited by the infant will in turn, encourage what Bowlby termed caregiving behaviors. Caregiving behavior is defined as reciprocal behavior from the caregiver in response to attachment behavior that brings both into proximity (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Attachment behaviors serve a variety of needs, most notably the needs of survival including nourishment and warmth. However, as infants mature physical needs become less associated with attachment. For instance, Bowlby (1969/1982) observed that human as well as non-human infants became more attached to the preferred figure, whether animate or inanimate due to factors outside the realm of nourishment or warmth. During these observations it was noted that regardless of the nourishment or warmth capability of the attachment figure, the infant would still use attachment behaviors to create proximity with the figure. For example, when an infant explored the local environment and a dangerous stimulus was presented, the infant ceased to explore and returned immediately to the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

### *The Strange Situation*

These and other attachment behaviors were also observed in studies conducted by Mary Ainsworth et al. (1978). In her work *Patterns of Attachment* published in 1978, Ainsworth and her colleagues explored the concept of attachment through an observational procedure known as the Strange Situation. The Strange Situation was a study of 106 infants and their mothers to observe how the infants would react in specific situations that

threatened proximity with the mothers. Specifically, the observers examined “use of mother as a ‘secure base’ from which to explore, responses to a stranger, and responses to separation from the mother” (Ainsworth, et al., 1978, p. 255).

An infant and a mother were observed in an “experimental room” that was unfamiliar to the infant, though not thought to be threatening. Each observation was divided into eight episodes with the first episode being the introduction of the mother and infant to the observation room. The following seven episodes were allotted 3 minutes each, unless more or less time was needed due to the infant’s amount of distress. The infant was watched to see if he or she would move away from the mother to play with the new toys previously set up in the room. While the mother was still in the room a stranger entered, spoke to the mother and later attempted to engage the child. Once the allotment of time had passed the mother left the room. It was expected that when the mother left, there would be a noted increase in anxiety from the infant. A few minutes later the mother was instructed to return and attempt to interest the children in the toys again. Once the next allotment of time passed both the mother and the stranger left the room and the infant was alone in the unfamiliar environment. In the next episode the stranger entered the room without the mother and attempted to interact with the child. In the final episode the mother re-entered the room and picked the infant up and the stranger left (Ainsworth, et al., 1978).

From these episodes, Ainsworth, et al. made several observations concerning exploratory behavior, responses to the stranger, and responses to separation. The first observation concerning exploratory behavior noted that attachment behavior tended to “be activated” when a sense of alarm (i.e. the stranger) was present within the infant. If

the infants felt in danger they would immediately seek proximity with the mother. Second, when the mothers left the room, the infants explored far less, indicating that attachment has an impact on the infants desire or willingness to explore and discover. In regards to responses to the stranger, it was found that the infants' "fear system" was stronger when the stranger was present. Only 3% of the infants approached the stranger, compared to the earlier episode when 80% approached the toys while mother was present. However, most of the infants exhibited a combination of both friendly and wary behavior toward the stranger. It seemed that the mothers' presence provided some sense of security, at least while the mothers and the strangers were in the room together. In the observations of the responses to separation from the mother it was discovered that more infants were distressed over the second separation than the first; indicating that the previous separation contributed to the infants being more alert to the possibility of a second separation (Ainsworth, et al., 1978).

Infant-mother attachment was characterized by the response of the infant during the reunion episodes. Ainsworth and her colleagues observed that infants were proximity seeking, avoidant, or angry-resistant during these reunions. Based upon the infant's behavior a classification of secure, insecure-avoidant, or insecure-ambivalent was given (Ainsworth, et al., 1978).

Ainsworth also found that a secure attachment to the primary caregiver was essential for children to securely attach to someone or something else (Ainsworth, et al., 1978). Steier and Lehman (2000) found this to be the case in their study of 50 mother-toddler dyads. The study indicated that the mother's personality was highly correlated with their child's attachment to a soft object.

### *Attachment and Fathers*

As mentioned above, the majority of research concerning attachment (as well as emotional availability) has focused on the mother as the attachment figure or primary caregiver. However, the attachment relationship between infants and their fathers has also been discussed. For instance, Fox, Kimmerly, and Schafer (1991) reviewed several studies of the Strange Situation and found that infants behaved similarly in separation episodes regardless of which parent was present. In their goal of describing infant temperament and its effect on attachment, they found that according to the parameters set in the Strange Situation, secure and insecure attachments are similar for both mothers and fathers (Fox, et al., 1991).

Main and Weston (1981) conducted the strange situation with 61 infants and their mothers and fathers. They found that infants who were “non-secure” with mothers, but “secure” with fathers tended to interact with the stranger in a friendly manner. Including the other findings in this study, it is believed that infants develop different kinds of attachment relationships with those whom they have the opportunity to interact (or attach to). In addition, “the ‘effects’ of an insecure relationship can be mitigated by a secure relationship” (Main & Weston, 1981, p. 939). The study of the strange situation has been and continues to be repeated in numerous studies across the United States and world wide, finding similar results (Ainsworth, et al., 1978; Main & Weston, 1981; Fox, et al., 1991; Kerns, et al., 2000).

Research including fathers also considers attachment with older children. In a study of fathers, as well as mothers, Kerns, et al. (2000) looked at the relationships between a 176 9-12 years olds and their parents. Specific observations included the

child's perception of security, preoccupied and avoidant coping strategies, and state of mind with respect to attachment. The parent's willingness to be an attachment figure was also considered in the assessment. It was found that attachment to mothers and fathers was similar in the identification and establishment of emotional bonds with their children and that these bonds did not change over time. It was further noted that the attachment measures used by the researchers were valid and reliable for fathers, though not as strongly as mothers (Kerns, et al., 2000).

#### *Attachment and Peer Relationships*

Considering patterns of attachment and peer relationships, Lieberman, et al. (1999) studied 541 late childhood and early adolescents. This study found children's perceptions of mother's and father's availability in late childhood and early adolescence to be important for developing peer relationships. It was also found that the father's role in influencing peer relationships was larger than previously thought. The father's role seemed to be more important in predicting the "positive friendship quality" and "lower conflict" in their children's best friendships (Lieberman, et al., 1999).

#### *Parent's vs. Children's Perceptions in Attachment*

It has been a concern among researchers that attachment theory only focuses on the child's perception of the attachment relationship (Bretherton, Biringen, Ridgeway, Maslin, & Sherman, 1989). Bretherton, et al. (1989) continues to report that parents also exhibit attachment behaviors when proximity is threatened. According to Bretherton and her colleagues, parents...

tend to keep a watchful eye on their infant, to intervene when the infant is getting into a potentially painful or harmful situation, to experience feelings of alarm when the infant's whereabouts are not known or the infant's well-being is in danger, and to feel relief when the child is found or the danger past (p.205).

Bowlby did consider this when he discussed maternal retrieving behavior, though it was not a focus of his theory of attachment (Bretherton, et al., 1989). He observed that mothers tend to stay within "eyeshot or earshot" of their infants and any distress would cause the mother to act immediately. Bowlby (1969) agrees that "most mothers experience a strong pull to be close to their babies and young" (p. 241).

Bretherton et al. (1989) also found correlations between parent's perceptions of "attachment-related issues" and their willingness to verbalize their thoughts concerning attachment in their families. They reported that regardless of whether or not the parents studied had secure or insecure attachments while growing up, the values placed on attachment and their willingness to discuss attachment-related issues was positively correlated with secure attachment in their relationships with their own children.

Perception of parent's availability and attachment was also the topic of a recent study of 81 adults in a study of self-worth, depression and attachment. It was found that the adult's self-worth and perceptions of attachment to their mothers were more predictive of depressive symptoms than the mother's perception of the attachment relationship with their adult children (Kenny & Sirin, 2006). The influence of perception was also noted in a study by Phares and Renk (1998). It was found that positive affect

toward parents led to greater psychological functioning in adolescents (Phares & Renk, 1998; Kenny & Sirin, 2006).

It is not difficult to see the importance of emotional process in the development of attachment between children and their caregivers. These processes have been acknowledged by the continuous study of the researchers mentioned above and Bowlby and Ainsworth have provided a good foundation for the emergence of the concept of emotional availability.

### Emotional Availability

Mahler first used the term emotional availability to refer to affective responses within the mother-child relationship and to describe the quality of the maternal presence in the context of a child's exploratory behavior common to the behavior mentioned above in the Strange Situation studies. Mahler, et al. (1975) considered emotional availability to be a key factor in the mother's encouragement and supportiveness of exploratory behavior, and describe the mother as providing "emotional refueling" for the child. This refueling creates an emotional bond between mother and child, as well as confidence within the child to stretch his or her boundaries and continue to explore more of the world (Mahler, et al., 1975).

Emde (1980) discussed the concept of emotional availability postulating the connection between emotional availability and the prevention of psychosocial disorders. Emde reasons that it is crucial for an infant to express negatively-toned and positively-toned emotions so the parent will be able to assess the current needs of the infant and intervene (Emde, 1980). From the Bowlby and Ainsworth perspective, the expression of these emotions would be defined as the attachment behavior and the intervention from

the parent would be defined as the caregiving behavior. Both behaviors again bring the caregiver and infant into proximity. Emde states that:

Nowhere is the adaptive nature of emotions more apparent than in human infancy. Emotional expressions are the language of the baby, providing messages for survival as well as loving and social bonding. Crying, for example, gives a message of “come change something,” a message that is species-wide and peremptory, while smiling gives a species-wide message something like “keep it up, I like it.”

Although the baby can’t use words to tell us how he feels, we believe that with repeated interactive sequences, mother and infant normally establish modes of reciprocal activity which leave both with a preponderance of pleasurable and positively-toned expectations, rather than negatively-toned ones. (p. 97)

Emde continues, “...the infant’s expressiveness allows for interchanges that are varied, interesting, dynamic, and, on the whole, rewarding” (Emde, 1980, p. 97). These expressions become reciprocal and help the caregiver and the infant understand how they are relating to one another furthering the development of the relationship. In this relationship “experience and research has shown that more than availability is important for development; emotional availability is required” (Emde, 1980, p. 97).

