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## Adaptation to college and individuation-attachment : a review of first year students in contemporary Ireland

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**ADAPTATION TO COLLEGE AND  
INDIVIDUATION-ATTACHMENT: A REVIEW OF  
FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN CONTEMPORARY  
IRELAND**

**By: Sarah Simmons**

**Supervisor: Dr. Ann Marie Halpenny**

**September 2008  
School of Social Sciences and Law  
Dublin Institute of Technology**

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

**Signature of candidate:**

.....

**Date:** .....

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Supervisor, Dr. Ann Marie Halpenny, who has offered me tremendous support and assistance throughout the course of my research.

I am very grateful to the various institutional departments who permitted my access to the first-year college students during their final week of the academic year.

Especially, I would like to thank my family for their love, support and encouragement throughout my academic endeavours, and for also giving me the most wonderful opportunities in life.

## **ABSTRACT**

The substantive aim of this study was to examine the adaptation of young-adult's to college life in Ireland today. The study also assessed the participant's levels of individuation-attachment and its consequences for college adjustment. A number of personal variables were examined in relation to both the participants' college adjustment and individuation-attachment, with gender being of significant interest. Data were collected from a sample of 125 (78 females and 47 males) first-year college students attending a number of Dublin based institutions. Participants' completed quantitative measures of college adjustment and individuation-attachment. Findings indicated that overall student adjustment was positive, with levels of individuation-attachment having little effect on college adjustment. There was no significant relationship between the predictor variables and college adjustment. Nevertheless, females reported significantly lower levels of 'Fear of Attachment' than their male counterparts. Interpretations of these results, their congruence within the context of the theoretical frameworks, and practical implications are discussed.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
Title	i
Declaration.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
<b>CHAPTER 1 – Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 - Aim of the study.....	1
1.2 - Rationale of the study.....	1
1.3 - Context of the study.....	3
1.4 - Methods, Findings and Conclusions.....	3
1.5 - Outline of the study.....	4
<b>CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 -Adolescence as a life-span stage.....	5
2.2 -The transition from adolescence into early-adulthood.....	5
2.3 –The adolescent and familial relationships.....	9
2.4 –The role of attachment.....	10
2.5 –Individuation and its effects on the young-adult.....	13
2.6 –The link between individuation and attachment.....	14
2.7 –Theories concerned with transition to 3 <sup>rd</sup> level Ed.....	15
2.8 –The effects of individuation-attachment on college Adj.....	16
2.9- Demographic variables which affect college adjustment.....	18
<b>CHAPTER 3 – Methodology</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.1- Design.....	21
3.2- The quantitative method.....	21
3.3- Sampling.....	22
3.4- Participants.....	23
3.5- Procedure.....	24
3.6- Measures.....	24
3.7- Data analysis.....	27
3.8- Ethical considerations.....	28

<b>CHAPTER 4 – Presentation of Findings .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5 – Discussion of Findings.....</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1 – SACQ: Relationships between full-scale and sub-scales.....	43
5.2 – Full-scale adjustment and individuation-attachment.....	44
5.3 – SACQ subscales and Individuation-Attachment.....	46
5.4 – Gender and student adjustment to college.....	48
5.5 – Gender differences across individuation & attachment....	49
5.6 – Family structure, individuation-attachment & adjustment.....	49
5.7 – Student adjustment and academic major.....	51
<b>CHAPTER 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>5</b>
7	

**APPENDICIES:**

Appendix A- Instruments Utilized

Appendix B- Statistical Output

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Chapter one begins by illustrating the aims of the study and then explains the rationale for the research and provides an outline of the study.

### **1.1: Aims of the Study:**

The main aim of this study is to explore the adaptation of First-Year college students to third level education in Ireland today. Furthermore, the relationship that exists between the students' sense of individuation-attachment and their adaptation to college life in terms of Academic, Social, Personal-Emotional and full-scale adjustment, in addition to their Attachment to the institution, will also be examined. Additionally, personal variables were inspected in terms of their possible effects on student adjustment and individuation-attachment, as identified from the varied literature (e.g. Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The particular effects of 'gender' for both adjustment to college and individuation-attachment, is of particular importance to the current study. Information regarding the personal variables was garnered in the form of a demographic questionnaire which was constructed by the researcher and attached to the final survey.

The study endeavours to explore these relationships through the use of quantitative, standardised, self-completion questionnaires (SACQ, Baker & Siryk, 1989; IAQ, Kaplan, 1988), while a demographic questionnaire will garner information in relation to 15 predictor variables that might affect college adjustment and the student's level of individuation-attachment. See Appendix A.

### **1.2: Rationale of the Study:**

Despite the wealth of international research concerned with student adaptation to college life (Baker & Siryk, 1984) and the effects that separation-individuation may have on such an adaptation (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), there has been relatively little attention dedicated to the combined effects of individuation and attachment on college adjustment. Furthermore, the influence that student's background information can have on their sense of individuation-attachment and subsequent college adjustment,



have not been widely explored in the literature. Moreover, to-date, research of this nature has not been conducted in Ireland.

