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The Relationship Between Academic and Psychological Help Seeking and Attachment Styles

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The Relationship Between Academic and Psychological Help Seeking and Attachment Styles

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

Julia C. Sager

Trinity College

Fall 2014 – Spring 2015

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Abstract

Research has shown a relationship between an individual's attachment style and help seeking behaviors. However, most studies have focused either on academic or psychological help seeking separately. The goal of my study was to see if, for Trinity College students, there were differences in attitudes about two different types of help seeking depending on one's attachment style. I predicted that students with a secure attachment would report willingness to seek help in both academic and psychological settings when necessary. Students with an avoidant attachment would report a strong resistance to seeking both psychological and academic help. Students with an anxious/ambivalent attachment would report the greatest willingness to seek help. Lastly, I predicted that female participants would report greater willingness to seek both academic and psychological help than male participants. To measure attachment style I used the Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1990). To measure students' propensity for seeking psychological help I used the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form (Fischer & Farina 1995). To measure students' willingness to seek academic help I used Karabenick's Help-Seeking Scale (2003). No significant relationship was found between students' attachment styles and their willingness to seek psychological help, but there do appear to be some differences in attachment styles' influence on academic help seeking. There also appears to be a relationship between gender and willingness to seek psychological help.

Introduction

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory holds the belief that infants' relationships with their primary caregiver shapes their sense of self and greatly influences the formation and maintenance of all future interpersonal relationships (Karen, 1994). Attachment orientation refers to individuals' expectations of the responsiveness and reliability of interpersonal relationships, beginning in infancy in the relationship with one's primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1973). John Bowlby who is widely recognized as the initial founder of attachment theory, suggested that infants' attachment to their caregivers help the infants understand and identify their emotions, as well as shape their expectations of relationships (Mattanah, Lopez & Govern, 2011). The nature of this early attachment not only determines how infants interact with their families but also how they respond to the world around them and form constructs of both themselves and how to relate to others. This attachment system also determines how infants learn to regulate and cope with stress, which shapes a frame of reference for responding to stress throughout their lives.

In the late 1960's Ainsworth developed a categorical measure of attachment to classify individuals into one of three specific styles or orientations based on Bowlby's theory of attachment. These attachment styles develop in infancy out of the interactions between infants and their primary caregivers, and create a foundation that can have later behavioral and social implications, as the child matures into adulthood.

Ainsworth furthered attachment theory with the development of a method to study it called the 'Strange Situation,' which involved brief separations and reunions between infants and their primary caregivers (Main, 2000.) Ainsworth's observations of the children's responses in the strange situation resulted in the identification of three attachment styles, 'secure', 'insecure-

avoidant', and 'insecure-anxious/ambivalent' (Main, 2000). Sixty-five percent of children studied in the strange situation were deemed to have a secure attachment, twenty percent were classified as insecure-avoidant, and fifteen percent were found to have an insecure-anxious/ambivalent attachment (Karen, 1994). A secure attachment is reflected in a balance between seeking proximity to the caregiver and independent exploration. Within the Strange Situation, securely attached infants exhibit distress when abandoned, but become calm and happy again when reunited with their caregiver (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). An avoidant attachment is characterized by a deactivation of the attachment system; avoidantly attached infants show limited distress when abandoned during the Strange Situation, and ignore their mother when she returns to the room (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). An anxious/ambivalent attachment style is characterized by hyperactivation of the attachment system; infants become inconsolable when separated from their mothers and yet are not comforted by their return (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). These classifications form from the individual's experiences and reactions to those experiences, which create a blueprint for future interactions. Furthermore, attachment styles have been shown to be largely persistent throughout one's life, and strongly influence interpersonal relationships in adulthood.

Attachment styles are formed in response to the caregiving an individual receives during infancy. It is important to note that the two insecure attachment styles are adaptations that infants use to cope with the stress of the inability or inconsistency around getting their needs met. Infants whose needs are continually met, learn to trust that their caregiver is capable of providing for and protecting them, and that the world is not a scary place. Infants whose needs are ignored, or inconsistently met develop adaptive strategies to cope with the fact that they have learned they cannot rely on their caregiver. Children who develop an avoidant attachment have learned that

their caregiver is unlikely to respond to attentional cues and therefore these children use strategies to conceal their attachment needs and deactivate attention (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Avoidant attachment styles are highly associated with both explicit and implicit parental rejection (Main, 2000). When infants experience repeated rejection of their attachment needs they start to suppress these needs, and learn to view them as unimportant. This strategy is the safest choice for the infant to deal with the lack of responsiveness from their caregiver. Children who develop an anxious/ambivalent attachment style receive inconsistent care, and, therefore, develop strategies that exaggerate their attachment needs in hopes of receiving the attention they crave (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). These hyperactivating strategies are an attempt to gain the consistent responses that the caregiver is not providing, but often this behavior pushes the caregiver farther away. These hyperactivating techniques can range from extreme neediness to an inability to be calmed, to constant fussing. Securely attached children feel confident that their caregiver will respond to their needs, and therefore they neither mask nor exaggerate their needs, and develop a healthy pattern of expression. In adulthood these attachment styles become known as ‘attachment orientations’ and reflect the manner in which individuals have learned to understand themselves and relate to others.

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) allows researchers to identify adults’ attachment orientations (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985). With the development of this instrument, researchers have been able to compare the attachment styles of infants who participated in the Strange Situation to the attachment classifications they receive as adults based on the AAI. The majority of these studies have found that classification given to the infant during the Strange Situation predicts the classification they receive after completing the AAI, twenty years later (Siegel, 1999). These findings support the idea that attachment styles are relatively stable

throughout individuals' lives. Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, and Albersheim (2000) conducted a twenty year longitudinal study that examined the stability of attachment classifications throughout individuals' lives. Sixty infants participated in the Strange Situation when they were one year old, and fifty of these participants were interviewed using the AAI twenty years later. The results of this study indicated that attachment security in infancy is significantly related to a secure attachment in adulthood. Seventy-eight percent of participants who did not experience traumatic life events related to their caregivers (such as death or divorce), showed a stable attachment classification in the study (Waters et al., 2000).

As Bowlby predicted, and later longitudinal studies supported, attachment orientations tend to remain consistent throughout the lifespan in the absence of a traumatic event that involves the primary caregiver. Infants who are securely attached often grow up to be securely attached adults, these adults score high on their willingness to rely on others and low on their emotional reactivity (Karen, 1994; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Securely attached adults value interpersonal relationships and have a balanced need for intimacy and independence. (Karen 1994). Due to the secure base that these adults had with their primary caregiver throughout infancy and childhood, they now have internalized security in a way that allows them to be both self-sufficient as well as willing and eager to establish healthy relationships (Mallinckrodt, 2000). In adulthood this secure attachment is occasionally referred to as an 'autonomous state of mind' and it is associated with "ego resiliency, social competence, and good integration in peer groups during adolescence" (Bernier, Larose, Boivan & Soucy, 2004, p. 784).

In adulthood, the avoidant classification is referred to as 'dismissive', and adults with a dismissive attachment orientation tend to be highly independent and often minimize the importance of relationships (Bernier et al., 2004). They are closed off to emotional experiences

and prefer to limit themselves and their relationships to non-emotional domains; furthermore they are often distant with their parents and have trouble remembering their childhood experiences (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). These adults are unwilling to rely on others and have a low emotional reactivity (Karen, 1994; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Due to their distancing nature and inability to form meaningful emotional relationships it is not surprising that dismissive adults score low on their need for intimacy, and high on their need for independence. This affinity for independence can serve as an isolating factor, and is likely to cause an aversion to social support. Adolescents with a dismissive attachment orientation often report more loneliness, and are viewed as more introverted than their peers (Bernier et al., 2004). These individuals tend to be characterized as more hostile, and have a difficult time admitting to and coping with negative emotions.