Later in the same article, Emde offers six “principles” to help an observer assess levels of emotional availability. These principles are pleasure inventory, individuality,



clarity of emotional signaling, range of emotions expressed, appropriate emotional tone, and regulatory control. The observation of these principles is meant to assess potential problems, rewards, perceptions, temperaments, appropriateness, and reciprocity in order to establish a specific perspective on the level of emotional availability within a relationship context (Emde, 1980).

A few years later Emde and Easterbrooks (1985) further developed the concept of emotional availability by discussing different ways emotional availability could be assessed in the context of the parent-child relationship. In this work emotional availability is described as “the degree to which each partner expresses emotions and is responsive to the emotions of the other” (Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985, p. 81). Emde and Easterbrooks go on to identify different assessments to assess emotional availability by indicating certain positive and negative features of emotional expression. For example, Emde and Easterbrooks state that if things are going well within the relationship one would tend to expect certain indications of mutual interest and pleasure. These indications may be expressed through smiling, eye-to-eye contact and “motoric activation in social encounters.” Indications that things are not going well or that the caregiver is emotionally unavailable include less engagement with the environment, lethargy and avoidance of social situations.

Unlike the works above, Emde and Easterbrooks (1985) also consider the parents’ side of the equation in assessing emotional availability. According to Emde and Easterbrooks, indicators of parents’ emotional availability would be their sense of pride and pleasure in the developmental accomplishments of their children. There is also an

expectation that the parents would be able to articulate how they felt about their children's emotional expression.

In addition to formulating a concept of the types of behaviors exhibited by an emotionally available dyad, Emde and Easterbrooks discuss present assessments of emotional expression in the parent-child relationship. At the time their article was published there were no instruments available to assess emotional availability. However, they did include a brief synopsis of several instruments, tools, and techniques that eventually influenced the development of the Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, Robinson, & Emde, 1988) mentioned in Chapter 1. These instruments are divided into two categories, assessment and observational.

The assessment tools included standardized materials to assess families overall attitudes toward emotional expression and the ability of family members to accurately interpret the emotional expressions of other family members.

The observational methods were more widely used and included a more extensive selection of techniques. These methods included observing the "caregivers style of interaction with the child, the ability of the child to produce clear emotional signals, the emotional climate of the family, (i.e. marital adjustment and emotional communication between parents) and assessment of the child's emotional reactions to strangers" (Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985, p. 89).

As emotional availability gathered attention from different researchers, it became more focused and better defined. Biringen, Robinson, and Emde were influential in the process of validating emotional availability as a construct with the development of the first Emotional Availability Scales in 1988 (Biringen, Robinson, & Emde, 1988). These

scales incorporated the observation techniques discussed above from Emde and Easterbrooks (1985) as well as procedures developed from Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969/1982) observations and Ainsworth's et al. (1978) study of the Strange Situation. Other observational techniques included The Infant Clinical Assessment Procedure (Solyom, 1982) and an observational process known as Affect Attunement (Stern, 1984).

Later Biringen and Robinson (1991) identified several concepts related to the development of emotional availability and offered new perspectives in understanding the impact of emotional availability in the context of the mother-child relationship. Concerning mother-child interactions Biringen and Robinson briefly discuss concepts such as psychological unavailability, maternal sensitivity, and maternal control. In addition to these concepts Biringen and Robinson included aspects of child emotional availability such as the child's involvement with and responsiveness to the mother. They go on to reason that emotional availability needs to be understood in a dyadic relational experience between mother and child (Biringen & Robinson, 1991). Through this deeper understanding and fresh concept of emotional availability, Biringen and Robinson further define emotional availability in terms of relational behaviors. According to them, in the emotionally available relationship, "the mother is sensitive and only moderately intrusive, and the child is responsive and involving of the mother in play" (Biringen & Robinson, 1991, p. 265). In the same context they also define what is considered an emotionally unavailable relationship. In this type of relationship, "the mother is insensitive and extremely high or low in intrusiveness, and the child is non-responsive and non-involving of the mother" (Biringen & Robinson, 1991, p. 265).

The significance of Biringen's and Robinson's work in this area was the integration of both the mother's as well as the child's emotional responses to each other. This integration created a better conceptualization of emotional availability by acknowledging that emotional availability is something that happens in the context of a relationship and that the child's responses contribute to the mother's responses and visa versa (Biringen & Robinson, 1991).

Shortly after the development of the Emotional Availability Scales in 1991 and Biringen's and Robinson's "reconceptualization" of emotional availability, other interested researchers began using the concept of emotional availability in a variety of studies. Not all of these studies however, were connected to body of work preceding the development of the Emotional Availability Scales.

Although there was no mention of the researchers discussed above and the Emotional Availability Scales were not used, Frankel, Lindahl, and Harmon (1992) used the idea of emotional availability as a relational construct in their study of depressed mothers. They found that depression and emotional availability were independent of each other and that emotional availability was a more likely predictor of a child's empathic responding than whether or not their mother was depressed. The mothers who were more consistent in providing the emotional needs for their children, tended to have children that were more empathic toward the mother when she was upset (Frankle, et al., 1992).

Unlike the work of Frankle, et al. (1992), most of the research concerning emotional availability rises from the foundations of attachment theory and incorporates the concept of emotional availability and the Emotional Availability Scales discussed throughout this work. Pipp-Siegel (1998) included a description of the Emotional

Availability Scales in her research concerning emotional availability and children who were hearing impaired. This description reviews the parental and child measures of emotional availability mentioned in chapter 1. The measures for parents are parental sensitivity, parental structuring, parental non-intrusiveness, and parental non-hostility. The children's measures are child responsiveness and child involvement (Pipp-Siegel, 1998).

As just mentioned, Pipp-Siegel also focused on the importance of emotional availability in settings with hearing impaired children. She reported that professionals are usually only trained in the areas that have to do with the difficulties of communicating, (i.e. language, hearing, and/or deafness) and that little attention is given to social or emotional aspects of mother-child interactions. Since children who are hearing impaired on any level are considered a higher risk in social and emotional interactions, Pipp-Siegel considers training in emotional availability assessment will further assist clinicians and parents in developing important emotional bonds that can be overlooked in these situations (Pipp-Siegel, 1998).

Research on emotional availability has also been conducted in multicultural settings. Aviezer, Sagi, Joels, and Ziv (1999) studied attachment and emotional availability in Israeli mothers and children. Using the Emotional Availability Scales Aviezer, et al. examined 48 families living in kibbutz settings. In accord with the original tenets of attachment theory and its relationship to emotional availability, the researchers found that security in the mother-child relationship was associated with higher emotional availability scores. Poor security of attachment was associated with lower emotional availability scores (Aviezer, et al., 1999).

Other findings concerning the Emotional Availability Scales include the process of emotional communication between mother and child. Biringen, Emde, Brown, Lowe, Myers and Nelson (1999) focused such research on how mothers interacted with both male and female children. They found that there were no significant differences in the mothers' emotional communication and emotional availability and gender of their children. There were no differences found in the quality of the emotional connection either. One finding of note was that for boys, positive emotional communication and availability usually occurred in the context of other positive circumstances, whereas positive emotional communication for girls occurred in both positive and negative contexts. To explain these findings, Biringen, et al. theorized that mothers worked harder to create harmony and positive emotional contexts with their sons than they do with their daughters. This extra effort gives indication that mothers are more comfortable expressing varieties of emotions with their daughters and that the mother-daughter relationship may be perceived to endure more conflict and disharmony than the mother-son relationship (Biringen, et al., 1999).

As the Emotional Availability Scales became more readily used it became apparent that emotional availability as a construct was more significant than its connection to attachment theory alone. In a study of the research concerning emotional availability from 1991 to 1998, Biringen (2000) found that emotional availability was not only a predictor of attachment to caregivers, but also helpful in identifying the affective quality of mother-child relationships. Emotional availability "is a way of understanding the attachment-relevant, affective experience between a parent and a child" (p. 112). She goes on to say that on repeated occasions, emotional availability may be more possible to

measure than attachment due to the variety of caregivers and settings in which the process can be observed (Biringen, 2000).

Using the emotional availability scales 51 mother-child dyads were observed in a laboratory setting during a free play session and a clean up task after the play session was over. The researchers found that emotional availability during the play session was a strong predictor of the child's compliance during the clean up session. Mothers who provided structure in the play session without being overly intrusive and showed appropriate responsiveness to situations that frustrated the child had children who were highly compliant (Lehman, Steier, Guidash, & Wanna, 2002).

In another study of 54 mother-child dyads researchers used a longitudinal approach to examine the effect emotional availability had on children's ability to recognize a stain marked on their nose. Emotional availability was a good predictor, at least in part, whether or not the children brought attention to themselves in response to being marked on (Harel, Eshel, Ganor, & Scher, 2002). In addition to these finding it was also noted that there were links between emotional availability and birth order. Specifically mothers' levels of sensitivity tended to decline between the first and third born children. In this particular study no correlations were found between gender and emotional availability (Harel, et al., 2002).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, several studies made efforts to focus on mothers and fathers when observing and addressing issues of emotional availability. Volling, McElwain, Notaro, and Herrera (2002) observed 62 one year-old infants, with both mothers and fathers participation, to assess how the parents' emotional availability influenced the infants' emotional competence. In general, parental emotional availability

was found to be highly correlated with infants' emotional competence. However, several issues were found to be significant concerning the gender of the parents. For the most part mothers were more emotionally available to their children than were fathers.

Although in instances where the father was more emotionally available, the infants were found to be much more emotionally competent than their counterparts. In addition, fathers who were more directive and controlling in their playfulness had infants who exhibited less negative affect in their interactions with the parents (Volling, et al., 2002).

In this article the authors also include implications concerning father's interactions with their children and shaping public policy. Volling and colleagues (2002) posit that due to the uniqueness of father-child relationship interactions, researchers should pay more attention to the role of fathers in the emotional regulation and competence of young children. Their perspective is that fathers are "being relegated to second-class status with respect to both research and public policies aimed at parenting" (p. 463). Fathers have so much more to offer and often get compared to mothers in areas of child rearing that are traditionally feminine responsibilities. To do so ignores a number of positive emotional experiences that are unique to the child's paternal relationship and the importance of a father's role in developing emotional competence (Volling, et. al., 2002).