### **Research Questions:**

- (1) To assess whether or not significant relationships exist between the full-scale scores of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1989) and the four SACQ adjustment Subscales (academic, social, personal-emotional and attachment to the institution).
- (2) To examine whether or not significant relationships will exist between the full-scale score of the SACQ and any of the Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire (Kaplan, 1988) subscales (Fear of Individuation, Need for Individuation, Fear of Attachment and Need for Attachment).
- (3) To assess the significance of the relationships that exists between the SACQ Subscales and the IAQ Subscales.
- (4) To examine the relationships that exists between the IAQ Subscales.
- (5) To assess the effects of gender differences on student adjustment (as measured by the SACQ) and their individuation-attachment.
- (6) To examine the effects of family environment (e.g. parents' marital status) on students' adjustment to college and individuation-attachment.
- (7) The current study will also examine whether any particular academic majors report better college adjustment than others.

### **1.3: Context of the Study:**

While there are vast amounts of studies concerned with ‘adolescence’ as a life-stage (e.g. Erikson, 1968), there are surprisingly fewer studies focused on ‘early-adulthood’ as a life-stage. The fact that third level education entry usually occurs between the latter stages of adolescence and beginning of early-adulthood, prompted the present study to examine the ‘emerging adulthood’ theory that was proposed by Arnett (1998), in relation to theoretical frameworks concerned with adolescence and early-adulthood.

As such, the current study examines adaptation to third level education for first-year undergraduate students in Ireland today, with regard to two interrelated and continuous developmental processes: attachment (Bowlby, 1969) and individuation (Mahler, 1963).

Furthermore, the Young people of today are faced with a multi-faceted and complex world of work and highly specialized tasks and as such, spend an extended period of time in technical institutes, colleges and post-graduate centres in order to acquire specialized skills, educational experiences, and professional training (Boyd & Bee, 2006). Such assumptions have never been more applicable to Irish society than they are today, with 143,546 students enrolled in third level education, compared with 69,988 in the year 1990-1991 ([www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)). Therefore, in order to safeguard the successful completion of third level education, it is imperative that our students adjust in a successful manner to all realms of college life. As it is well adjusted graduates who are believed to drive a strong internationally competitive economy compared with their poorly adjusted counterparts (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2000).

### **1.4: Methods, Findings and Conclusions:**

For the current study a quantitative research method was utilized. Two-hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed, with one-hundred and twenty five returned completed. The primary results of research suggest good overall adjustment to college life for Irish students in addition to low level fears/needs for individuation and attachment. Nevertheless, there were a number of participants who reported poorer

adjustment to college, thus the researcher recommends that increased and sustained consultation takes place between students and their college counselling/support services.

### **1.5: Outline of the Study:**

Chapter one of a brief introduction to the dissertation and gives the reader an idea of what is contained therein including the aims of the study, the rationale of the study, the context of the study, the research design adopted and the main findings of the research and recommendations made by the author.

Chapter two presents the literature review, outlining what has been written on this topic previously.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology of this study and discusses the research design (and justification for its use), sampling framework, selection of participants, procedure, research instruments, data analysis and the ethical considerations.

Chapter four presents the research findings of the current study with the aid of graphs and charts.

Chapter five discusses the research findings in relation to the literature review and presents the limitations of the current study.

Chapter six contains the author's conclusions and future recommendations arising from the research findings and discussion.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1: Adolescence as a life-span stage:**

Adolescence as a lifespan stage is characterized by continuity and discontinuity in terms of genetic, biological, environmental and experiential factors which all interact during this developmental stage (Brooks-Gunn & Reiter, 1990). As such, events of puberty have been examined with regard to their effects on the psychological and social functioning of the adolescent (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). It is suggested that the genes which have been inherited from parents still influence thought and behaviour during adolescence, however, inheritance now interacts with the social conditions of the adolescent's world, namely, with family, peers, friendships, dating, and the school experience (Durkin, 1995). Furthermore, Brooks-Gunn and Zahaykevich (1989) suggest that pubertal changes may result in intraindividual changes that impact on the adolescent's relationship with parents.

While the adolescent has had countless hours of interaction with parents, peers and teachers during their life, during adolescence new experiences and developmental tasks appear (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Furthermore, relationships with parents take a different form, interactions with peers become more intimate and dating and sexual relationships usually occur for the first time. While such factors occur during adolescence, they also continue into early adulthood. (Bornstein, 1995).

### **2.2: The transition from adolescence into early-adulthood:**

Nonetheless, it is difficult to suggest an age wherein an individual has moved away from adolescence and into early adulthood. As Bob Dylan quotes at the opening of Section VII "How many roads must a man walk down before you can call him a man?" (Dylan, 1974; Boyd & Bee, 2006). Accordingly, many developmentalists believe the task of determining the beginning of adolescence is easier than determining its end and the beginning of adulthood. While some criteria have been proposed regarding when adulthood begins, no consensus exists as to when adolescence is left behind (Arnett, 1998).