In adulthood, the anxious/ambivalent style is referred to as 'preoccupied'. Preoccupied individuals tend to have a strong desire for closeness coupled with a constant and crippling fear of rejection and abandonment (Mikulincer, Shaver, Bar-On, & Ein-Dor, 2010). Many adults with a preoccupied attachment orientation are overly focused on unresolved issues from their own childhoods, and find these memories interfering with their ability to form successful interpersonal relationships (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Adolescents with a preoccupied attachment orientation are more anxious and lonely than their peers and exhibit more delinquent and suicidal behaviors (Bernier et al., 2004). Individuals with a preoccupied attachment orientation feel that their needs can never be met, and often interact with others with a sense of urgency that tends to alienate themselves from forming the connections they so desperately crave. Individuals with a preoccupied attachment orientation tend to have a high emotional reactivity and desire for

intimacy, but are rarely independent and may be overly eager to rely on others (Karen, 1994; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Internal Working Model

All of these attachment styles, which are formed during infancy and early childhood, are related to the individual's internal working model. The internal working model "reflects the child's relationship history, codifying the behaviors that belong to an intimate relationship, and defining how he will feel about himself when he is closely involved with another person" (Karen, 1994, p. 204), and plays a role in how that person interprets events as well as his expectations of relationships. The theory of the 'internal working model' of attachment, developed by John Bowlby, refers to the mental process that is "'ingrained' in patterns of neuronal firing in which past experiences and the adaptations that were generated in response to them create synaptic connections that are retained in memory" (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003, p. 148). This process serves as a type of implicit memory that is formed in infancy, unconsciously activated throughout adulthood, and influences one's beliefs, emotions, reactions, and behaviors (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). This mental representation allows the mind to summarize past experiences and form a model for how to perceive and respond to present and future events (Siegel, 1999). One's internal working model has shown to be persistent throughout one's life, and can be difficult to alter. Therefore, when infants' attachment needs are repeatedly overlooked, they unconsciously develop negative expectations of social support and alter their expression of these needs accordingly.

The internal working model is comprised of the 'self model' and the 'other model', which serve as two separate yet interconnected cognitive schemas (Lopez, Melendez, Sauer, Berger, & Wyssman, 1998). The self model consists of "basic perceptions of one's own worth,

competence and lovability”, while the other model involves the “core expectations regarding the essential goodness, trustworthiness, and dependability of important others in one’s social world” (Lopez et al. 1998, p. 79). These self and other models directly influence individuals’ sense of self, as well as their beliefs about the capabilities of others (Karen, 1994). Lopez et al. (1998) conducted a study that examined the relationship between college students’ internal working models, and both self-reported problems and the students’ attitudes about help seeking. To assess the participants’ self-reported problems, they used a 20-item version of the Personal Problems Inventory (PPI). To assess willingness to seek counseling they asked participants to rank their willingness to seek counseling for each of the 20 questions on the PPI on a 6-point likert scale. To assess the participants’ attitudes about seeking psychological help, they used the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS) developed by Fischer & Turner. Lastly, adult attachment style was measured with the Relationship Questionnaire. The researchers found that of the participants who reported current problems, individuals with a secure or preoccupied attachment (i.e. those with positive other models) scored significantly higher on willingness to seek counseling than those with a dismissive attachment (i.e., those with negative other models). Furthermore, Lopez et al. (1998) found that participants’ self models significantly predicted their degree of self-reported problems—participants with positive self models (i.e., those with a secure or dismissive attachment) reported significantly fewer current problems than those with negative self models (i.e., those with a preoccupied attachment). These results suggest that not only does the internal working model associated with attachment theory influence individuals’ beliefs and expectations of others, but it even shapes their understanding and acknowledgement of personal distress.

College Students and Psychological Distress

The college years are widely seen as some of the most influential years of one's life, when individuals develop academically, emotionally, and socially. However, this time period can be extremely difficult for some people, and in recent years there has been a significant increase in individuals seeking psychological help. To investigate this transition, the American College Counseling Association's (ACCA) conducted a survey in which ninety-four percent of college counseling center directors reported that there has been a steady increase in students struggling with serious psychological issues (American College Counseling Center, 2014). A significant percent of the directors surveyed also reported an increase in anxiety disorders, clinical depression, learning disabilities and other psychological issues over the past five years. Finally, the directors also reported that fifty-two percent of their patients have severe psychological problems, which is an eight percent increase from 2013.

The influx in students with significant psychological problems has led to an increase in students' psychological help seeking. In the last decade, college counseling centers have noted an increase in the number of people seeking help for more serious psychological issues, compared to the less serious informational needs of the past (Kitzrow, 2003). The most common psychological issues affecting college and university students are anxiety, which affects 41.6% of students; depression, which affects 36.4% of students; and relationship problems, which affect 35.8% of students (Mistler, Reetz, Krylowicz, & Barr, 2012). However, despite the increase in college students seeking psychological help, it is important to note that many students do not receive the treatment they need. In the 2014 ACCA survey of college counseling center directors, there were 125 reported suicides in the past year, in which "61% of the students who committed suicide were depressed, 21% had relationship problems, 11% had academic problems, 5% had legal concerns, and 2% had financial problems" (American College Counseling Center, 2014, p.

6). Kitzrow (2003) suggests that a college student suffering from mental health issues may also experience physical, emotional, and cognitive problems, and often struggles to maintain interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, mental health problems may be associated with a decrease in academic performance, retention, and graduation rates (Kitzrow, 2003). High levels of psychological distress have an indirect, but significant negative relationship with academic performance in college students (Brackney & Karabenick, 1995). They found that students with significant psychological distress also experienced high test anxiety, low motivation and academic self-efficacy, and were less likely to use study resources or engage in academic help seeking. The National Alliance on Mental Health published a report in 2012 showing that, of the students who withdrew from college due to mental health issues, forty-five percent did not receive the treatment they needed (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012). While the report did not speculate potential reasons for this discrepancy, any way in which colleges can understand and encourage psychological help-seeking behaviors ought to be pursued.

Attachment and Psychological Distress

It is apparent that college students may be at a higher risk for developing or exhibiting psychological distress than the average population, and this risk can be magnified with an insecure attachment style. Insecure attachments are often associated with a difficulty regulating distress in infancy, which often affects distress regulation capabilities in adulthood as well. A secure attachment is often viewed as an 'inner resource' that enables individuals to properly manage stress, while an insecure attachment can serve as a risk factor during stressful events (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Wei, Heppner, & Mallinckrodt, 2003).

Lopez, Mitchell, and Gormley (2002) conducted a study that examined the relationship between college students' attachment orientations and their level of psychological distress. The

results of the study revealed that an insecure attachment was generally and significantly related to self-organization and distress. They found that the anxiety/ambivalent attachment style in particular, is associated with high levels of self-disorganization, which can increase the risk for experiencing significant psychological distress. Additionally, individuals with both attachment anxiety/ambivalence and attachment avoidance struggle with affect regulation, and often develop maladaptive coping mechanisms, which may predispose these individuals to experience greater general distress.

Lopez et al.'s (2002) findings are supported by a study conducted by Bradford and Lydon (1993) that examined the relationship between parental attachment and symptoms of psychological distress in college students. To measure attachment orientations, they used the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. To assess psychological distress, participants completed the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised. The results of this study supported the researchers' hypothesis that college students' attachment styles significantly predict the presence of psychological symptoms. The researchers reasoned that their findings may suggest that the presence of a 'secure base' in the attachment relationship is especially important during the college years because of the overwhelming developmental challenges that individuals face during this time.