In addition to the articles mentioned above, in September 2000 the journal *Attachment & Human Development* released a special issue devoted exclusively to the subject of emotional availability. The articles that follow cover topics ranging from attachment theory foundations, at risk behaviors, parental psychopathology, and future research in emotional availability. Also included in this issue was a breakdown of the



specifics constructs concerning the Emotional Availability Scales and the full definition of each parental and child characteristic observed and rated by the Scales.

The opening article by Easterbrooks and Biringen summarizes the past decades of research concerning attachment and emotional availability and their similarities that are discussed above. They conclude by emphasizing the advantages, importance and necessity of further research in emotional availability and its validation in multicultural contexts (Easterbrooks & Biringen, 2000).

Swanson, Beckwith and Howard (2002) open the research articles reporting on a study of 51 prenatally drug-exposed toddlers and their primary caregiver. Looking specifically at the caregiver intrusiveness aspect of the Emotional Availability Scales and its relationship with quality of attachment, Swanson, et al. found that caregivers who were more intrusive had toddlers who were observed to have avoidant or disorganized/disoriented attachment behaviors. Toddlers who were more secure in their attachments had caregivers that were much less intrusive (2002). It was noted by the authors that insecure attachments were found to be more prevalent in this sample than in previous and more normal samples of caregivers (Swanson, et al., 2002).

To further solidify the validity of the Emotional Availability Scales in multicultural settings, Ziv, Aviezer, Gini, Sagi and Koren-Karie (2000) examined emotional availability and attachment in 687 infant-mother relationships in families living in Israel. Using the Strange Situation and the Emotional Availability Scales to evaluate the mother-infant dyads, it was found that higher scores in emotional availability were associated with more security in the attachment between mothers and infants. Including the validation of multicultural considerations, this study also provided further

evidence of the strength that exists between the tenets of attachment theory and emotional availability (Ziv, et al., 2000).

This strength was also in seen in Easterbrooks, Biesecker and Lyons-Ruth (2000) in a longitudinal study of 45 mother-child relationships. During the first part of the study the Strange Situation was used to assess the security of attachment between mothers and their infants. The mothers also completed a self-report depression inventory. Seven years later the mother-child dyads were observed using the Emotional Availability Scales. It was found that every dimension of emotional availability was predicted by the security of attachment observed during the Strange Situation seven years earlier. The authors provide a case example of one dyad in which the relationship was securely attached. During the emotional availability observation genuine affect, appropriate reciprocity, and a general “delight” to be in each others presence were noted (Easterbrooks, et al., 2000).

In relation to depression, mother’s scores were associated with lower maternal structuring and sensitivity. This is significant for two reasons. First, emotional availability was found to be more predictive of a child’s emotional development than mother’s depressive symptoms (Easterbrooks, et. al., 2000), and second, in Easterbrooks, et al (2000) maternal sensitivity was found to have the strongest association with secure attachment and higher levels of emotional availability.

The connection between attachment and emotional availability was also seen in a separate study of 35 mothers and their 5 year-old children (Biringen, Brown, Donaldson, Green, Krcmarik, & Lovas, 2000). The mothers were given the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) to assess quality of attachment to their parents. The mothers and children were then observed in a laboratory setting using the

emotional availability scales. The maternal sensitivity, maternal structuring, child responsiveness and child involvement dimensions of the Emotional Availability Scales successfully predicted the classification of the attachment relationship between mother and child. As mentioned above levels of maternal sensitivity were again influential in the outcome of attachment scores (Biringen, et al., 2000).

It was further noted that mother's education was also predictive of emotional availability dimensions. The more educated mothers were more able to interact sensitively and structure interaction appropriately. They also seemed better able to manage their anger in response to their children, though they were more likely to be hostile with their girls than their boys (Biringen, et al., 2000).

In their article Oyen, Landy and Hilburn-Cobb (2000) focused specifically on the maternal sensitivity aspect of emotional availability. Much like the articles mentioned above, maternal sensitivity was strongly associated with the outcomes. The study included 30 Canadian mother-child relationships that were classified as at-risk due to socioeconomic status and employment descriptions. Using the Adult Attachment Interview and the Emotional Availability Scales the mother-child relationship was assessed to see if the mother's feelings on evaluating her attachment relationships impacted her sensitivity in interactions with her child. It was found that mothers who had positive feelings about evaluating their attachment were more sensitive in interactions with their children than mothers who were more anxious in evaluating attachment relationships (Oyen, et al., 2000).

Furthering the specific research on maternal sensitivity Biringen, Matheny, Bretherton, Renouf and Sherman (2000) studied the concept along with the maternal

structuring dimension of emotional availability. In a study of 40 mother-child dyads, maternal sensitivity and maternal structuring were compared to maternal representation of self as a parent (i.e. self-esteem, emotional investment, moral standards and management of aggressive impulses). Again, maternal sensitivity was influential in the outcomes of the study. The researchers observed mothers interacting with their children at 18, 24, and 39 months. It was found that maternal sensitivity predicted maternal representation of self at 18 months. However when the pairs were observed at 24 and 39 months maternal structuring was the greatest predictor of maternal representation of self as a parent. Overall, mothers who structured interactions with their children seemed to have felt more competent about themselves as parents (Biringen, et al., 2000).

Responding to the articles above concerning attachment and emotional availability (as well as other research) Bretherton (2000) compares the two concepts and offers suggestions on the continuing development of the emotional availability concept. Bretherton states that the Emotional Availability Scales differ from the Strange Situation in that they focus more on specific parts of the emotional interaction between a parent and child, are more explicitly dyadic, concentrate on repairing interactions as needed, more strongly emphasize mutual negotiation, and are designed to assess interactions beyond toddlerhood. In summarizing, Bretherton considers the emotional availability “system” viable in assessing a variety of parent-child interactions and further refines its attachment roots and calls for “continued collaboration between emotional availability and attachment researchers” (2000, p. 240).

In the article following Bretherton, Emde (2000) takes a more historical approach in describing the connection between attachment and emotional availability and makes

several suggestions for further research. From Emde's perspective what makes the concept of emotional availability more appealing today than in the 1950's and 1960's is that emotions have come to be seen as more of an "adaptive process" instead of as "disruptive states." This new attitude toward the expression of emotion led to an understanding of how emotions could be conceptualized and applied to clinical settings. It was not long after this shift that researchers began to acknowledge the connections between attachment theory and emotional availability in the areas of early development. In conclusion, Emde discusses four areas of future exploration for researcher, 1) variation of emotional expression and uses in other cultures, 2) risk and preventative interventions, 3) identification of pathology and alternative development, and 4) representation of self to others (Emde, 2000).

Biringen and Easterbrooks (2000) conclude the special issue of *Attachment and Human Development* by discussing issues presented in the two previous articles by Bretherton and Emde. This discussion offered perspectives into future direction of emotional availability. Biringen and Easterbrooks acknowledge for instance, that emotional availability has not been used to understand different personality disorders in mothers nor personality types in children and stress the need for these considerations. Also in need of consideration is a longer observation time or multiple observation periods. This is needed for more specific understanding and better definition of the maternal sensitive dimension of emotional availability. As seen above maternal sensitivity has historically had the largest variance in the explanation of studied behaviors and interactions. Longer and multiple periods of observation time would allow

researchers to better differentiate between apparent and genuine maternal sensitivity (Biringen & Easterbrooks, 2000).

The final two articles in the special issue (appendix A and B) offer abridged versions of the Emotional Availability Scales. Biringen, Robinson, and Emde (2000a) describe in detail the second edition of the scales and give definitions of each dimension. Biringen, Robinson, and Emde (2000b) focus on the third edition of scales and incorporate a brief history of the conceptualization of emotional availability. The main differences in the two editions are that the second edition includes an upper range of maladaptive behavior in the sensitivity dimensions of emotional availability, the structuring/intrusiveness dimensions are divided into separate scales, and the child responsiveness and involvement dimension do not include the upper range of maladaptive behavior. It should also be noted that the third edition of the scales uses the term *parental* instead of *maternal* in the caregiver dimensions (Biringen, Robinson, & Emde, 2000b).

In 2005 the *Infant Mental Health Journal* released an issue mostly devoted to the research on emotional availability. These articles fulfilled some of the needs concerning the study of emotional availability that were discussed in the special issue of *Attachment & Human Development* above. Easterbrooks and Biringen (2005) open the issue by highlighting the connections to attachment theory and then discussing the importance of emotional availability in parent-child relationships. According to the previous research, emotional availability assesses the emotional quality and dialogue within a relational dyad or system and helps clinicians understand how well caregivers and children read each others emotional cues for interaction. They also emphasize that the Emotional

Availability Scales are meant to assess systemic qualities of a relationship and not solely the behaviors of one individual (Easterbrooks & Biringen, 2005).

In Biringen and Easterbrooks (2000) it was suggested that longer periods of observation time and varied observation experiences should be used to further validate research findings. Biringen, et al. (2005) completed two studies; one to examine the effectiveness of longer observations times, and one study to examine different contextual approaches of observation. In the first study, mothers of 36 infants approximately 12 months old were observed. Finding showed that with the increase of time of observation, there was an increase in the prediction of secure attachment within the relationship. In the second study of 57 mother-child relationships 4 and 5 year-olds were observed in varied contexts. The second study found that aspects of emotional availability were still associated in different situations. Both studies indicate the importance of longer observation periods and varying contexts of observation. (Biringen, et al., 2005).

Another indirect finding in this study was that mothers who provided greater levels of emotional availability had children who were less likely to be aggressive in the kindergarten classroom settings and whose teachers were more likely to perceive them as socially skilled (Biringen, et al., 2005).

Easterbrooks, Chaudhuri and Gestsdottir (2005) used the Emotional Availability Scales to examine patterns of emotional availability in adolescent parents. The study included 80 mother-infant pairs that were involved in an in-home intervention program for first-time young parents. The goal for this study was to explain certain variations by identifying different relational patterns within groups of mothers. Four different groups indeed emerged with distinctly different patterns of interaction. The first group scored

high in emotional availability. The second group scored low in emotional availability. The third group scored in the average range for emotional availability. The fourth group showed variability between infants and mothers. The infants in this group were disengaged and the mothers scored in the average range for emotional availability. The researchers also included qualitative samples of transcripts from young mothers involved in the study. Several themes were noted including changes in feelings of responsibility, desire to “go back to just being me”, changes in attitudes about their mothers, and frustrations with changes in social interactions. The results of this study hope to provide interventions for young parents to help improve parenting skills and competence in self as a parent (Easterbrooks, et al., 2005).