Moreover, it is suggested that the seeping demographic shifts that have taken place over the past half century have made late adolescence and early twenties a distinct period of the life course, and not simply a brief period of transition into adult roles. This is a period of frequent change and exploration (Arnett, 1998). It is credible to suggest that the young people of today are faced with a multi-faceted and complex world of work and highly specialized tasks and as such, spend an extended period of time in technical institutes, colleges and post-graduate centres in order to acquire specialized skills, educational experiences, and professional training (Boyd & Bee, 2006). This is also a period when marriage and family may be shunned, unlike in previous generations where it was the norm to marry young and start a family (Heaven, 2000). It is suggested that this period of specialization often lasts from 2 to 8 years, although it may last a decade or longer. Therefore, a firm suggestion on when adulthood has been entered, is complicated further (Santrock, 2004).

As such, Arnett (2000) proposes a theory of development from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on the ages 18-25 years. Arnett (2000, p. 470) argues that this is a period of 'emerging adulthood', not adolescence nor young-adulthood but it is a period that is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both. Emerging adulthood is distinguished by virtual independence from social roles and from normative expectations and it is a time in life when many different directions remain a possibility, when the future has not been decided for certain, and when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other stage of the life cycle. Nevertheless, similar to adolescence, emerging adulthood is a period of the life cycle that is culturally constructed, not universal and unchangeable (Arnett, 2000).

There has been a vast amount of important theoretical contributions to the understanding of development from late teens through the twenties. One important and early contribution was made by Erik Erikson (1950, 1968). He discusses one of the most widely studied issues which concerns adolescent's-identity formation. During adolescence, worldviews become important to the individual, who enter a "psychological moratorium", which is a gap between the security of childhood and the autonomy of adulthood according to Erikson (1968, p.66). Simply, if youths successfully cope with the conflicting identities that adolescence evokes, they can emerge with a new sense of self that is both refreshing and acceptable. However, those that do not cope well suffer from what Erikson (Erikson, 1950; Durkin, 1995, p.

517) calls “identity confusion”, wherein individual’s can isolate themselves from peers and family or they may lose their identity in the crowd. Erikson’s classification of adolescent identity crisis appears to be a cataclysmic transition. Instead, many contemporary developmentalists view it as a gradual, lengthy and complex process (Heaven, 2001).

Marcia (Marcia, 1966; Crain, 2005) refined and extended Erikson’s model, primarily focusing on adolescent development. Marcia’s (1966) theory challenges Erikson’s notion of identity crisis, suggesting that the adolescent stage consists neither of identity resolution nor identity confusion, instead, the degree to which one has explored and committed to an identity in a variety of life domains from vocation, religion, relational choices, gender roles, and so on. Furthermore, Marcia’s (1966) theory of identity achievement argues that two distinct parts form an adolescent’s identity: crisis (i.e. a time when one’s values and choices are being re-evaluated) and commitment. He defined a crisis as a time of upheaval where old values or choices are being re-evaluated. Identity formation does not end with adolescence, rather, it begins with the emergence of attachment, the development of a sense of self, and the emergence of independence in infancy, and identity enters its final phase in old age (Heaven, 2001).

It is thus clear to see that an important concept of identity is the ability that one has to make choices for themselves and their future. One such concept is the commitment they make in choosing a career which, in turn will have consequences for their adjustment to college. The nature of the career that one chooses may lead to a very different college experience than the one that they had envisaged early on in their life. If a student from Ireland decides that they have the ability to become a professional swimmer and also want to gain a degree, then there is not much choice (due to lack of facilities and funding for such a sport in Ireland) other than to travel to a university abroad (e.g. USA, Australia) where they can be facilitated in both domains of their life.

This view of one’s transition into adulthood and one’s aim to become an autonomous self was further examined by the instrumental developmentalist and sociologist Keniston (1971), who describes ‘youth’ as the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood that is a time of extended economic and personal temporariness. Furthermore, he argues that youth have not settled the questions whose answers once defined adulthood in relation to the existing society, vocation, and about

social roles and lifestyles. Keniston (1971) suggests that youth differs from adolescence due to youth's struggle between developing an autonomous self and becoming socially involved in contrast to adolescence's struggle for self-definition. However, Keniston (1971) was writing his theories at a time when American society was convulsed with extremely visible youth movements protesting the involvement of the USA in the Vietnam War (Arnett, 2000). As such, his description of youth as a time of "tension between self and society" (Keniston, 1971, p. 8) and "refusal of socialization" (Keniston, 1971, p. 9) is reflecting the historical movement and not the enduring characteristics of the period (Arnett, 2000).

Nevertheless, 'youth' is a term often used to describe childhood and adolescence (Ben-Amos, 1994). Therefore, Keniston's choice of such an ambiguous and confusing term to describe the period between late teens and early twenties, may to some extent explain this stage as a separate period of life. This viewpoint has never become widely accepted by his developmental counterparts (Arnett, 2000). Instead the term 'emerging adulthood' has been accepted as a distinct life period that follows adolescence (Arnett, 2000).