Wei et al. (2003) conducted a study on the meditational role of perceived coping between attachment and psychological distress in college students. To measure attachment orientations, the researchers used the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS). To assess perceived coping, the Suppressive Style and Reactive Styles subscales of the Problem-Focused Style of Coping were used, and to assess individuals' awareness of problem-solving abilities the Problem Solving Inventory was used. To measure psychological distress the Beck Depression Inventory, the State-

Trait Anxiety Inventory-Trait Anxiety Form, the Trait Anger Scale, the Hopelessness Scale, and the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems-Short Circumplex Form were used. The results of this study not only revealed that attachment orientations influence psychological distress, but that perceived coping mediates this relationship. More specifically this study found a direct effect between attachment avoidance and psychological distress, which is partially mediated by perceived coping. No direct effect between attachment anxiety/ambivalence and psychological distress was found, but perceived coping does in fact mediate the relationship between the two. These findings suggest that both types of insecure attachment orientations can serve as a risk factor for experiencing psychological distress, particularly for college students.

Attachment and Academic Difficulty

An insecure attachment not only serves as a risk factor for psychological distress, but can also influence academic ability in both children, and college students. The relationship between attachment style and academic performance can be seen from early childhood through the college career, perhaps implying a pattern of learned behaviors that are either detrimental or beneficial to academic performance.

Moss and St. Laurent (2001) conducted a study on the relationship between attachment and academic performance in school age children. They assessed the children's attachment styles, relationship with their primary caregiver, cognitive engagement, mastery motivation of academic learning, academic performance, and IQ at two separate developmental stages. Some of their relevant findings revealed that securely attached children scored significantly higher on three of the five performance-related measures, and that at age six higher cognitive engagement was associated with a secure attachment. In this study, attachment style was not significantly related to differences in IQ or academic performance. In contrast, Jacobsen and Hofmann's

(1997) longitudinal study on attachment and academic competency did in fact show a relationship between attachment security and academic performance. They classified their participants as either secure or insecure, rather than into three distinct styles, but the results indicated that securely attached students had higher GPAs at age fifteen, scored higher on measures of attention-participation, and had less school-related insecurities. This relationship between attachment security and academic performance has been found in the college population as well.

Larose, Bernier and Tarabulsy (2005) examined the role of attachment in students' learning dispositions and academic performance during the transition to college. The participants completed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) at the end of their high school career, and again after the first semester of college. The participants learning dispositions were measured with a 50-item questionnaire that examines their beliefs, emotional reactions, and behaviors in regard to learning, and their academic performance was measured based on grades obtained and weighted from both high school averages and a standardized general mean from the first three semesters of college. The findings revealed that the learning dispositions of individuals with a secure attachment either improved or remained the same, whereas insecurely attached students' learning dispositions appeared to decline during the transition to college. Quality of test-prep for students categorized with a dismissive attachment decreased slightly during the college transition, while those categorized with an autonomous attachment maintained their quality of test-prep. Students classified as dismissive also gave less priority to schoolwork, and reported greater reluctance to seek help from their teachers than the autonomous students. Individuals with a preoccupied attachment experienced increased fears of failing during this adjustment period, while there was no change for autonomous students. Despite this increase in failure

related anxiety, the results also showed that giving priority to school work and willingness to seek help from teachers decreased for students with a preoccupied attachment, while both of these factors remained stable for autonomous students. From these findings, the researchers inferred that a secure attachment serves as a protective factor against the difficulties associated with the transition to college. The detriments associated with academic performance for students with a preoccupied attachment appear to be related to more emotional and social areas, while individuals with a dismissive attachment struggled more with school-specific tasks. Furthermore, they found that a dismissive attachment orientation in particular is associated with lower grades and an overall poorer academic performance in college.

The researchers concluded that a secure attachment may provide students with inner adaptive resources that serve as protective factors during the adjustment to college.

Attachment and Psychological Help Seeking

Considering the rising statistics of individuals struggling with psychological issues and mental health concerns, professional psychological help is an essential outlet. Unfortunately there has been a long-standing stigma associated with psychological help seeking, which has often served as a barrier for individuals seeking the help they require. Many people are reluctant to admit that they need professional psychological assistance, and may avoid seeking treatment even in times of need. Komiya, Good and Sherrod (2000) summarized some of the many different reasons for individuals' aversion to psychological help, including, perception of social stigma, role of individualism, discomfort with self-disclosure, reluctance to rely on others, and a desire to conceal negative personal information. In recent years, researchers have begun examining the role that attachment orientations play in individuals' attitudes about and willingness to seek psychological help.

Attachment styles influence not only how individuals feel about themselves and how they regulate distress, but also how they understand and relate to others, which includes perceptions of social support and subsequent help seeking attitudes and behaviors. Researchers have suggested that the internal working models associated with the various attachment styles play a role in individuals' perceptions of, and willingness to seek help from others (Lopez et al., 1998; Vogel and Wei, 2005).

Vogel and Wei (2005) conducted a study on attachment insecurity and help seeking intentions in college students. They measured participants' attachment styles, levels of psychological distress, perceptions of social support, and intentions to seek counseling. The researchers found that there was a direct positive effect of attachment anxiety/ambivalence on intentions to seek help, and a direct negative effect of attachment avoidance on intentions to seek psychological help. They also found that both perceived social support and psychological distress play an indirect role in the help-seeking process, for both insecure attachment styles. Another interesting finding was that perceptions of social support influenced individuals' level of psychological distress, which significantly predicted the probability of help seeking. More specifically, individuals with either insecure attachment orientation perceived less social support than individuals with a secure attachment did, and this perception was negatively associated with psychological distress, which was positively associated with help-seeking.

As discussed earlier, avoidantly attached individuals tend to devalue the importance of relationships and avoid relying on others, while anxious/ambivalently attached individuals tend to exaggerate instances of distress in hopes of prompting responsiveness and assistance from others. Due to these characteristics, it is not surprising that research indicates that individuals with an avoidant attachment style are less likely to seek psychological help (Vogel & Wei, 2005;

Hill et al., 2012; Shaffer, Vogel, & Wei, 2006; Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005). There are many explanations for this finding, including that avoidantly attached people do not perceive strong social support, and tend to either not acknowledge or deny completely any emotional distress (Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005; Vogel & Wei, 2005). In contrast, many studies found that individuals with attachment anxiety are more likely to seek professional help (Vogel & Wei, 2005; Lopez et al., 1998). Anxious/ambivalently attached individuals are significantly more willing to acknowledge emotional distress, and are often eager to self disclose, thus making them more willing to seek psychological help (Lopez et al., 1998; Vogel & Wei, 2005). Attachment anxiety is associated with a negative internal working model of the self, but a positive internal working model of others, which likely explains anxious/ambivalently attached individuals' willingness to utilize social support (Lopez et al., 1998; Vogel & Wei, 2005).

Individuals' internal working models play a major role in determining their attitudes about seeking psychological help (Lopez et al. 1998). Adults with a secure or preoccupied attachment orientation tend to have a positive 'other' model. Lopez et al. (1998) found that these two styles were related to significantly higher scores on a willingness to seek counseling measure than adults with a dismissive attachment orientation, who tend to have a negative 'other' model. They also found that individuals' 'self' models significantly predicted their overall level of self-reported problems, for example, positive 'self' models are associated with reports of less psychological distress. Adults with a preoccupied attachment orientation often have a negative 'self' model, and are more likely to report psychological or emotional difficulties particularly during transitional periods.