In the first study of emotional availability and fathers Lovas (2005) examined the differences in mother-child and father-child dyads. The sample for this study included 113 families (226 adults, 50 girls and 63 boys) with the children ranging in age from 19 to 24 months. Lovas expected, as seen in previous research, (Nakamura, Stewart, & Tatarka, 2000) that difference in emotional availability between mothers and fathers would emerge. It was also expected that gender difference in the children’s scores would be minimal as seen in Biringen, et al. (1999) and Biringen, Robinson, and Emde (1994). Both assumptions were correct. Minimal differences in child’s gender were found in these observations and mothers were found to have higher levels of emotional availability than fathers. Mother-daughter pairs had the highest scores and mother-son pairs were next highest. Father-daughter and father-son interactions were next respectively. It is worthy to note that father-son dyads were not lower in hostility, but that by 24 months hostility was higher in same-sex pairs than opposite-sex pairs (Lovas, 2005).



To continue addressing needed issues in emotional availability research, Little and Carter (2005) studied a low-income sample of forty-five 12 month-old infants and their mothers during play sessions designed to elicit emotional responses so researchers could observe infants ability to regulate their emotions. The data provided evidence that levels of emotional availability were related to infant's emotional regulation. Further, levels of mother's hostility impacted the infant's ability to regulate distress during emotionally challenging situations and mothers who were overtly hostile in varied contexts tended to have problems negotiating conflict in the parent child relationship in daily interactions (Little & Carter, 2005).

Though no direct research exists as of yet, Biringen, Fidler, Barrett, and Kubicek (2005) provide a thought provoking article concerning the implication that emotional availability has for dyads where the child is either physically or mentally disabled. In this article the researchers discuss mental retardation, Down's syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Williams syndrome, autism and other spectrum disorders, and children who are deaf or hearing impaired and the impact these disorders have on the emotional relationship between caregiver and child. The article is concluded by discussing adaptations to each dimension of the Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, et al., 2005).

The final article in the issue discussed above concerns training and reliability issues with the Emotional Availability Scales. Biringen (2005), who was the originator of the Emotional Availability Scales stresses appropriate use of the scales and does not allow researchers to use the scales until the proper training has been completed. Based upon length of observation time discussed by Biringen and Easterbrooks (2000), Biringen

provides a brief rationale for lengthening the observation time and increase reliability in the scales (2005).

The final article in this review of literature concerning emotional availability discusses the process of creating the Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP) measure. Lum and Phares (2005) studied a sample of 375 individuals ranging from age 18-25 in the development and psychometric qualifying of (LEAP) measure. The goal of this research was to create a scale that would measure emotional availability from an individual within a dyadic relationship without the need for observation. Strongly rooted in the concepts of emotional availability, the LEAP was found to be a valid and reliable measure for the assessment of the emotional availability for parents of the individuals who completed the measure (Lum & Phares, 2005).

#### Adjustment to College

Moving away from home and into a university environment can be a challenging and difficult time for adolescents (Robbins, et al., 1993). Furthermore an increasing number of college students seem to be unprepared or inappropriately motivated for the demands of college life (Strage & Brandt, 1999). The difficulty of this transition is further noted by Tinto (1987) who reported that 57% of college students would leave the first college they attended and 43% would never complete a degree. In addition, even though research suggests that the number of students enrolling in colleges and universities in the United States is increasing, graduation rates in the United States are actually decreasing (Sax, et al., 1996).

Many factors contribute to an individual's decision to leave college such as lack of financial stability, insufficient student-institution match, changes in career or academic

goals, personal circumstances, inability to manage course load, inability to integrate into student population and failure of the institution to provide an environment that is conducive to the student needs (Lau, 2003). Given these factors it is not difficult to understand the current findings in student retention. However, years of research has provided evidence and acknowledged the importance of college students' relationships with their parents in the success of college adjustment (Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Rice, 1995; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Lapsley, Rice, & Shadid, 1989; Mattanah, et al., 2004).

#### *Attachment and Adjustment to College*

Kenny (1987) was the first to posit that an individual's transition to the college environment was similar to the Strange Situation studies conducted by Ainsworth et al. (1978) and others (Kerns, et al., 2000; Main & Weston, 1981). In a study of 173 first-year college students living in campus housing, Kenny (1987) found that students' perspectives on their relationship with their parents were generally positive and resembled Ainsworth's theories. The students reported the same type of stress at separation that can be seen during a Strange Situation observation. In response to parents, the student described their parents as respectful of differences, accepting, available and supportive. Students' also sought out the support of their parents during times of stress. One difference noted in gender of students was that female students reported that they were more likely to seek parental support during their first year of college, than their male counterparts. However, both male and female students reported their parents as being a secure base once they had left home for college (Kenny, 1987).

Supporting Kenny (1987) Lapsley, et al. (1989) studied 130 freshman and 123 upperclassmen to examine attachment and separation from parents and college

adjustment using the SACQ. Focusing specifically on the separation-individuation aspect of attachment, they found that the freshman reported more dependency on their parents in times of psychological stress and poorer social and emotional adjustment than upperclassmen. At the same time, although psychological separation was not found to be predictive of academic adjustment, significant correlations were found between separation-individuation and adjustment to college (Lapsley, et al., 1989).

Also using the SACQ, Rice, et al. (1995) conducted two studies to explore cross-sectional and longitudinal aspects of attachment and college adjustment. Both studies included freshman and upperclassmen and data was collected from 223 students in the cross-sectional study and 81 completed the longitudinal study. Both methods of research were incorporated for the basic purpose of examining three assumptions concerning attachment theory. 1) “That attachment bonds remain stable over time, 2) that secure attachment facilitates healthy separation from parents, and 3) that secure attachment fosters successful adaptation and adjustment to college life” (Rice, et al., 1995, p. 464). Data collected supported each of the three assumptions. The college students involved in this study reported stable attachment bonds throughout their college experience, less conflict, feelings of anger, resentment and hostility, and overall, better adjustment to college (Rice, et al., 1995).

As with Lapsley, et al. (1989) Rice, et al. (1995), found that upperclassmen were better adjusted than freshman. It is postulated that higher scores from upperclassmen could be related to the fact that freshmen who reported lower levels of adjustment to college withdrew from school. Therefore the juniors and seniors who participated in the longitudinal study were available for the study precisely because they had higher levels

of attachment and were better adjusted to the university environment and remained in school (Rice, et al., 1995).

Another study providing evidence to the connection between attachment and adjustment to college was completed by Lapsley and Edgerton (2002). Using the SACQ, the researchers studied 156 participants at a small university in Canada. The data suggested that students who reported secure attachments with parents also showed healthy social and emotional adjustment to college. More specifically, individual differences in attachment styles predicted individual difference in adjustment to college (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

Providing further evidence for the connection between attachment and adjustment to college, Mattanah, et al. (2004) studied 404 college students over a period of 3 years. Data supported previous research finding secure attachment related to positive adjustment to college for both men and women.

Implication for college counselors were also discussed in this work. The authors suggest that the findings in this study should encourage college counselors to assess levels of attachment security for the students they see. Recommendations focus on strengthening students' relationship networks to help facilitate separation and adjustment to college (Mattanah, et al., 2004).

Following up on previous a previous study, (Kenny, 1987) Kenny (1990) focused associations with parental attachment on college seniors' maturity in career decisions. In a study of 159 college seniors data indicated that secure attachment to parents indicated career maturity. Parental attachment was found to provide feelings of security and confidence in academic ability, career choice, and career commitment (Kenny, 1990).

In one study (Gratz, et al., 2002) risk factors concerning college students were associated with lack of parental attachment. Researchers studied 133 college students who were considered a non-psychiatric population. Including childhood separation, emotional neglect, sexual abuse and dissociation, insecure attachment was found to be a significant predictor of self-harm overall. In fact for women, insecure attachment was second only to dissociation in predicting self-harm. However, insecure attachment was not as significant a predictor in males (Gratz, et al., 2002).

*Attachment, Adjustment to College and Diverse Populations*

To further the work on attachment and adjustment to college a few articles have been considerate of diversity in student populations. Each of these articles mentioned below used the SACQ to measure adjustment to college. Huff (2001) studied the difference between of missionary children and non-missionary children in universities in the United States. Data was collected on 45 missionary students and 65 non-missionary students to examine difference in the relationships between parental attachment, social support and college adjustment. Overall the study found that attachment to parents had an effect on the individual's perception of social support and adjustment to college. Additionally, social support was found to be independently associated with adjustment to college. Differences in responses between missionary children and non-missionary children were not significant and lend the idea that although missionary children may experience a more difficult transition to college, attachment and social relationships provide the needed support for adjustment to college (Huff, 2001).

Hinderlie and Kenny (2002) also considered diversity in measuring attachment, social support and college adjustment. In a study of 186 Black students at predominantly

White universities, parental attachment was found to be more significant in an individual's adjustment to college than social support. Although social support from friends, faculty, and campus organizations also contributed to college adjustment, the security of parental attachment for Black students on predominantly White campuses was found to be the better indicator (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002).

To incorporate ethnic identity issues into the study of attachment and college adjustment, Kalsner and Pistole (2003) studied 252 college students. Results indicated that college students of diverse ethnic backgrounds associated their ethnic identity and parental attachments with levels of adjustment to college. As expected association with parental attachments were correlated with adjustment to college. However, with this sample, connection with similar ethnic groups was a more significant predictor of college adjustment.

#### *Parenting Styles/Relationships with Parents and Adjustment to College*

Studying adjustment in first-year college student Holmbeck and Wandrei (1993) examined variables such as family relations, the home leaving process, and personality. In a sample of 286 male and female freshman data provided evidence that all three variables correlated with adjustment to college for both males and females. However, family attachment and personality were greater predictors than cognitive perceptions of leaving home (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993).

In a study of 236 college students Strage and Brandt (1999) examined connections between parenting style, students' relationships with parents and adjustment to college. The data revealed that an authoritative parenting style continues to play significant roles in the successful academic lives of college students. For instance, parents who allowed

their children to be more autonomous, while still providing support and communicating expectations had children who were more likely to report positive feedback concerning their teachers (Strage & Brandt, 1999).