An extremely important demographic characteristic of emerging adulthood is that there is a great deal of demographic variability (Greene, Wheatley & Aldava, 1992). It is suggested that economic independence marks the onset of adulthood; however, developing this independence is often characterized by a long, drawn out process rather than an abrupt one. As such it is now the norm for many college students to return to the family home as they try and establish themselves economically (Noble, Cover & Yanagishita, 1996).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Scheer & Unger (1994) reported that adolescents often cite taking responsibility for oneself and independent decision making as identifying the onset of adulthood. In a similar study over 70% of college students said that being an adult means accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions, deciding on one's own values and beliefs, and establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult (Arnett, 1998). It is thus clear to see how defining when one enters adulthood is complex. Moreover, Levinson (1978, p. 134; Crain, 2004) suggests that the process of entering adulthood "begins around 17 and continues until 33...A young man needs about 15 years to emerge from adolescence, find his place in adult society and commit himself to a more stable life."

One key transition experienced by many young Irish people during this developmental period is the transition from secondary school to college life. The transition into college involves change and possible stress (Durkin, 1995). Becoming a first year undergraduate student after being a final year student at school replays the top-dog phenomenon of transferring from the oldest and most powerful group of students to the youngest and least powerful group of students that occurred earlier as adolescence began (Grayson, 1989). Also, the transition into college involves movement to a larger, more impersonal school structure; interaction with peers from more diverse geographical and sometimes more diverse ethnic backgrounds; and increased focus on achievement and its assessment (Bailey 1998; Santrock, 2004). While there are many challenges associated with the transition to college, it is also characterized by many positive features. It is suggested that students are more likely to feel grown-up, have more modules from which to select, have more time to spend with peers, have more opportunities to explore different lifestyles and values, enjoy greater independence from parental monitoring, and be challenged intellectually by academic work (Heaven, 2000).

Such positive features are experienced by most new college students, yet, a number of them still experience the effects of stress and more are depressed than in the past. A relatively recent American study by Astin (Astin, 1994; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000) included more than 300,000 freshmen at more than 500 colleges and universities. Findings indicated that just under one quarter of these students (up from 16 percent in 1985) said that they felt “overwhelmed with what I have to do.” Furthermore, college freshmen in 1994 indicated more depression than their counterparts from the 1980’s had indicated. The pervasive concerns of such students were the pressure to succeed in college, get an outstanding job, and make a lot of money (Astin, 1994; Wintre & Yaffe 2000).

### **2.3: The adolescent and familial relationships:**

Family relationships and their potential to influence the young person’s ability to adjust to the changing environment of college life are also worth considering with regard to the present study. Therefore, it is important to examine the nature of autonomy and attachment during adolescence and the consequences for early adulthood when one usually enters third-level institutions. Parents are very important



figures for adolescents' new identity development (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). However, the fact that adolescents are constantly striving for autonomy and responsibility may be a source of discomfort or anger for some parents, due to the adolescent's new-found strong-will and sometimes, negative attitudes towards parent (Arnett, 2000). During this stage, adolescents increasingly begin to question and debate parental rules and expectations (Collins, 1990; Bornstein, 1995). Furthermore, the Parent can quite often overlook the difficulties that adolescent's face in terms of adjusting to change and entering a new life-span stage. moreover, increases in sophistication and complexity of thought allows adolescents to manifest more adult-like reasoning, making debates more prolonged and challenging (Bornstein, 1995).

Another gripe problem for many parent-child relationships is that quite often parents do not understand the desire that adolescent's have to spend time with their peers rather than family (Heaven, 2001). In order to control possible conflicting situations between parents and children during the transition towards adulthood, "the parenting task begins to require more sophisticated reasoning in limit setting coupled with flexibility and a willingness to allow for change in rules and rule regulations" (Kidwell, Fischer, Dunham & Baranowski, 1983; Bornstein, 1995 p. 94).

Accordingly, it is suggested that the ability to attain autonomy and gain control over one's behaviour during the adolescent stage, is achieved via appropriate adult reactions to the adolescent's desire for control (Ben-Amos, 1994). In the past adolescence was seen as a period where young people grew apart from their parents and became less close and more independent. However, more recent theorists suggest that the adolescent-parent closeness is part of the positivist process of individuation (Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004). As such, the adolescent does not simply move away from parental influence into a process of decision making all by themselves, instead, there is a continued connectedness to parents as adolescents gain autonomy (Wallace, 1995).

#### **2.4: The role of attachment:**

According to Bowlby (1969), Attachment is centred on the emotional bonding between the infant and the parent/caregiver, mainly the mother. During the mother and child interactions, the infant has the ability to internalise the mother's

responsiveness and behaviours as internal working models that serve later in the construction of new relationships (Bowlby, 1988). As such, at older ages, attachment relationships will mirror the attachment style of the developing young child (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Moreover, “attachment style characterizes individuals from the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129). Nonetheless, critics of Bowlby’s (Bowlby, 1950; Bowlby, 1988) theory of attachment commented on empirical support for the theory and for the possible alternative explanations for results of empirical research. Bowlby (Bowlby, 1950; Bowlby, 1988) placed too much emphasis and had too much of a deterministic view of attachment and its consequences for later development. As such, Wootton (Wootton, 1959; Weisel & Kamara, 2005) questioned the suggestion that early attachment history had a lifelong impact.