Shaffer et al. (2006) conducted a study on the relationship between attachment orientations and help seeking that examined how anticipated risks and benefits shape individuals'

attitudes about seeking psychological help. More specifically, they looked at how the different internal working models associated with each attachment style effects participants' opinions about seeking psychological help. They found that individuals with an avoidant attachment (and a negative internal working model of others) anticipated more risks and less benefits associated with seeking psychological help, which was then associated with more negative attitudes towards counseling and an aversion to seek it. However, participants with anxious/ambivalent attachment had more contradictory opinions, anticipating both more risks and more benefits associated with seeking psychological help. The researchers suggested that this finding is in line with attachment theory, as anxious/ambivalent attachment is often associated with a strong desire to rely on others coupled with an intense fear of rejection, resulting in a fluctuating contradiction between relying on social support and retracting from it.

Attachment style also influences individuals' attitudes about the process of therapy. Securely attached people are less nervous about interacting with a therapist, and tend to perceive more benefits than detriments associated with therapy, whereas insecurely attached people have the opposite attitude (Hill et al. 2012). Shaffer et al. (2006) found similar results, in which attachment avoidance corresponded with the perception of more risks than benefits associated with psychotherapy, which resulted in more negative attitudes and less willingness to seek psychological help. Perceived risks and benefits were found to be significant indicators of willingness to seek psychological help. When the perceived benefits outweighed the perceived risks, individuals were more likely to report positive attitudes about psychological help, as well as, a greater likelihood of seeking it.

Attachment and Academic Help Seeking

As discussed earlier, Larose et al. (2005) found that while insecurely attached students' learning dispositions tend to decline during the transition to college, securely attached students' learning dispositions either remain stable or improve. Bernier et al. (2004) suggest that this attachment-based difference may be due to securely attached individuals greater ability to access emotional and cognitive resources related to academic performance. Furthermore, Bernier et al. (2004) found that preoccupied attachment in particular is associated with difficult adjustment during the first year of college, thus suggesting a particular need for this population to receive academic support. Examining the role attachment orientations play in academic help seeking is of particular relevance, especially considering the tremendous presence that school plays in both social and intellectual development.

Similar to the role it plays in influencing individuals' perceptions of professional psychological support, attachment orientations have been found to affect individuals' attitudes about seeking academic support as well (Larose, Bernier, Soucy, & Duchesne, 1999; Holt, 2014; Larose & Bernier, 2001). Larose et al. (1999) examined how attachment styles affect individuals' beliefs and attitudes about social support networks, and whether these beliefs then impacted their willingness to seek help from college professors. The researchers expected that secure attachment would be associated with positive expectations of support networks, while both anxious/ambivalent and avoidant attachment would be associated with negative expectations of support networks. The results showed that while both insecure attachment styles were associated with negative network orientations, avoidantly attached participants revealed the most negative feelings towards their social support networks. Larose et al. (1999) suggested that this might be related to negative attachment experiences from childhood that shaped their views of support networks. In line with attachment theory, avoidantly attached participants in this study scored

high on the 'Discomfort with Closeness' and 'Relationships as Secondary' subscales of the Attachment Style Questionnaire, while anxious/ambivalently attached participants scored high on the 'Need for Approval' and 'Preoccupation with Relationships' subscale. Another interesting finding revealed that participants who held positive attitudes, expectations and beliefs of support networks (characteristics of a positive network orientation) were significantly more likely to engage in academic help-seeking with their college professors. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the expectations associated with interpersonal relationships that were formed during infancy influence individuals' attitudes, beliefs and future expectations of the helpfulness and capability of their social support networks, including seeking help from teachers as an academic resource.

Similarly, Kobak and Sceery (1988) compared how secure and insecure individuals develop beliefs and biases about support networks. Secure people develop an internal working model that allows them to properly recognize distress and rely on others for support or comfort, while insecurely attached people developed various strategies to cope with the negligent or unpredictable experiences of their infancy. Their research suggests individuals with an avoidant attachment style utilize strategies that purposefully repress distress, and limit seeking comfort or assistance from others, while anxious/ambivalently attached people over emphasize distress in hopes of garnering the consistent comfort or acknowledgement they crave. Following this study, Larose et al. (1999) proposed that Kobak and Sceery's (1988) findings support the theory that attachment styles help establish social support cognitions, which then influences help seeking behaviors in academic settings. Their findings suggest that these network orientations do in fact influence help seeking behaviors, and that students who have a positive network orientation are more likely to seek help from their teachers in times of need.

Holt (2014) examined the role of help seeking attitudes in the relationship between attachment and academic adjustment during the college transition, using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment to assess students' attachment styles, Karabenick's (2003) Help-Seeking Scale to assess students' attitudes about academic help seeking, and the Academic Adjustment Scale to measure students' academic adjustment to college after the first semester. The results revealed that college students' attachment security did in fact predict more favorable attitudes toward seeking academic help. This finding supported the researchers' hypothesis that parental attachment influences students' feelings towards seeking academic help in times of need.

Larose and Bernier's (2001) study examined the mediating role that perceptions of social support play in the relationship between attachment styles and students' adjustment to college. They measured participants' attachment styles, perceptions of social support during times of distress, attitudes about seeking help from both teachers and peers, personal adjustment, and a young adult behavioral checklist that was completed by a close friend. The participants' friends also completed a copy of the measure on attitudes about help seeking based on their perceptions of the participants' behaviors. The researchers found that a dismissive attachment orientation was negatively related to trust, and seeking help from both teachers and peers. This finding aligns with the typical characteristics of dismissive attachment, viewing others as unreliable or unwilling to help, which directly influences their likeliness to access their support network when needed. Similarly, a preoccupied attachment was negatively correlated with trust, both self and peer reported help seeking from teachers, and support network satisfaction. However, a preoccupied attachment style was also positively correlated with stress associated with the college transition. This suggests that individuals with a preoccupied attachment may be acutely

aware of their distress, but believe that their support system is inadequate and thus neglect to seek the help that they feel they need.

Tying together these studies suggest that the attachment styles formed during infancy create a mental framework that influence students' expectations of social support, and guide their academic help seeking behaviors in college.

Role of Gender in Help Seeking

Many studies have found a correlation between gender and help seeking, showing that females report more positive attitudes about seeking help than their male counterparts (Holt, 2014; Elhai, Schweinle, & Anderson, 2008; Larose & Bernier, 2001; Lopez et al. 1998).

Nam, et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on gender differences in attitudes toward seeking psychological help. In their meta-analysis they only included studies of college students, and those that used the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS), since it is a measurement of general attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Sixteen studies were reviewed, with a total of 5,713 participants. Their main finding was that gender is significantly related to attitudes toward seeking psychological help, and that female college students exhibit more favorable attitudes about psychological help seeking. Nam et al. (2010) also found that cultural background moderates this relationship. While females cross-culturally report more positive attitudes toward psychological help seeking, this gender difference is largest for Caucasian Americans. Perhaps, in non-western cultures emotional expression may not be reinforced in either male or female development, whereas in western cultures there is a greater acceptance for females to express emotions. The authors hypothesized that students identifying as Asian or Asian American may view psychological help seeking as

source of shame or embarrassment to their families, and thus avoid engaging in such help seeking behaviors.

While there is limited research on the role of gender in academic help seeking, the results from Holt's (2014) study revealed that female students reported more positive attitudes towards seeking academic help than their male counterparts. This finding led her to propose that the gender differences presented in Nam et al. (2010) meta-analysis on students' attitudes toward seeking psychological help also pertain to students' attitudes toward seeking academic help. However, the limited research in the extant literature does not offer empirically supported explanations for this gender difference in academic help seeking.