Focusing on the current functioning of female college students Renk, McKinney, Klein, and Oliveros (2006) examined childhood discipline and perception of parents of 116 females. As mentioned in Chapter 1 this study incorporated the first use of the LEAP measure outside of establishing psychometric properties. The LEAP was used in conjunction with the Perception of Parents (POP; Phares & Renk, 1998) scales to assess for the relationship of females with their parents. Results indicated that childhood discipline and current perceptions of their parents contributed significantly to levels of self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. However, childhood discipline styles were more significant than current perceptions of and relationships with parents (Renk, et al., 2006).

#### *Measures of Adjustment to College*

As discussed in Chapter 1 several instruments can be used to measure adjustment to college. Each of these instruments have been designed to assess the overall adaptation of an individual student to the college environment. However, depending on the specific desire of the researcher, a scale can be chosen to measure more specific variables within the context of college adjustment.

One of the first instruments created to assess adjustment to college focused specifically on academic adjustment. The College Inventory of Academic Adjustment (CIAA; Borow, 1949) has 90 items with six sub-scales that measures curricular adjustment, maturity of goals and level of aspiration, planning and use of time, study skills and practices, mental health, and personal relationships with faculty.



The College Satisfaction Scale (Vinsel, et al., 1980) is a 25 item scale that focuses on an individual's satisfaction with social and academic aspects of college life and contentment with the university they are attending.

The College Adjustment Scales (CAS; Anton & Reed, 1991) were designed to assess possible needs for remedial intervention in 9 different areas. This 108 item scale explores a student's anxiety levels, likelihood of depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse (drugs or alcohol), problems with self-esteem, interpersonal problems, family related problems, problems with academic performance and career planning issues (Pinkney, 1992).

Another prominent instrument for assessing an individual's adjustment to college is the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989). The SACQ is a 67 item questionnaire assessing the areas of academic, social, personal-emotional adjustment and goal commitment-institutional attachment, (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992). Using a Likert 9 point scale the individuals are asked to rate these items from, "Applies very close to me" to "Doesn't apply to me at all." Higher scores on the SACQ mean higher levels of adjustment to college and lower scores provide evidence of difficulty adjusting to college. The SACQ can be scored using the full range of all 67 items or each of the four individual sub-scales. The SACQ was used in this study due to the prominence of use in research and institutional interventions (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992) as well as its already established connection with college students' attachment to parents (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

## Summary

This chapter included a review of literature concerning emotional availability and adjustment to college. Connections were first made with attachment theory which provides a foundation for emotional availability. The history of attachment theory and emotional availability as a quantifiable construct and relationships between attachment and college adjustment were also included. Attachment to parents was found to be a valid predictor of an individual's adjustment to college.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the research methodology and design used by the researcher to examine the relationship between emotional availability and adjustment to college. The research questions, participants, data collection, instruments, and overall procedures will be discussed.

#### Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the relationship between emotional availability and level of college adjustment?
2. Does the relationship between emotional availability and level of college adjustment differ according to parental role?
3. Does the relationship between emotional availability and level of college adjustment differ according to gender?

#### Participants

A non-random sample of 18-21 year-old college students at one small private university and one large public university in the southeastern United States was recruited for this study. The small private university was located in the state of Tennessee where the age of consent is 18 years old. The large public university was located in the state of Alabama where the age of consent is 19 years old. Due to the differences in age of

consent in Alabama and Tennessee, only those students who were 19 years of age or older were asked to participate in Alabama while student who were 18 years of age or older were asked to participate in Tennessee. The researcher provided all participants with an information letter outlining age requirements for each state and requested that those who did not meet the age requirements to not participant in the study. Students were asked to volunteer to participate from various classroom settings in several different departments at the two universities. Individuals' participation in the study was voluntary and they were be asked to indicate their gender, age, class standing (i.e. freshman, sophomore, etc.) and complete the LEAP and SACQ measures.

#### Instruments

##### *Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP)*

Participant's perception of parental emotional availability was measured by the LEAP. Developed by Lum and Phares (2005), the LEAP is the most recent assessment of emotional availability concerning any population. Two separate studies were done to develop the LEAP measure and determine its psychometric quality. The first study included 220 older adolescent and young adult college students, ages 18-25 years, and focused on creating and gathering the items used in the measure. The second study included 155 participants in the same age range for the purpose of assessing the quality of the scale and to address any other issues in development. The population was considered gender and ethnically diverse (Lum & Phares, 2005).

A total of 153 items were generated from the initial pilot study and the authors developed a 6-point Likert scale for further assessment of the original items. From that assessment 80 items were kept and the second pilot study was initiated. On completion of

the second pilot study a total of 15 items for mother and 15 items for father remained which comprises the present LEAP measure (Lum & Phares, 2005).

Using the final 30 items the researchers rated mother's and father's behaviors when the individuals were 16 years-old. For example, question one reads, *Supports Me*. The individual is then asked to rate both their mother and their father on the Likert scale from 1-6. The lowest possible score on the LEAP is 15 with 90 being the highest. Higher scores demonstrate higher levels of emotional availability from mothers and fathers (Lum & Phares, 2005).

Test-retest coefficients for the LEAP were .92 ( $p < .0001$ ) for mothers and .85 ( $p < .0001$ ) for fathers. The number of days between testing was 4-16 with an average of 7 days (Lum & Phares, 2005). To test for validity the LEAP was compared with other measures of parenting including The Children's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory-Revised (CRPBI-R; Schludermann & Schludermann, 1970), The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979), My Memories of Upbringing (EMBU; Winefield, Goldney, Tiggemann, & Winefield, 1990). These measures are considered established in the field and psychometrically sound, and the LEAP was positively associated with each measure. Therefore, the LEAP measure is considered a reliable and valid measure for assessing children's perception of the emotional availability of their parents (Lum & Phares, 2005).

#### *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)*

Participant's adjustment to college will be measured by the SACQ. The original SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1984) was created over a three year period using successive academic freshman classes and included 52 items. The present SACQ is a two-page 67

item assessment composed of four sub-scales measuring academic adjustment (24 items), social adjustment (20 items), personal-emotional adjustment (15 items), and goal commitment-institutional attachment (15 items). It can be administered individually or in groups and takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. Scores are rated on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from “Doesn’t apply to me at all” to “Applies very closely to me” (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992).

The purpose in developing the SACQ was to create a way to assess needs for early counseling interventions and to provide the research needed for institutional interventions (Baker & Siryk, 1984/1989). Research, counseling and institutional interventions have been the most common uses of the SACQ (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992).

The SACQ has been found to be a psychometrically sound instrument. For reliability the alpha coefficients are .81 to .90 for academic adjustment, .83 to .91 for social adjustment, .77 to .86 for personal-emotional adjustment, .85 to .91 for goal commitment-institutional attachment, and .92 to .95 for the full scale. Validity has been demonstrated by data indicating that the SACQ is significantly associated with student academic performance and GPA (.17 to .53,  $p < .01$ ), personal-emotional adjustment and contact made with university counseling services (-.23 to .34,  $p < .01$ ), and commitment-institutional attachment and attrition (-.27 to -.41,  $p < .01$ ). Comparisons with social adjustment have not been found statistically significant (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992). Compared with such measures as the Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 1983), Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Fitts,

1965), and the Psychological Distress Inventory (Lustman, et al., 1984) the SACQ revealed significant correlations (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992).

As just discussed the SACQ is a valid and reliable questionnaire for the measurement of an individual's adjustment to college. In addition, a review of pertinent literature (see Chapter 2) shows that the SACQ has been used in many studies to explore the relationship with parental attachment.

#### Procedure

To gather data on the LEAP and SACQ 18-21 year old students in identified classrooms were provided a research packet containing the LEAP (appendix A), SACQ (appendix B) and Information Letter (appendix C). Demographic information was included with the SACQ. The Information Letter provided students with information about the purpose of the study, and their rights concerning participation. The researcher collected research packets once the assessments had been completed. No personal identifying information was taken and there is no way to link test packets with the individuals who participated in the study. Participation in this study was voluntary and 161 college students chose to participate. The participants completed the LEAP, rating the emotional availability of their mothers and fathers and SACQ, rating their adjustment to college. Once the surveys were completed the participants returned them to the researcher. The participants were informed that they could keep the Information Letter for their records if any question should arise in the future. The researcher entered all collected data from the LEAP and SACQ into The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 12.0 (SPSS) for scoring and statistical analysis. The LEAP consists of two subscales, which include 15 identical questions for mother and father for a total of 30

items. The SACQ is made up of four subscales measuring academic adjustment (24 items), social adjustment (20 items), personal-emotional adjustment (15 items) and goal commitment-institutional attachment (15 items) for a total of 67 items.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis for the current study included descriptive analysis of demographic variables and descriptive analysis of items. In addition, regression and correlational analyses were used to determine whether there was a relationship between results on the LEAP and SACQ. Regression analyses provided the necessary information to help differentiate the strength of specific factors associated with emotional availability and college adjustment (i.e. parental role and gender of participant). Analysis also included consideration of overall scores as well as regression and correlational analyses of items on the LEAP and sub-scales of the SACQ. Correlational analysis was necessary in order to examine the strength of the relationships between the variables of emotional availability and college adjustment as a whole, as well as the strength of the relationships between sub-scales.

### Summary

The LEAP and the SACQ being used in the current study were discussed. Participants were asked to respond to questions concerning their perception of the emotional availability of their parents and their college adjustment in order for the researcher to assess any possible relationship between emotional availability and adjustment to college. The LEAP measure was used to assess perception of parent's emotional availability and the SACQ was used to measure students' adjustment to



college. Both measures were found to be psychometrically sound. Procedures and data analysis were also discussed.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Demographics

Of the 161 packets that were returned, 8 were missing crucial data and were not included; leaving 153 participants for this study. The 153 participants were college students attending a small private university and a large public university in the Southeastern United States. The participants were asked to indicate their gender, age and class standing (i.e. freshman, sophomore, etc). Of the 153 participants, 89 (58.2%) were female, 64 (41.8%) were male, 81 (52.9%) were 18 years of age, 49 (32%) were 19 years of age, 19 (12.4%) were 20 years of age and 4 (2.6%) were 21 years of age. Freshmen made up the majority of participants at 109 (71.2%). There were also 40 (26.1%) sophomores and 4 (2.6%) juniors who participated in this study.