Furthermore, Gerwitz (1969; Durkin, 1995) discussed how mother and child could provide each other with positive reinforcement experiences via their mutual attention and as such, learn to stay close together. This supposition would make it unnecessary to posit innate human characteristics fostering attachment.

However, in addition to parental attachment, Bowlby (1988) proposed that individuals form multiple attachments, while it is only one person who is typically prioritised. Donley (1993) suggests that an optimal care giving arrangement consists of a network of more or less stable relationships between the individual and several caregivers. As such, Donely (1993) argues that this network conceptualization could be essential to a culturally cemented understanding of attachment theory because the pattern of establishing extended families seems to be an adaptive strategy common to people of colour. It is suggested that an optimal child-rearing context may be formed by older siblings sharing the care giving of their younger siblings (Harrison et al, 1990; Mattanah et al, 2004). Research conducted by Kenny & Rice, (1995) found such findings to be true, as 27% of college students who were not white, identified a family member other than their parent as their primary attachment figure.

According to the fourfold scheme that was developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), the securely attached style is characterised by a working model of the self as positive, and others as trustworthy, reliable, and available. The secure individual is comfortable with both autonomy and intimacy. Consequently, developmentalists began exploring the roles that secure attachment and connectedness to parents have in adolescent development. Allen (1995) suggests that attachment to parents in

adolescence can facilitate the adolescent's social competence and well-being, which will be reflected in characteristics such as self-esteem, emotional adjustment, and physical health. Adolescents who have secure relationships with their parents demonstrate higher self-esteem and better emotional well-being (Black & McCartney, 1995; Mattanah et al, 2004). As such, the current study aims to examine whether or not first-year college students who demonstrate a need for attachment (as measured by the IAQ) will also score higher on the Personal-Emotional subscale of the SACQ.

In contrast to students who demonstrate secure parental relationships and better psychological well-being, it has been found that emotional detachment from parents is associated with a greater sense of parental rejection and a lower feeling of one's own social and romantic attractiveness (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Furthermore while individuals with a dismissing attachment style do have a positive working model of the self and low dependency needs, they are otherwise disdainful of close, intimate relationships. It is argued that this avoidance of intimacy is a self-protective stance against rejection and disappointment (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style have a working model of the self as unworthy or unlovable, yet the individual's with this attachment style value others in a positive manner and close relationships are highly desired in order to gain acceptance (Hogg, 1992; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). As such, these individual's demonstrate strong dependency needs and they have an inclination to become enmeshed in relationships (Boyd & Bee, 2006).

However, the final attachment style (fearful attachment) is of particular importance to the current study. It is suggested that individuals who demonstrate a fearful attachment style have a working model of the self as unworthy and unlovable. Furthermore, they show strong dependency needs and tend to avoid intimate relationships because of their working model of others as rejecting, untrustworthy, and unavailable (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

It is suggested that it is important that young people have a secure attachment style in order for them to adapt to the transition to college effectively (Blustein, Wallbridge, Friedlander & Palladino, 1991). Accordingly, a number of studies have shown that securely attached students report better social, academic, and emotional adjustment to college (Bradford & Lyndon, 1993; Wintre & Taffe, 2000), greater social connectedness with friends and less loneliness (Blain et al, 1993; Boyd & Bee, 2006).

Furthermore, it is suggested that attachment to parents during adolescence may cater for the adaptive function of providing a secure base from which they can investigate and master new environments and a broader social world in a psychologically healthy manner (Allen & Bell, 1995). Interestingly, one longitudinal study demonstrated that attachment security measured in the first year of college predicted better college adjustment 2 years later (Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley & Gibbs, 1995).

One particular study found adolescents who had a secure attachment to their parents, perceived their family as cohesive and reported little social anxiety or feelings of depression (Papini & Barskey, 1990; Durkin, 1995). While adolescents often reject closeness, connectedness and attachment to their family as a means of developing their identity, usually the worlds of parents and peers are coordinated and connected, not uncoordinated and disconnected (Santrock, 2004).

### **2.5: Individuation and its effects on the young-adult:**

Similar to the process of attachment, the separation-individuation (SI) process begins in early childhood, when a young child becomes aware of their differentiated identity and separatedness from the mother (Mahler, 1963). In addition to separateness which uses communication patterns as a means of expressing how one is different from others, individuality is also concerned with self-assertion, which sees individual's communicating a point of view (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993). Consequently, the SI process is crucial for the formation of an independent identity, even taking on different forms in various developmental stages (Josselson, 1980). Moreover, adolescence has recognised as a period of "second individuation", when the process is extremely intensive and dominant (Blos, 1967; Bornstein, 1995). SI proceeds during this life-stage and the adolescent learns to manage in a more independent fashion from their parents, maintaining a certain distance from them in both a practical and emotional manner (Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke, 1997; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002). Similar to the influence of secure attachment, supportive and encouraging parents can promote a successful SI process that includes the gradual transfer of responsibilities from the parents to the adolescent and as such, a more mature relationship can be established between them (Steinberg, 1981; Bornstein, 1995). The SI process is positively influenced by parents who serve as appropriate models for interpersonal relationships, by way of offering a secure atmosphere that encourages the expression

of the adolescent's individuality (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002), and by providing a "safe basis" or "stable anchor" for the adolescent during this stage and transition into early-adulthood (Rice, Cole & Lapsley, 1990). Similarly, Cooper, Shaver and Collins (1998) suggest that the presence of a family atmosphere that promotes both individuality and connectedness is vital in the young person's identity development.