Interestingly, Larose & Bernier (2001) found that more of their male participants fell into the dismissive category, and proposed that this could be related to how boys and men are raised in western society. Often emotions, and negative emotions in particular, are devalued more in parent-son interactions than in parent-daughter interactions, and this could potentially influence how men understand and respond to moments of personal distress. This finding may partially explain the gender disparity between men and women's attitudes toward using their support networks, and seeking both psychological and academic help.

Implications of Research

The college years, given the academic demands it places on students, show increased levels of psychological distress, a number that has grown exponentially in recent years (American College Counseling Center, 2014). Therefore, understanding students' attitudes about help seeking in both academic and psychological domains is important in establishing effective support networks at colleges and universities. As research has demonstrated, attachment styles greatly influence individuals' view of themselves and others (Bowlby, 1958; Karen, 1994;

Lopez, et al. 1998), and these views often affect perceptions of support networks and peoples' propensity to seek help (Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005; Hill et al. 2012). Extant research has shown a relationship between attachment style and attitudes about psychological help seeking (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Vogel & Wei, 2005), as well as attachment style and academic help seeking (Holt, 2014; Larose & Bernier, 2001). The literature, however, is lacking a study that simultaneously compares the role of attachment on academic and psychological help seeking for the same individuals. A more comprehensive study is necessary in order to better understand college students' attitudes about both types of help seeking.

Current Study

This study aimed to understand college students differing attitudes about seeking psychological and academic help, and explored whether attachment style has an equal influence on attitudes about seeking both psychological and academic help. Self-report measures were distributed to a random sampling of college students to measure attachment orientation, and attitudes about both psychological and academic help seeking. The study was designed to collect information on general attitudes about help seeking, as well as look at the relationship between these attitudes and individuals' attachment styles.

Hypotheses

H1: Attachment style will influence attitudes about seeking both academic and psychological help seeking, but because of the emotional component associated with psychological help seeking, attachment style will have a stronger affect on attitudes about seeking psychological help.

H2: Secure attachment will be associated with a willingness to seek both academic and psychological help when needed.

H3: Anxious/ambivalent attachment, because of the characteristically strong desire to rely on others, will be associated with the greatest willingness to seek both academic and psychological help.

H4: Avoidant attachment will be associated with the most reluctant to seek help in both domains, and this reluctance will be especially strong in regard to psychological help.

H5: Female participants will report more positive attitudes about seeking both academic and psychological help than male participants. This gender difference will be more significant for psychological help seeking due to the emotional nature of that domain, as well, as the social stigma associated with males seeking psychological help.

Method

Participants

The participants (N=181) in this study were college students from a small liberal arts college in southern New England. The survey was originally sent to 610 students, with a thirty percent response rate. One hundred and sixteen participants (64.1%) identified as female, while sixty-five (35.9%) identified as male. There were fifty-three First-Year students (29.3%), thirty-four Sophomores (18.8%), forty Juniors (22.1%), and fifty-four Seniors (29.8%). One hundred and thirty-eight participants identified as Caucasian (76.7%), eight as Hispanic or Latino (4.4%), six as Black or African American (3.3%), eighteen as Asian/Pacific Islander (10%), and ten participants indicated 'Other' (5.6%). One participant did not indicate a race. Ninety-seven participants reported seeking academic help in the past twelve months (53.6%), while only forty-eight participants (26.5%) reported seeking psychological help in the past twelve months. Each participant completed an informed consent form (see Appendix A). The Trinity College Institutional Review Board approved the protocol for this study.

Measures

Demographics: The demographic measures consisted of five items: gender, grade, ethnicity/race, a question about academic help seeing in the past twelve months, and a question about psychological help seeing in the past twelve months. A response of “yes” to either of the last two questions yielded the follow-up questions ‘if so, how often?’ and ‘briefly describe what kind of academic help you sought’. Participants were given the option to skip any question. (See Appendix B).

Adult Attachment Scale: The adult attachment scale was designed by Collins and Read (1990) based on Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) paragraph descriptions of the three adult attachment styles, with the addition of questions assessing beliefs about availability and responsiveness of others. This self-report questionnaire is an eighteen-item measure ($\alpha = .72$), with six questions corresponding to each specific attachment style—secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. It uses a five-point likert scale ranging from “Disagree Strongly” to “Agree Strongly” to identify attachment orientations (see Appendix C). The scale comprises the three different dimensions that underlie the three attachment styles—the extent to which individuals are comfortable with closeness, the extent to which they feel that they can depend on others, and the extent to which they are anxious or fearful about being abandoned or unloved. The dimensions that Collins and Read (1990) captured (i.e., Closeness, Dependence, and Anxiety) underlie the three attachment styles. One is classified as having a secure attachment if the responses show that the participant is comfortable with closeness and intimacy, able to depend on others and not worried about being abandoned or unloved. Responses that yield this categorization show high scores on the Closeness and Dependence dimensions, and low scores on the Anxiety dimension. Avoidant attachment is identified if the respondent is uncomfortable with closeness and intimacy, not confident in others’ availability, but not particularly worried about being abandoned. Low scores

on all three dimensions form this classification. An anxious/ambivalent attachment style is assigned if the participant reports being comfortable with closeness, fairly confident in the availability of others, and very worried about being abandoned/unloved. High scores on the Anxiety dimension coupled with moderate scores on both the Closeness and Dependence dimensions are characteristic of this group. Collins and Read (1990) argue that measuring the underlying dimensions of attachment allows researchers to get a more sensitive measure of adult attachment

Karabenick's Help Seeking Scale: Karabenick's (2003) Help Seeking Scale is a thirteen-item scale ($\alpha = .81$) that measures students' intentions to seek academic help (see Appendix D). For the purpose of this study, eight items from this scale were used to evaluate participants' willingness to seek academic help if they were struggling in a course. This measure uses a five-point likert scale ranging from "Not at all true" to "Completely true". This questionnaire originally consists of five subscales that not only examine participants' willingness to seek help, but also look at their reason for and type of help seeking, which may influence their attitudes. Specifically, it looks at five different dimensions: instrumental help seeking, executive help seeking, help seeking threat, help seeking avoidance, and formal versus informal help seeking. However, for the purpose of this study, only the subscales 'instrumental help seeking', 'help seeking threat' and 'help seeking avoidance' were relevant for the questions under consideration, so these three subscales were combined to measure participants' willingness to seek academic help when needed.

Instrumental help seeking refers to help seeking behaviors that further one's understanding and facilitate independent capabilities (Butler, 2006) Instrumental help seeking employs indirect help that serves to improve comprehension and equip the student with the tools

needed to succeed autonomously. Executive help seeking on the other hand is characterized as an ‘effort-avoidant’ behavior in which the student seeks direct help in solving a specific problem or getting explicit directions (Karabenick, 2006). This type of help seeking is employed to complete a specific assignment or task, and makes the student more, rather than less, dependent on their source of help. The differences in outcomes between these two types of help seeking tactics suggest that not all types of help seeking are equally effective or advantageous. Instrumental help seeking has been referred to as an adaptive self-regulatory strategy that is associated with higher levels of both achievement and adjustment in academic settings (Karabenick & Volet, 2006), whereas executive help seeking requests concrete answers, which only increases reliance on others down the road (Collins & Sims, 2006). The help seeking avoidance subscale consists of questions that assess respondents’ tendency to avoid help, while the help seeking threat subscale measures their level of perceived threat associated with seeking academic help.

The instrumental subscale is highly correlated with both the reversed help seeking avoidance subscale $r = .521, p \leq .01$ and the reversed help seeking threat subscale $r = .422, p \leq .01$, which are also highly correlated with each other $r = .644, p \leq .01$, so for the purpose of this study these three subscales were combined to capture participants’ overall willingness to seek academic help when struggling in a class.

Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form

(ATSPPHS-SF): The Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help Scale-Short Form (Fischer & Farina, 1995) is a ten-item measure ($\alpha = .83$) adapted from the original Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Help Scale (Fischer & Turner, 1970). This questionnaire uses a four-point likert scale ranging from “Disagree” to “Agree”, and is the most widely used measure of individuals attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Elhai, Schweinle, & Anderson, 2008).

Higher scores on this measure indicate a more positive attitude about treatment, and are associated with greater intentions to seek help. (See Appendix E).

Procedure

The four measures described above were distributed to a random sample of 610 students on February 4th using Qualtrics, by an email solicitation. The survey began with a brief description of the study in which the potential risks and benefits were outlined clearly, and confidentiality was guaranteed (see Appendix A). After the initial distribution of the measures, a reminder email was sent out on February 12th, and then again on February 17th. The subjects were informed that if they participated they would be entered into a drawing for a \$10 gift card at an on-campus restaurant. The email message asked participants to provide informed consent, and then participants were directed through the demographics questions with the ability to skip any question. The three measures were each presented on their own page, with the ability to skip any question. At the completion of the questionnaire a brief debriefing paragraph appeared that informed the participants of the purpose and intentions of the study (see Appendix F).

Results

Correlations Among All Measures

Correlations were examined among Adult Attachment Scale scores, Karabenicks' Help Seeking Scale scores, and Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form (see Table 1). As predicted, secure attachment was positively correlated with academic help seeking, $r = .368, p \leq .01$, while avoidant attachment was negatively correlated with academic help seeking, $r = -.362, p \leq .01$. Contrary to my hypothesis, anxious/ambivalent attachment was also negatively correlated with academic help seeking, $r = -.265, p \leq .01$. Also contrary to my hypothesis, none of the attachment styles were significantly correlated with psychological help seeking.

An unpredicted finding was that academic and psychological help seeking were positively correlated with each other, $r = .166, p \leq .05$. Lastly, there were a few significant correlations between the attachment styles. Secure attachment was negatively correlated with both avoidant attachment, $r = -.486, p \leq .01$ and anxious/ambivalent attachment, $r = -.241, p \leq .01$. Avoidant attachment was positively correlated with anxious/ambivalent attachment, $r = .434, p \leq .01$.

Correlations Among All Measures, Separately for Males and Females

Correlations were examined among Adult Attachment Scale scores, Karabenicks' Help Seeking Scale scores, and Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help-Short Form separately for male (see Table 2) and female participants (see Table 3).

Gender Correlations for Help Seeking Measures

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare gender differences in each of the help seeking measures (see Table 4). There was a significant gender difference in attitudes toward seeking psychological help (see Figure 1), with women reporting more positive attitudes about seeking psychological help than men $t(179) = -3.4, p = .001$. There were no significant gender differences in participants' willingness to seek academic help (see Figure 2), $t(178) = -1.3, p = .207$. There were no significant gender differences in secure attachment $t(178) = .13, p = .90$. There were no significant gender differences in avoidant attachment $t(178) = -.71, p = .48$. There were no significant gender differences in anxious/ambivalent attachment $t(178) = .57, p = .57$.

Test Effects of Class Year for Help Seeking Measures

Two separate one-factor ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences in help seeking behaviors based on participants' class year. There were no significant differences in

Academic Help Seeking based on participants' class years. However, there was a significant difference in Psychological Help Seeking (see Table 5), with Seniors reporting more positive attitudes about seeking psychological help than First-Years, $F(3, 176) = 2.90, p = .036$, partial $\eta^2 = .047$.

Discussion

Attachment style has been found to influence college students' perceptions of and attitudes about their social support networks (Lopez et al., 1998), which has been linked to their willingness to seek both psychological (Vogel and Wei, 2005), and academic help (Holt, 2014). The current study aimed to examine whether the relationship between attachment style and two different types of help seeking would be present in the same individuals, and whether or not gender would play a role in determining college students' attitudes about these two distinct types of help seeking. Interestingly, attachment was significantly related to willingness to seek academic help, but unrelated to students' attitudes about seeking psychological help. Furthermore, gender was found to influence only attitudes about seeking psychological help, but had no effect on willingness to seek academic help. The findings from this study suggest interesting discrepancies in college students' perceptions about support networks and intentions to seek help.

Attachment and Help Seeking

Like Holt's (2014) findings, college student's attachment styles influenced their intentions to seek academic help. As predicted, secure attachment was positively associated with academic help seeking, while avoidant attachment had the strongest negative relationship with willingness to seek academic help. This finding aligns with attachment theory in which secure

attachment is associated with a willingness to utilize support networks in times of need, while insecure attachment is associated with negative views of support networks (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Larose et al. (1999) found that the negative views of support networks related to insecure attachment results in a reluctance to seek help from college professors, and that this aversion is especially strong for avoidant attachment.

Contrary to my hypothesis about attachment style and academic help seeking, anxious/ambivalent attachment was negatively correlated with academic help seeking. In the current literature there are contradictory findings about the relationship between anxious/ambivalent attachment and help seeking behaviors. Anxious/ambivalent attachment is characterized by a strong desire to rely on others as well as a hyper-vigilance about distress, which led to my prediction that this attachment style would be associated with the strongest intentions to seek both academic and psychological help. However, as Shaffer et al. (2006) found, individuals with anxious/ambivalent attachment had confused attitudes about seeking help in which they anticipated both significant risks and benefits associated with seeking help. They speculated that because of the contradiction of a desperate wish for closeness as well as a crippling fear that one's needs cannot be met, individuals with an anxious/ambivalent attachment may fluctuate between seeking support and contracting from it. Furthermore, Larose and Bernier (2001) found that anxious/ambivalent attachment was negatively correlated with trust, both self and peer reported help seeking from teachers, and support network satisfaction. They suggested that since individuals with an anxious/ambivalent attachment tend to be hyper vigilant of stressful experiences, they may view their support systems as inadequate. This mindset could drive anxiously/ambivalently attached students to discontinue help seeking, or to seek it in a maladaptive or unproductive manner.

The lack of a relationship between attachment style and psychological help seeking was unexpected and contradicts past research on the topic. One explanation for this finding could be that the hypothetical nature of the questions did not accurately capture individuals' actual attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Furthermore, because so few participants reported seeing psychological help in the past year (see Table 6), it may have been difficult for them to speculate on how they felt about seeking psychological help.

Gender Differences

In accordance with Nam et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis on gender differences in attitudes toward seeking psychological help, my study revealed a significant gender difference in participants' attitudes toward seeking psychological help, with female college students reporting more favorable attitudes about psychological help seeking than males. This is not a surprising finding since females tend to report greater willingness to seek counseling. Furthermore, there is a social stigma that is often associated with males seeking psychological help, which may be a contributing factor in this gender difference.

Courtenay (2000) suggests that men internalize the stereotypes that they should be tough, and emotionally inexpressive, and that this can influence their attitudes toward seeking psychological help. This creates a stigma that often implies that men who do seek mental health services are weak and do not fit the mold of the typical man, which might further their reluctance to seek treatment (Kushner & Sher, 1989).

Contrary to both my predictions and Holt's (2014) finding, there were no gender differences in attitudes about seeking academic help. One explanation for the lack of gender difference in the current study could be that the group of men who completed the self-report measure have more positive attitudes about academic help seeking than the general population of

male college students. Furthermore, the participants in Holt's (2014) study were all first year students, whereas my participants came from all four class levels. Therefore, as students become more acclimated to college they may develop more positive attitudes about seeking academic help regardless of gender.