#### Reliabilities

##### *LEAP*

Cronbach's alpha for the LEAP (.97) indicated a high amount of internal consistency reliability. When examined separately, the scale for mothers (.97) and the scale for fathers (.98) were also high. These reliability findings support Lum and Phares (2005) who also found a high amount of reliability at .92 for mothers and .85 for fathers using test-retest analysis (Table 4.1).

### *SACQ*

Cronbach's alpha for the SACQ (.93) also indicated a high amount of internal consistency reliability. When examined separately, academic adjustment (.86), social adjustment (.87), personal-emotional adjustment (.84) and goal commitment-institutional attachment (.87) indicated moderately high internal consistency reliability. These reliability scores are within the range of scores found in Baker and Siryk (1989). Their analysis found reliability for the SACQ full scale to be .92 to .95, the academic adjustment scale to be .81 to .90, the social adjustment scale to be .83 to .91, the personal-emotional adjustment scale to be .77 to .86, and the goal commitment-institutional attachment scale to be .85 to .91 (Table 4.1).

### Statistical Analysis

It is important to note that there were no statistically significant differences between the participant's class standing and their perception of emotional availability or their adjustment to college ( $r = .683$ ).

#### *Relationship between Emotional Availability and College Adjustment*

A regression analysis determined that emotional availability and college adjustment were not significantly related, nor did emotional availability provide any significant measure of strength in the relationship,  $R^2 = .011$ ,  $F(1, 151) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .190$ . A correlational analysis (Table 4.3) also indicated that although positively correlated, there was not a statistically significant relationship between emotional availability and college adjustment ( $r = .107$ ). However, the results of correlational analyses (Table 4.3) also indicated that emotional availability was more positively associated ( $r = .140$ ) with

the *social adjustment* subscale than the other three scales, though the relationship was not statistically significant.

#### *Parental Role in Emotional Availability and College Adjustment*

The results of a regression analysis also indicated that the relationship between emotional availability and college adjustment does not differ significantly due to parental role of mother or father.  $R^2 = .022$ ,  $F(2,145) = 1.60$ ,  $p = .205$  (Table 4.2). In addition, mean scores for mother's emotional availability (5.25) were only slightly higher than those of father's emotional availability (4.82) on a 6 point scale. The result of the correlational analysis (Table 4.3) also indicated that although parental role was positively associated with emotional availability's relationship with college adjustment ( $p = .146$  for mothers and  $p = .058$  for fathers), neither role was statistically significant. In the case of academic adjustment, there was actually a negative correlation with father's emotional availability. Again this relationship was not significant. The correlational analysis (Table 4.3) also indicated that mothers' emotional availability was positively associated and statistically significant with the *social adjustment* (.171) and *personal-emotional adjustment* (.182) aspects of college adjustment at a .05 level.

#### *Gender Difference in Perceptions of Emotional Availability and College Adjustment*

Regression analyses were also run for the LEAP and each subscale of the SACQ to assess gender's impact on the perception of emotional availability and college adjustment. For the *academic adjustment* subscale, analysis indicated that gender had no impact.  $R^2 = .021$ ,  $F(7, 140) = .437$ ,  $p = .878$  (Table 4.2). An analysis of gender, emotional availability and the *personal-emotional adjustment* subscale showed little significance.  $R^2 = .068$ ,  $F(7,140) = 1.46$ ,  $p = .188$  (Table 4.2). A regression analysis of

gender, emotional availability and *goal commitment-institutional attachment* also indicated no statistical significance.  $R^2 = .059$ ,  $F(6, 141) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .191$  (Table 4.2). Although gender explained little variance and indicated no statistical significance with emotional availability and these three subscales, the *social adjustment* subscale of the SACQ indicated that gender provided a greater explanation of variance and a stronger statistical significance.  $R^2 = .117$ ,  $F(7, 140) = 2.64$ ,  $p = .014$  (Table 4.2).

Correlational analysis indicated differences between males (Table 4.4) and females (Table 4.5) in how emotional availability was associated with college adjustment. Separating the participants by gender indicated that for males, emotional availability and college adjustment were slightly negatively correlated ( $-.094$ ), although the relationship was not statistically significant. For females, emotional availability and college adjustment were positively correlated ( $.251$ ) and found to be statistically significant at the .05 level. In addition, females perception of emotional availability from their mothers was also positively correlated and provided greater significance ( $.285$ ,  $\alpha = .01$ ) than the perception of their father's emotional availability. Females' perception of their mother's emotional availability and their social adjustment to college was the most significant finding in this study ( $.320$ ,  $\alpha = .01$ )

Table 4.1

***LEAP Reliability Analysis***

		Lum & Phares (2005)	Current Study
	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha
Full Scale	30	Not reported	.97
Father's EA	15	.85	.98
Mother's EA	15	.92	.97

***SACQ Reliability Analysis***

		Baker & Siryk (1989)	Current Study
	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha
Full Scales	67	.92 to .95	.93
Academic Adjustment	24	.81 to .90	.86
Social Adjustment	20	.83 to .91	.87
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	15	.77 to .86	.84
Goal Commitment-Institutional Attachment	15	.85 to .91	.87

Table 4.2

**Regression Analysis for LEAP and SACO Sub-scales**

	Academic Adjustment	Personal-Emotional Adjustment	Goal Commitment Institutional Attachment	Social Adjustment
R Square	.021	.068	.059	.117
F	.437	1.46	1.47	2.64*
Predictor	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Gender	-1.808	-1.934	-1.854	-1.627
Mom EA	-.334	-.217	-.434	-.267
Dad EA	-.334	-.781	-1.130	-1.053
Mom EA & Gender	2.221	1.818	1.575	.994
Dad EA & Gender	1.652	2.013	2.143	1.652
Mom EA & Dad EA	.577	.978	1.347	1.069
Mom EA & Dad EA & Gender	-2.049	-2.026	-1.769	-.896

\* p &lt; .05

Table 4.3

**Correlation Analysis of Full and Sub-Scales of LEAP and SACQ and Relationship with Parental Role**

Pearson Correlation N = 153	Full-Scale SACQ	Academic Adjustment	Social Adjustment	Personal- Emotional Adjustment	Goal Commitment Institutional Adjustment
Emotional Availability	.107	-.013	.140	.137	.109
Mother's Emotional Availability	.146	.011	.171*	.182*	.130
Father's Emotional Availability	.058	-.017	.082	.076	.066

\*\* Correlation significant at .01 (2-tailed)

\* Correlation significant at .05 (2-tailed)



Table 4.4

**Correlation Analysis of Full and Sub-Scales of LEAP and SACQ and Relationship with Parental Role for Males**

Pearson Correlation N=81	Full-Scale SACQ	Academic Adjustment	Social Adjustment	Personal- Emotional Adjustment	Goal Commitment Institutional Attachment
Emotional Availability	-.094	-.111	-.136	.057	-.094
Mother's Emotional Availability	-.049	-.129	-.049	.100	-.038
Father's Emotional Availability	-.116	-.046	-.217	.013	-.145

\*\* Correlation significant at .01 (2-tailed)

\* Correlation significant at .05 (2-tailed)

Table 4.5

**Correlation Analysis of Full and Sub-Scales of LEAP and SACQ and Relationship with Parental Role for Females**

Pearson Correlation N=64	Full-Scale SACQ	Academic Adjustment	Social Adjustment	Personal- Emotional Adjustment	Goal Commitment Institutional Attachment
Emotional Availability	.251*	.056	.320**	.205	.251*
Mother's Emotional Availability	.285*	.108	.309**	.264*	.239*
Father's Emotional Availability	.161	.002	.244*	.113	.191

\*\* Correlation significant at .01 (2-tailed)

\* Correlation significant at .05 (2-tailed)

## Summary

This chapter included a description of the procedure for collection of data, demographic information of the participants, statistical procedures used and results of the data analysis. Tables providing SPSS outputs for regression and correlation analysis were also included. Both positive and negative correlations were found concerning the research questions and though few significant findings were discovered, some constructs of emotional availability and college adjustment were found to be statistically significant. One such finding was that the female participant's perception of mother's emotional availability was significantly related to their social adjustment to college.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In recent years emotional availability has been solidified as a construct in helping understand the emotional reciprocity within a dyad or family system (Biringen, 2004). Several relational constructs identified in the context of emotional availability are consistent with those identified in Bowlby's (1969/1982) and Ainsworth's et al. (1978) work on attachment theory (Emde, 2000). As interest in attachment theory has grown, many other researchers have built upon the foundation of attachment theory and created a strong body of literature concerning emotional availability (Biringen, et al., 2000a; Biringen et al., 2000b; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985; Lum & Phares, 2005).

Primarily, emotional availability describes the quality of mutual emotional expressions within a relationship between an individual (traditionally an infant or toddler) and their primary care giver (Biringen & Robinson, 1991; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). This includes four characteristics of parental behavior and two characteristics of child behavior. Parental characteristics include parental sensitivity, parental structuring, parental non-intrusiveness, and parental non-hostility. Child characteristics include child responsiveness and child involvement (Biringen, et al., 2000; Pipp-Siegle, 1998). These six behavioral characteristics help identify the level and quality of emotional availability between individuals. Furthermore, research suggests that the quality of emotional availability is related to an individual's psychological health (Easterbrooks & Biringen,

2000; Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Ziv et al., 2000), quality of the attachment to parents, significant others, and other types of relationships (Aviezer et al., 1999; Bretherton, 2000).

Though most of the recent research on emotional availability has been studied in mother-child and father-child dyads with young children (Biringen, et al., 2005; Biringen & Robinson 1991; Biringen, 2000; Bretherton, 2000; Emde, 2000), Lum and Phares (2005) developed an instrument to assess emotional availability with older children, adolescents and college age individuals.

The current study was an attempt to examine the possible relationship between emotional availability and college adjustment. In previous research, college adjustment has been positively associated with the quality of an individual's attachment to their parents (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Kenny, 1990; Mattanah, et al., 2004; Rice, et al., 1995). The question that was posited in the current study was that since emotional availability and attachment theory have common ideals and are linked in research literature, would emotional availability provide some explanation of an individual's adjustment to college? More precisely, the researcher wanted to examine the possible relationship between an individual's perception of their parent's emotional availability and their self-reported adjustment to college. Parental roles and gender difference in participants were also considered in the exploration of this relationship.