## **2.6: The link between individuation and attachment:**

It is interesting to note that Attachment and individuation are comprised of related and complementary developmental processes that are compulsory for the development of an independent and separate identity (Blain et al, 1993; Bornstein, 1995). As such, satisfying interpersonal relationships can be established as secure attachment in early childhood enables differentiation and individuation (Blatt & Blass, 1990; Santrock, 2004).

Interestingly, successful individuation is necessary for adult attachment and more specifically, finding a spouse or, more generally, a romantic partner, as one can only be receptive to successful romantic relationships when one view's themselves as loveable, effective and autonomous (Weisel & Kamara, 2005). Accordingly, individuals seek out partners that conform to one's internal working model of the self-in-relationship (Collins & Read, 1994; Mattanah et al, 2004). While SI can be conceptualized as a process whereby the internal working models of the self-in-relationship are updated or reconstructed in light of new relational experiences of separation and connectedness, others have argued that the psychological separation process is better understood in terms of both attachment theory and separation-individuation (Lopez & Gover, 1993). In terms of adjustment, together they do a better job in predicting college adjustment than does the presence of only one or the other variable. Nevertheless, empirical studies of the relationship between SI and attachment styles are rare (Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

One purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between the need for attachment and the need for individuation and, the fear of attachment and the fear of individuation. There is a possibility that young-adult college students who exhibit a need for attachment would also report greater personal-emotional adjustment and in-turn, show a pattern of psychological independence from parents (Bartholomew &

Horowitz, 1991). Such a finding would contrast with the claims of Lapsley and Edgerton (2002) who suggest that individuals with fearful and preoccupied attachment styles are expected to demonstrate a working model of rejection and unavailability but, show greater psychological dependency on parents.

## **2.7: Theories concerned with the transition into third-level education:**

The transition from second to third level education is a stressful situation for most individuals (Brooks & DuBois, 1995; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2003). Yet it is suggested that the transition into college is a naturally occurring separation experience that activates attachment-related processing due to the late adolescents' need to navigate, explore and master a novel environment (Bornstein, 1995). This new transition is influenced by daunting factors including social, emotional, academic adjustments, new relationships (both romantic & platonic), self-organisation of coursework and exam preparation, in addition to career and identity issues (Kenny & Rice, 1995).

There have been three major sociological models proposed that focus on student development at university (Weidman, 1989; Mattanah et al, 2004). These theories appear to represent an evolving process and provide an essential foundation for the current, psychologically orientated study. Chickering's (Chickering, 1969; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000) systematic framework for investigating undergraduate growth has a central theme of identity development. This theme is highlighted in Chickering's seven "vectors of development": achieving a sense of competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing one's own identity, interacting with others with increasing tolerance, developing a sense of purpose, and clarifying a personal and consistent set of beliefs (Chickering, 1969; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Chickering's (1969) theory was expanded by Tinto's (1993; Mattanah et al, 2004) theory of student attrition, which focused on background characteristics (e.g. gender and socioeconomic status) that students bring with them to college. Tinto's (1993) theory also focused on the distinction between the academic and social domains of college life. This distinction is clearly outlined in the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).

Furthermore, Weidman (1989) developed an even more explicit model of student socialization, which had an emphasis on extra-institutional socializing forces as

predisposing background variables that mould adjustment to college. Weidman (1989) was the first theorist to incorporate parental socialization into his model, which he operationally defined as socio-economic status, family lifestyle, and parent-child relationships (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000).

However, while some of the aforementioned theories have been tested empirically, Weidman (1989) himself proposed the criticism that, in the area of research, authors seldom develop conceptual frameworks or adequately operationalize them to provide explanations for relationships observed between variables. Furthermore, not one of the previous models distinguishes specific factors of the parent-child relationship, which may contribute to adaptation to university. It is therefore important to identify and test a number of relevant parent-child variables that can affect a young-person's adaptation to university. The potential importance of particular variables was based on theoretical considerations and previous findings (Wintre, Yaffe & Crowley, 1995). As such, the current study will account for certain parent-child variables such as whether or not they live with their parents, how often they see them and so forth and the effects that such variables have on student adaptation to college life (as measured by the SACQ) will be examined.