Effect of Class Year on Help Seeking

Contrary to my speculation that the lack of gender difference in willingness to seek academic help might be attributed to the inclusion of all class levels, this factor had no effect on willingness to seek academic help. It is possible that due to the participant pool, which came from a small liberal arts college, academic help seeking is encouraged early on and does not alter significantly throughout students' tenure at the institution. Furthermore, I believe that a larger sample size might reveal an effect of class year on willingness to seek academic help.

There was a significant effect of class year on attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Seniors reported significantly more positive attitudes about seeking psychological help than first years. This finding has a few possible explanations—seniors may have more experience seeking psychological help than first years, and therefore be more aware of how they feel towards it. More specifically, they may have had positive experiences seeking psychological help, which then shaped their attitudes toward psychological help seeking. Alternatively, seniors may be in a position of feeling as though they currently need or may require psychological help in the near future, and therefore have more positive dispositions toward seeking this type of assistance.

Remaining Significant Findings

A few noteworthy findings that were not related to my hypothesis were that secure attachment was negatively correlated with both types of insecure attachment, while they were

positively correlated with each other. Secure attachment was negatively correlated with both avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment. This finding corresponds with past research on attachment theory, that individuals with secure attachments would not have the characteristics associated with either insecure attachment style. Larose et al. (1999) found that avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment dimensions are not totally independent, which may explain the positive correlation between the two in the current study. This suggests that both insecure attachment styles share similar characteristics with each other, possibly rooted in their difficult experiences interacting with their caregivers in infancy, which then shaped negative expectations of others. Larose and Bernier (2001) found that both avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment is negatively correlated with trust, which suggests another shared characteristic between these two insecure styles.

Another finding that was not anticipated was the positive relationship between academic and psychological help seeking, but based on research about support networks, it makes sense that individuals who have positive attitudes about seeking help in one domain would feel similarly to seeking help in a different domain. This could indicate a general tendency toward help seeking, or help seeking avoidance. However, because of the gender differences that appeared in participants' attitudes about psychological help seeking but not academic help seeking, these types of help seeking behaviors seem to be differentially motivated.

Limitations of Current Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether attachment style influences attitudes about seeking both academic and psychological help equally. However, the findings in the current study revealed no significant relationship between attachment and attitudes about psychological help seeking, thus making this comparison difficult. One limitation of this study

was that the self-report measures asked participants to speculate on how they would respond to hypothetical situations. These types of questions may not accurately represent students' actual attitudes about help seeking. Another limitation of this study was the discrepancy between the percent of participants who indicated seeking academic help in the past year and those who indicated seeking psychological help in the past year. More than half of the participants in the current study reported seeking academic help in the past year, whereas less than one third reported seeking psychological help in the past year. I believe that because so many respondents indicated that they have not engaged in psychological help seeking in the past year, they may have been less conscious of how they would respond if such a need should arise.

Future Research

As described above, the current study could have benefited from examining participants' actual help seeking behaviors in past experiences. Therefore, I believe that future studies might benefit from comparing actual help seeking behaviors in academic and psychological settings, to see if there are differences between actual behaviors and hypothetical self report measures. Another potential area for research would be to target a sample of students who have either sought both types of help in the past or neither so as to eliminate the discrepancy between experiences in each of the different help seeking domains.

Implications

The findings of the present study support extant research showing a significant relationship between attachment style and academic help seeking, in which secure attachment is the only style associated with positive attitudes toward seeking academic help as well as a willingness to do so. This information is relevant to colleges across the country as it suggests that there is a fundamental disparity among the students who engage in academic help seeking. The

results from this study suggest that college students with either avoidant or anxious/ambivalent attachment have negative attitudes and expectations about academic resources and are unlikely to seek help in this domain even when the need for such help arises. Therefore, professors and colleges at large should work to identify systems which facilitate, encourage, and emphasize the normalcy of academic help seeking for students who may be predisposed to avoid seeking academic help in spite of their actual need for it. Researchers should continue to examine the role attachment styles play in shaping students' beliefs and expectations about their support networks and how this influences their willingness to seek various types of help. Further research may help identify potential areas of intervention in which colleges can proactively alter their students' preconceptions and create a more comprehensive willingness to seek help among students. To more accurately capture students' opinions about help seeking, comparisons should be made between responses to hypothetical situations and actual help seeking behaviors.

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Tables

Table 1.

Correlations Among Measures of Attachment, Academic Help Seeking, and Psychological Help seeking

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
Attachment					
1 Secure	-				
2 Avoidant	-.486**	-			
3 Anxious/Ambivalent	-.241**	.434**	-		
Academic Help Seeking					
4 Academic help seeking	.368**	-.362**	-.265**	-	
Psychological Help Seeking					
5 Psychological help seeking	.063	-.056	-.057	.166*	-

Note. *N*'s for individual correlations range from 179 to 181

Note. Correlation is significant at the $p < .01$ level**, Correlation is significant at the $p < .05$ level*

Table 2.

*Correlations Among Measures of Attachment, Academic Help Seeking and Psychological Help**Seeking for Men*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
Attachment					
1 Secure	-				
2 Avoidant	-.397**	-			
3 Anxious/Ambivalent	-.342**	.639**	-		
Academic Help Seeking					
4 Academic help seeking	.398**	-.355**	-.350**	-	
Psychological Help Seeking					
5 Psychological help seeking	.143	.104	.071	.119	-

Note. Correlations for Men (n = 65)

Table 3.

*Correlations Among Measures of Attachment, Academic Help Seeking and Psychological Help**Seeking for Women*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
Attachment					
1 Secure	-				
2 Avoidant	-.543**	-			
3 Anxious/Ambivalent	-.174	.325**	-		
Academic Help Seeking					
4 Academic help seeking	.352**	-.379**	-.207*	-	
Psychological Help Seeking					
5 Psychological help seeking	.022	-.159	-.115	.165	-

Note. Correlations for Women (n = 115)

Table 4.

Independent Sample T-Test to Examine Gender Differences

	Male (n =65)		Female (n = 115)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Secure attachment	20.89	3.99	20.82	3.48	.13
Avoidant attachment	16.28	3.78	16.70	3.98	-.71
Anxious/Ambivalent attachment	15.57	3.61	15.26	3.45	.57
Academic Help Seeking	3.90	.80	4.05	.73	-1.3
Psychological Help Seeking	24.72	5.60	27.80	5.96	-3.4

Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics of Class Year on Help Seeking Measures

		Mean	SD
Academic Help Seeking			
	First-Years	4.03	.73
	Sophomores	4.0	.81
	Juniors	3.90	.82
	Seniors	4.1	.71
Psychological Help Seeking			
	First-Years	25.20	5.6
	Sophomores	25.90	5.9
	Juniors	27.03	6.2
	Seniors	28.37	6.0

Table 6.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	Percentage (%)
Gender	181	
Male	65	35.9
Female	116	64.1
Race/Ethnicity	180	
Caucasian	138	76.7
African American/Black	6	3.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	18	10.0
Hispanic/Latino	8	4.4
Other	10	5.6
Class Year	181	
First-Year	53	29.3
Sophomore	34	18.8
Junior	40	22.1
Senior	54	29.8
Have Sought Academic Help in Past 12 Months		
Yes	97	53.6
No	82	45.3
Have Sough Psychological Help in Past 12 Months		
Yes	48	26.5
No	131	72.4

Note: *N* = 181

Figures

Figure 1.