#### Demographics

One hundred fifty-three undergraduate students from one small private university and one large public university in the Southeastern United States participated in the current study. Of the 153 participants, 89 were female and 64 were male. The participants

were at least 18 years of age and volunteered to participate in this study. As previously discussed, neither age nor class standing were significant in the participant's perception of emotional availability and/or college adjustment. Participants were part of randomly selected classes on the respective campuses.

### The Relationship between Perceptions of Parental Emotional Availability and Students' Adjustment to College

The first research question focused on the overall relationship between emotional availability and college adjustment. Given the established relationship between attachment theory and emotional availability (Biringen, et. al, 2000; Bretherton, 2000; Emde, 2000) and attachment theory and college adjustment (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002; Rice, et al., 1995), one might assume that emotional availability and college adjustment would have a similar significant relationship. The current study found that this was not the case. Although an individual's perception of parental emotional availability and their adjustment to college was slightly positively correlated, there was not a significant relationship between the two.

These findings are perplexing because of the already established relationship between healthy family relationships and higher levels of college adjustment (Mattanah, et al., 2004; Protinsky & Gilkey, 1996; Rice et al., 1995). One possible explanation for the lack of significant findings in the examination of the present study may be that the LEAP measure itself is not as strongly connected to the tenets of attachment theory as to college adjustment. The LEAP measure is a very new tool used to assess the emotional availability of parents and, because the present study is the first attempt to examine the two constructs, it is possible that the LEAP is not the appropriate measure to represent the

variable of emotional availability in this context. However, it is also possible that regardless of the type of assessment tools used, a significant relationship between emotional availability and college adjustment would not be found.

It is worthy to mention that although no significant relationship was found between emotional availability and any of the four sub-scales of college adjustment, a more positive correlation was found with social adjustment and the perception of parent's emotional availability. Positive and significant correlations with social adjustment were a consistent aspect of the current study. The main reason for the difference in social adjustment's relationship with emotional availability could be that, as previously discussed, emotional availability is defined as a relational construct (Biringen & Robinson, 1991; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). Moreover, although emotional availability and social adjustment were not significantly correlated, research conducted by Lieberman, et al. (1999) and Aviezer et al. (1999) supports the importance of attachment and emotional availability in socialization and the development of healthy peer relationships.

#### *Impact of Parental Role*

The second question asked in the present study included the examination of parental roles and how those roles influenced the perception of emotional availability and the participant's adjustment to college. Independent of college adjustment, mothers were rated slightly higher than fathers in perception of emotional availability. This finding is supported by previous research with younger age groups concerning parental roles and emotional availability (Nakamura, et al., 2000; Volling, et al., 2002). Taking these parental roles into account with college adjustment, no significant differences were

discovered. Furthermore, although a positive relationship was found, and mother's emotional availability was more positively correlated than father's emotional availability, the relationships were not statistically significant.

In addition to these findings, mother's emotional availability was found to be statistically significant in relation to the participant's social and personal-emotional adjustment to college. Given that mothers scored higher in this study on levels of emotional availability and that emotional availability in general was more positively, though not significantly correlated with social adjustment, it is understandable that mother's emotional availability would be significantly associated with these areas of college adjustment. Previous research concerning mothers' impact on social, personal and emotional aspects of college adjustment supports the present findings (Lapsley, et al., 1989; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

An unexpected finding from the current study was that father's role in emotional availability and college adjustment was not significant. In fact, although not significant, father's emotional availability was actually negatively correlated with the academic subscale of college adjustment, and only slightly correlated with social adjustment. Lieberman et al. found father's role significantly important for positive friendship quality and lower social conflict (1999). In addition, other research on attachment and emotional availability has found fathers' role to be a positive influence in every aspect (Ainsworth, et al., 1978; Fox, et al., 1991; Kerns, 2000; Lieberman, et al., 1999; Volling, et al., 2002) and researchers suggest more credence and support be given to fathers in these areas (Lovas, 2005; Volling, et al., 2002).



### *Differences between Males and Females*

The final research question for the present study focused on the gender of the participants and examined how gender may impact perceptions of emotional availability and adjustment to college. The only significant findings for the impact of gender was that for females, emotional availability and college adjustment were positively correlated and statistically significant, whereas for males, the relationship was only slightly negatively correlated and not significant. This finding seems to contradict previous research that found no significant differences between gender and emotional availability (Biringen et al., 1994; Biringen, et al., 1999; Harel, et al., 2002). However, these studies focused on the observation of the interaction between parent and child when the child was an infant or toddler. The present study asks for the participant's perception of emotional availability as a young adult. In research concerning attachment (including college adjustment) attachment bonds have been shown to remain static over time (Kerns, et al., 2000; Rice, et al., 1995) however, more longitudinal research is needed to examine the possible variance of perceptions of emotional availability.

It is also important to acknowledge that gender, although not significant, was more accurate in explaining the participants' social adjustment to college. Previous research may help explain this finding. Kenny (1987) reported that females were more likely than males to seek parental support while away at college. Research also suggests that mothers and fathers are more emotionally available toward their daughters than their sons (Lovas, 2005). This "emotional refueling" as Mahler, et al. (1975) described it, could provide female college students with the necessary support to build social networks

more effectively and therefore, females would have greater levels of social adjustment than their male counterparts.

The most significant finding in the current study was females' perception of emotional availability from their mothers and their adjustment to college. Scores for this relationship were higher than any other relationship examined in the study. This finding is not surprising given that previous research by Nakamura, et al. (2000) and Volling, et al. (2002) found that mothers were more emotionally available than fathers. This finding is further supported by the current study. Lovas (2005) found mothers and fathers to be more emotionally available toward their daughters than their sons and that daughters were more emotionally responsive to their parents. In addition, mothers and daughters showed higher levels of emotional availability than mothers and sons and fathers and sons or daughters.

#### Limitations of Study

This study may be limited due to the relatively small sample of college students who participated in the research. Furthermore, most of the attachment literature has previously focused on the emotional availability in relationships between parents and infants and toddlers. In the current study, all participants were over the age of 18 and attending college. Also, as mentioned above, this is only the second study to involve the LEAP measure, and the first to examine the relationship of emotional availability and college adjustment; a variable that has already been shown to have significant connections with attachment to parents. It is possible that with other measures a stronger relationship would have been found.

Another limitation to consider is the fact that this study was completed toward the end of fall semester. For freshman participants this study occurred during the last two weeks of their first semester in college, whereas the remaining participants had already completed a year or more of college. Statistical analysis concluded that there were no differences between the freshman participant's adjustment to college and sophomores adjustment to college; a finding supported by Lapsley, et al. (1989). However, given that the current study is the first to examine these two variables with college students, no supporting information is yet available on the impact of emotional availability and college adjustment longitudinally.

### Implications

There are several implications from the current study. Most of these implications center on the impact of mothers and female participants perception of emotional availability and college adjustment. The highest scores from either scale came from females reporting on the perception of their parent's emotional availability and females reporting on their adjustment to college; especially their social adjustment to college.

#### *Implications for parents*

Given the present findings, it is important for parents to be aware of the impact of their parenting and future areas of development. Although the current study showed few significant relationships between the variables of emotional availability and college adjustment, plethora of research exists concerning the importance of healthy family relationships and an individual's adjustment to college.

It is also important for mothers to be aware of the different types of influence they have on their children, especially in the context of emotional availability. The present

study does indicate that mothers have the most significant impact on their children's adjustment to college. Equally, since there seems to be an increased influence with females, it is important for mothers to understand how their impact on their daughter's adjustment to college may differ from their sons.

One unexpected discovery in the current study included the lack of positive and significant correlations between perceptions of fathers' emotional availability and college adjustment. This is not to say that fathers' role in emotional availability and college adjustment is non-existent. In fact, as discussed above, fathers' role has previously been found to be very important in both areas. In agreement with Volling, et al. (2002) and Lovas (2005), and given the disparity in previous research and the current study related to fathers, more research is needed specifically on fathers' and their children's perceptions of emotional availability.

In addition, more research is needed to examine how the perception of mother's emotional availability is different than the perception of father's emotional availability in the impact on college adjustment.

#### *Implications for School Counselors*

School counselors may have a unique perspective on an individual's ability to be successful at a university. They have access to their students during the entire school year and may be aware of the student's ability to establish social networks, personal and emotional health and academic abilities. Although someone's college adjustment can't be generalized by these factors in high school, the research covered in this study does show that these areas are important for college adjustment. It is also important to consider the

parental involvement and the student's attachment to or perception of their parent's emotional availability, especially if those students have goals of going on to college.

#### *Implications for College Counselors*

The SACQ has been used on university campuses for over two decades (Baker & Syrik, 1984/1989; Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992). Attachment has been shown to have a significant relationship with college adjustment. Although the current study does not show many significant connections between emotional availability and college adjustment, the perception of emotional availability may still be a variable that needs to be considered when working with a student who is having difficulty adjusting to college (especially if the student is female). Some factors such as social adjustment and personal-emotional adjustment were found to be influenced by emotional availability.

Previous discussions concerning the implications for college counselors suggest the counselor focus on strengthening the student's social networks in order to help facilitate adjustment to college (Mattanah, et al., 2004). For counselors working with female clients, being aware of the health of the maternal relationship and encouraging a student of any gender to seek out "emotional refueling" opportunities could be advantageous in helping that student adjust to the expectation of college life.

#### *Implications for Counselor Educators*

If anything, this study has reiterated that fact that emotional availability has a significant impact on emotional, social and psychological health of individuals. Regardless of the apparent lack of connection with college adjustment, counselors-in-training need to be made aware of the research concerning emotional availability and the impact it has on infants' and toddlers' further adjustment to other areas of life. For

counselors who will be more focused on a younger population, present research shows that emotional availability is a relevant concept to their profession.