## **2.8: The effects of individuation-attachment on college adaptation:**

Another purpose of the current study was to assess the relationship between scores on the individuation-attachment scale with scores on the SACQ, as attending university is often one of the first major life transitions for many young adults. As such, this transition poses a number of important challenges to individuation and attachment. In respect to individuation, the young-adult must often physically separate from parents, confront identity and career options, and manage the daily responsibilities that escort the more independent collegiate lifestyle (Durkin, 1995). As a result, issues of self-governance, dependency, and relational autonomy will probably be of severe concern to the young-adult. Moreover, it is suggested that individuation involves a renegotiation of familial relationships in such a way that independence and autonomy are attained within a context of ongoing relationships with care-givers (Allison & Sabatelli, 1988; Bornstein, 1995). This would suggest that the individual needs to shed parental dependencies. However, the goal of individuation is 'relational

autonomy', whereby independence and self-governance are affirmed within the context of continuous, mutually validating relationships (Josselson, 1980, p86) Furthermore, due to the negative aforementioned issues related to individuation, it is suggested that the transition to college challenges students with the sort of analogous experiences that possibly evoke the attachment behavioural system well (Rice, 1992). For this reason, the influence of SI and attachment on college adjustment has been an important focus of research within counselling and psychology, as it is now believed that separation-individuation may well underlie many of the presenting problems seen in college counselling/support services (Rice, 1992).

A limitation in the research on separation-individuation is that it is suggested that there are discrepancies in the measurement of separation-individuation (e.g. the Psychological Separation Inventory), as they are not sensitive enough to detect more serious symptom patterns that might accompany dysfunctional separation-individuation (Rice et al, 1995). However, a measure that does assess the "pathology" of separation-individuation has been developed (Christenson & Wilson, 1985; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002).

Additionally, the transition to college requires the making of new friends, modifying existing relationships with family members, and adjusting to the new academic environment (Parker et al, 2003). Therefore, it is suggested that the parent-adolescent attachment relationship can serve the adaptive function of providing a secure base from which the adolescent can explore this new environment and experience in a healthy adaptation to college life (Holmbreck & Wandrei, 1993). It is further argued that secure attachment provides the reserve for mastery so that college students are less inclined to respond to challenges with disappointment and feelings of helplessness (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2000).

Support is paramount for a student's successful adaptation to college life. while studies have shown that family support is of particular importance during the transition to university (Rice et al, 1995), such investigations have tended to reflect more generalized constructs (e.g. parental support) or concentrate on specific issues, such as attachment, ego-identity status, and religion (Hunsberger et al, 1996; Baker & Siryk, 1999). Furthermore, an overall model that illustrates components of parental contributions to academic achievement and social/psychological well-being of university-age students has thus far not been formulated (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). However, it is the affects of individuation and attachment (as measured by the



Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire) on individual's adjustment to third level education that is of great importance to the current study. Furthermore, the overall adjustment, academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and attachment to the institution as measured by the SACQ are also of significant interest.

## **2.9: Demographic variables which affect college adjustment:**

There have been a number of studies in which the SACQ was used to investigate the influence of various factors on adjustment to college. Studies that are concerned with the relationship between characteristics of students not measured by tests and adjustment to college have proven to be very interesting as there are always going to be external factors which can affect a new transition (Baker & Siryk, 1999). A series of studies that were conducted over three successive semesters with two different first year classes at Clarke University examined the relationship between decidedness regarding academic major and effectiveness of adjustment to college (Smith & Baker, 1987; Baker & Siryk, 1999).

The Clarke university sample also reported contrasting information available concerning SACQ differences associated with gender. Moreover, at other institutions, Hogan (Hogan, 1986; Baker & Siryk, 1999) and Lopez, Campell & Watkins (1986) found higher scores for males than for females on the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale, and Albert (Albert, 1988; Baker & Siryk, 1999) obtained higher scores for females in the Social Adjustment and Attachment subscales. O'Brien (O'Brien, 2000; Lapsley & Edgerton, 2002) demonstrated that both attachment and individuation were predictive of female's subsequent vocational development. (Mattanah, Hancock & Brand, 2000). Nevertheless, Flescher (Flescher, 1986; Baker & Siryk, 1999), Gerdes (Gerdes, 1986; Baker & Siryk, 1999), and Harris (Harris, 1988; Baker & Siryk, 1999), who also examined individuals from other institutions, reported no differences associated with gender. However when individuation-attachment and the effects for student adaptation to college life is examined, the gender debate is multi-faceted.

In addition to gender and other predictive variables, family environment has proven to be very influential on SACQ scores. Wick and Shilkret (1986) reported indications from qualitative analysis of non-test data that parental and familial difficulties were

less evident among students who scored high on the SACQ Full Scale score than among students who scored low. Accordingly, parents of high scoring female students were seen to be more involved in their daughters' college careers in supportive and caring ways than were parents of students who scored low. The parents of such low scoring students were described as cold and distant (Wick & Shilkret, 1986).

However, no SACQ differences were reported between students whose parents were divorced and for others for whom the parental relationship was intact (Lopez et al. (1986). Furthermore, in Albert's (1988) study, students whose parents were still alive and married had higher Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale scores than students whose parents were deceased, divorced, or separated. Garner (1986) and Stoltenberg, Garner & Kell (1986), focused on single-parent families to see if there would be a difference in scores compared with intact dual-parent families. Similarly, Lopez (in press, C.F. Baker & Siryk, 1999) examined groups of students categorized according to different forms of interfamilial coalitions, while Allen (1985) was concerned with family experience and order of birth.