Male and Female's Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological help

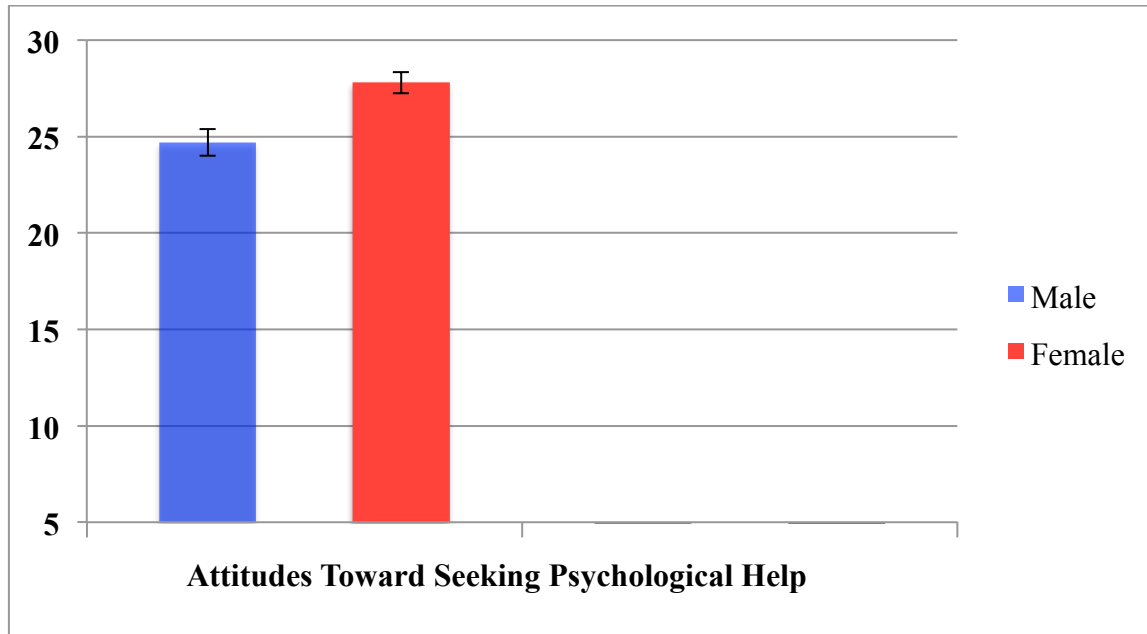
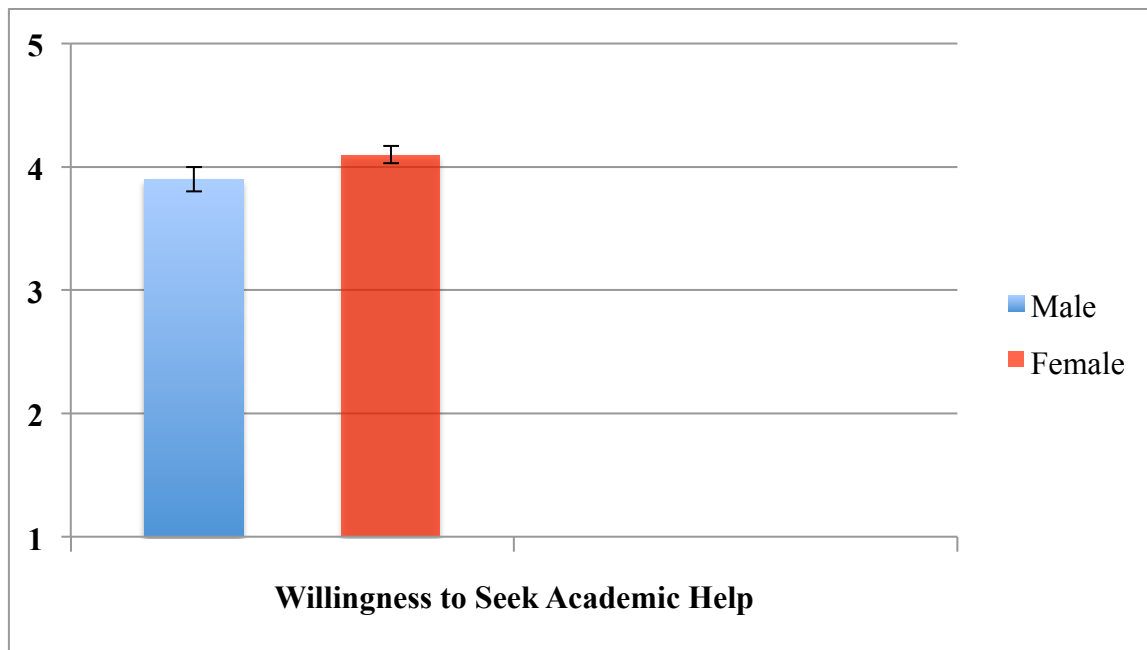


Figure 2.

Male and Female's Willingness to Seek Academic Help



Appendix A

Informed Consent Agreement

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to identify students' attitudes about help seeking

What you will do in the study: Please answer three self-report measures as honestly as possible

Time required: The study will require 10-15 minutes of your time

Risks: There are no specific risks to you for participating in this research, if at any time you feel uncomfortable you have the right to withdraw or skip a question you do not feel comfortable answering.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand college students' attitudes about help seeking.

Confidentiality: Your answers will not be directly shared with anyone besides the main researcher, your name will not be associated with any answers, and all responses will be stored in a password protected computer.

If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact the principal investigator Julia Sager (Julia.sager@trincoll.edu)

Thank you for your participation

- Agree to participate**
- Do not agree to participate**

Appendix B

Demographics:

Please choose one

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other

2. Grade:

- First-Year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other

3. Ethnicity/Race:

- Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

4. Have you sought Academic help in the past 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- No response

If so, how often?

Briefly describe what kind of academic help you sought:

5. Have you sought Psychological help in the past 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- No response

If so, how often?

Briefly describe what kind of psychological help you sought:

Appendix C

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. People are never there when you need them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I am comfortable depending on others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I know that others will be there when I need them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I find it difficult to trust others completely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I do not often worry about being abandoned	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I often worry that my partner does not really love me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I want to merge completely with another person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. My desire to merge sometimes scares people away	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I find it relatively easy to get close to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. I do not often worry about someone getting close to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I am nervous when anyone gets too close	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. I am comfortable having others depend on me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix D

	Not At All True	Probably Not True	Neither True nor False	Probably True	Completely True
If I were having trouble understanding the material in this class I would ask someone who could help me understand the general ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting help would be one of the first things I would do if I were having trouble in this class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would feel like a failure if I needed help in this class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would not want anyone to find out that I needed help in this class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting help in this class would be an admission that I am just not smart enough to do the work on my own.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I didn't understand something in this class I would guess rather than ask someone for assistance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even if the work was too hard to do on my own, I wouldn't ask for help with this class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would rather do worse on an assignment I couldn't finish than ask for help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix E

	Disagree	Partly Disagree	Partly Agree	Agree
If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first inclination would be to get professional attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in psychotherapy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is something admirable in the attitude of a person who is willing to cope with his or her conflicts and fears without resorting to professional help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I might want to have psychological counseling in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A person with an emotional problem is not likely to solve it alone; he or she is likely to solve it with professional help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Considering the time and expense involved in psychotherapy, it would have doubtful value for a person like me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A person should work out his or her own problems; getting psychological counseling would be a last resort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal and emotional troubles, like many things, tend to work out by themselves.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix F

Thank you for your participation. You have just answered questions that pertain to adult attachment style, and help seeking behaviors. I am interested in learning if students' attachment styles influence their attitudes about, and willingness to seek academic and/or psychological help. Your responses on the surveys were important and greatly appreciated. If you have any questions concerning your participation, please feel free to contact the principle investigator at Julia.sager@trincoll.edu.