### *Implications for Future Research*

Future studies concerning emotional availability and college students could be beneficial in helping researchers and clinicians understand a greater context of emotional availability and variables associated with college students. As stated above, it is possible that though emotional availability as a whole was not significantly associated with college adjustment, other variables impacting college students may be found significant with emotional availability. More research is also needed to further examine emotional availability as measured by the LEAP and attachment in college students to solidify the type of relationship existing between the two.

It would also be interesting to conduct this study again with more participants and possibly include other instruments to assess the same variables. This could help researchers and clinicians understand how different instruments impact findings and could provide further validity to previous, current and future findings regarding these issues.

### Summary

This chapter includes a discussion of the research study and implications that may be drawn from the findings. In short, findings in the current study suggest that 1) overall, emotional availability and college adjustment are not significantly related, 2) the perception of mothers' emotional availability has more bearing on college adjustment than the perception of fathers' emotional availability, and 3) females rated perceptions of emotional availability and adjustment to college higher than males. Implications for

parents, school and college counselors, counselor educators and future research are discussed. More research is suggested to examine how the perception mother's emotional availability and the perception of fathers' emotional availability are different. Further research is also suggested to examine emotional availability with other variables associated with college students.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP)

### Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** In this questionnaire, you will read statements about your parents. First, you will be asked to rate your MOTHER's behavior and then you will be asked to rate your FATHER's behavior. For all questions, please answer the statement as to how each parent acted throughout your relationship. If you did not live with both of your biological parents, please rate the behavior of whomever you consider to be your mother and your father (e.g., adoptive parent, step-parent, etc.).

	Never Always 1	Rarely 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very Often 5	6								
	<b>MY MOTHER:</b>			<b>MY FATHER:</b>										
1. Supports me	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
2. Consoles me when I am upset	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
3. Shows she/he cares about me	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
4. Shows a genuine interest in me	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
5. Remembers things that are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
6. Is available to talk with me at anytime.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
7. Asks questions in a caring manner				1	2	3	4	5	6			1	2	3
4 5 6														
8. Spends extra time with me just he/she wants to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
9. Is willing to talk about my troubles				1	2	3	4	5	6			1	2	3
4 5 6														
10. Pursues talking with me about my interests	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
11. Values my input	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
12. Is emotionally available to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
13. Makes me feel wanted	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		
14. Praises me				1	2	3	4	5	6			1	2	3
4 5 6														

15. Is understanding

1 2 3 4 5 6

1 2 3 4 5 6

## APPENDIX B

### Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ)

### **Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ)\***

The 67 statements on this form describe college experiences. Read each one and decide how well it applies to you at the present time (within the past few days). For each statement, select the asterisk at the point in the continuum that best represents how closely the statement applies to you. Select only one asterisk for each statement.

1. I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.
2. I have been feeling tense or nervous lately.
3. I have been keeping up to date on my academic work.
4. I am meeting as many people, and making as many friends as I would like at college.
5. I know why I'm in college and what I want out of it.
6. I am finding academic work at college difficult.
7. Lately, I have been feeling blue and moody a lot.
8. I am very involved with social activities in college.
9. I am adjusting well to college.
10. I have not been functioning well during examinations.
11. I have felt tired much of the time lately.
12. Being on my own, taking responsibility for myself, has not been easy.
13. I am satisfied with the level at which I am performing academically.
14. I have had informal, personal contacts with college professors.
15. I am pleased now about my decision to go to college.
16. I am pleased now about my decision to attend this college in particular.
17. I'm not working as hard as I should at my course work.
18. I have several close social ties at college.
19. My academic goals and purposes are well defined.
20. I haven't been able to control my emotions very well lately.
21. I'm not really smart enough for academic work I am expected to be doing now.
22. Lonesomeness for home is a source of difficulty for me now.
23. Getting a college degree is very important for me.
24. My appetite has been good lately.
25. I haven't been very efficient in the use of study time lately.
26. I enjoy living in a college dormitory. (Please omit if you do not live in a dormitory; any university housing should be regarded as a dormitory.)
27. I enjoy writing papers for courses.
28. I have been having a lot of headaches lately.
29. I really haven't had much motivation for studying lately.
30. I am satisfied with the extracurricular activities available at college.



31. I've given a lot of thought lately to whether I should ask for help from the Psychological/Counseling Services Center or from a psychotherapist outside of college.
32. Lately, I have been having doubts regarding the value of a college education.
33. I am getting along very well with my roommates(s) at college. (Please omit if you do not have a roommate.)
34. I wish I were at another college or university.
35. I've put on (or lost) too much weight recently.
36. I am satisfied with the number and variety of courses available at college.
37. I feel that I have enough social skills to get along well in the college setting.
38. I have been getting angry too easily lately.
39. Recently I have had trouble concentrating when I try to study.
40. I haven't been sleeping very well.
41. I'm not doing well enough academically for the amount of work I put in.
42. I am having difficulty feeling at ease with other people at college.
43. I am satisfied with the quality or the caliber of courses available at college.
44. I am attending classes regularly.
45. Sometimes my thinking gets muddled up too easily.
46. I am satisfied with the extent to which I am participating in social activities at college.
47. I expect to stay at this college for a bachelor's degree.
48. I haven't been mixing too well with the opposite sex lately.
49. I worry a lot about my college expenses.
50. I am enjoying my academic work at college.
51. I have been feeling lonely a lot at college lately.
52. I am having a lot trouble getting started on homework assignments.
53. I feel I have good control over my life situation at college.
54. I am satisfied with my program of courses for this semester/quarter.
55. I have been feeling in good health lately.
56. I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways that I don't like.
57. On balance, I would rather be home than here.
58. Most of the things I am interested in are not related to any of my course work at college.
59. Lately I have been giving a lot of thought to transferring to another college.
60. Lately I have been giving a lot thought to dropping out of college altogether and for good.
61. I find myself giving considerable thought to taking time off from college and finishing later.
62. I am very satisfied with the professors I have now in my courses.
63. I have some good friends or acquaintances at college with whom I can talk about any problems I may have.
64. I am experiencing a lot of difficulty coping with the stresses imposed upon me in college.
65. I am quite satisfied with my social life at college.
66. I'm quite satisfied with my academic situation at college
67. I feel confident that I will be able to deal in a satisfactory manner with future challenges here at college.

\* The original SACQ form is a carbon copy booklet consisting of the 67 items above and demographic information such as age, gender, age and academic standing.

## APPENDIX C

Information Letter for Auburn University

Information Letter for Lipscomb University

(Letter to Lipscomb University Participants)  
INFORMATION LETTER FOR  
Emotional Availability as a Factor in Student Adjustment to College

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the relationship between the emotional availability of an individual's parents and their adjustment to college. Emotional availability is defined as the degree to which parents and children express emotions and are responsive to the emotions. College adjustment is defined as the ability of the student to adjust to academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional expectations. This study is being conducted by Heath Willingham under the supervision of Dr. Jamie Carney at Auburn University. I hope to learn how your perception of your parent's emotional availability may be related to your adjustment to college life. You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are 18 years of age or older and in college. **If you are not 18 years of age or older please do participate in this study.**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete the Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP) measure and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The LEAP measure is a 15 item measure that will ask you to rate the emotional availability of one or both of your parents (i.e. supportiveness, encouragement, etc.). The SACQ will ask about your current thoughts and feelings concerning your college experience (i.e. making friends, homesickness, etc.). By completing these forms, you agree to participate in this study. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete these forms. When you have completed the LEAP and SACQ please place and seal them in the provided envelope and return it to box provided.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. **Your participation or nonparticipation will have no bearing on your standing or grades at Lipscomb University.** The information collected through this study will be used to complete my dissertation, may be published in a professional journal, and may be presented at professional meetings. However, no one who participates in this study will be identifiable from the results. If you choose not to participate in this study please place the LEAP and the SACQ in the envelope and return in to the box provided.

If you have any questions I will be glad to answer them now. If questions arise later, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at the following: Heath Willingham, Department of Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology & School Psychology, 2084 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849, (334) 844-5160, [williha@auburn.edu](mailto:williha@auburn.edu). My faculty advisor is Dr. Jamie S. Carney. She may be reached through the Department of Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology & School Psychology, 2084 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849, (334) 844-5160, [carneyjs@auburn.edu](mailto:carneyjs@auburn.edu).

For additional information about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at Auburn University by phone (334) 844-5966 or via e-mail at [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu). The IRB Chairperson for this study is Dr. Peter Grandjean.

HAVING READ THIS INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST NOW DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

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Investigator's Signature

Date

(Letter to Auburn University Participants)  
INFORMATION LETTER FOR  
Emotional Availability as a Factor in Student Adjustment to College

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the relationship between the emotional availability of an individual's parents and their adjustment to college. Emotional availability is defined as the degree to which parents and children express emotions and are responsive to the emotions. College adjustment is defined as the ability of the student to adjust to academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional expectations. This study is being conducted by Heath Willingham under the supervision of Dr. Jamie Carney at Auburn University. I hope to learn how your perception of your parent's emotional availability may be related to your adjustment to college life. You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are 19 years of age or older and in college. **If you are not 19 years of age or older please do participate in this study.**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete the Lum Emotional Availability of Parents (LEAP) measure and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The LEAP measure is a 15 item measure that will ask you to rate the emotional availability of one or both of your parents (i.e. supportiveness, encouragement, etc.). The SACQ will ask about your current thoughts and feelings concerning your college experience (i.e. making friends, homesickness, etc.). By completing these forms, you agree to participate in this study. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete these forms. When you have completed the LEAP and SACQ please place and seal them in the provided envelope and return it to box provided.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. **Your participation or nonparticipation will have no bearing on your standing or grades at Auburn University.** The information collected through this study will be used to complete my dissertation, may be published in a professional journal, and may be presented at professional meetings. However, no one who participates in this study will be identifiable from the results. If you choose not to participate in this study please place the LEAP and the SACQ in the envelope and return in to the box provided.

If you have any questions I will be glad to answer them now. If questions arise later, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at the following: Heath Willingham, Department of Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology & School Psychology, 2084 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849, (334) 844-5160, [williha@auburn.edu](mailto:williha@auburn.edu). My faculty advisor is Dr. Jamie S. Carney. She may be reached through the Department of Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology & School Psychology, 2084 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849, (334) 844-5160, [carneyjs@auburn.edu](mailto:carneyjs@auburn.edu).

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Investigator's Signature

Date