It is also interesting to note the differences in scores between students who come from a rural background as opposed to an urban one and vice versa. Savino and Costar (1986) conducted an important study which addressed their familial background and place of origin. Albert (1988) and Hogan (1988) examined differences between students who live in college accommodation and those who commute from home against the SACQ. The aforementioned demographic variables (certainty of course, gender, family environment and place of origin) and studies shall be further examined and developed in the Discussion section of the current study.

A careful review of the literature failed to uncover studies that directly investigated the individuation-attachment process on student adaptation to college life.

Furthermore, there have been no studies conducted in Ireland regarding individuation-attachment and consequences for adaptation to Irish college life. While it is clear to see that there are a number of international studies that focus on the outcomes of the SACQ and perceived adjustment to college, the studies of the conjoint effects of attachment and individuation suggests that at least two possibilities for how these two sets of variables may affect an individual's adjustment to college. Mattanah et al. (2004) suggest that one possibility is an additive model, in which the presence of both attachment and individuation does a better job in predicting college adjustment than

does the presence of only one or the other variable. The second possibility is a mediational model, wherein a history of secure attachment actually leads to better feelings about individuation during adolescence, which can, in turn, lead to greater college adjustment. Mattanah et al. (2004) suggest that this mediational model is consistent with attachment theorists' argument that secure attachment relationships provide the foundation for the construction of differentiated and complex view of self. This would include the capacity to see oneself as lovable, effective and autonomous (Sroufe, 2002; Mantanah et al, 2004).

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1: Design**

For the purpose of the current research a quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed, which was descriptive and retrospective in nature, as both males and females were examined in relation to their attachment-individuation and their adaptation to third level education in Ireland as measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire [SACQ, (Baker & Siryk, 1989)] and the Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire [IAQ, (Kaplan, 1988)]. All surveys entailed a number of demographic variables which were descriptive in nature, while both the IAQ and SACQ questionnaires examines the participants' recent/past feelings regarding the items, thus lending a retrospective nature to the study. The current study is a within-subjects design.

### **3.2 The Quantitative Method**

The method of empirical research chosen is a quantitative approach centred on questionnaires. *A questionnaire is a structural planned process of eliciting information through one way communication* (Blaxter, 1996, p. 78). This method of administration was appealing for a number of reasons. Firstly, given the limited resources such as time and money, questionnaires prove to be very economical in the sense that they supply a considerable amount of research data for a relatively low cost (Blaxter, 1996). Questionnaires are a lot easier to arrange and less time consuming than personal interviews.

Furthermore, they enable the collection of public opinion, something that is not always a possibility with personal interviews, due to potential interviewer bias. Moreover, the current study required a range of views regarding individuation-attachment of individuals and their college adjustment. Such views would only be accessible via questionnaires and not through personal interviews. The decision to administer the questionnaires in person and at the end of class and not via post or college societies seemed the only viable option when a large sample size of only first year college students is required. Many of the questions may be deemed sensitive and

personal in nature, as such; the anonymous aspect of a survey is beneficial (Blaxter, 1996).

One of the most significant advantages of questionnaires is their ability to reduce bias, which can occur in the process of interviewing. Such error can occur due to 'eagerness of the respondent to please the interviewer, a vague antagonism that sometimes arises between interviewer and respondent or the tendency of the interviewer to seek out the answers that support his/her preconceived notions' (Borg, 1981, p. 87; Bell, 1999). This danger is eradicated when using questionnaires as the interviewer is not present. The presence of an interviewer can often have an intimidating effect or make the participant nervous (Bell, 1999). As such, questionnaires are the best option as they allow the participant to complete them in privacy where they can consult their files and write rather than talk about certain issues. According to Sarantakos (2005), this is something that people find appealing. Therefore, it is clear to see how quantitative research methods are less intrusive and they also prove to be easier to analyse, as scores from questionnaires can usually be transferred very easily into a computer database (e.g. SPSS). According to Denscombe (1996; Bell, 1999) questionnaires supply standardised answers to the extent that all respondents are posed with exactly the same questions with no scope for variation to slip into face-to-face contact with the interviewer. As such, *'there is little scope for data to be affected by interpersonal factors'* (Denscombe, 1996, p. 159; Bell, 1999).

Nonetheless there are some limitations regarding the utilisation of questionnaires, mainly due to the fact that they are structured instruments. Despite the fact that this allows for standardisation and in effect easier analysing of information, it also *'allows little flexibility to the respondent with respect to the response format'* (Blaxter, 1996 p.85). Nevertheless, this can be overcome by the inclusion of open ended questions which allows respondents 'the freedom to express feelings and thoughts especially when complex issues are being studied' (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 231).

### **3.3: Sampling**

Similar to most psychological research, the current study relies on samples of data from which statements are made (Howitt & Cramer, 2005). Population and sample both refer to scores on a variable, but a statistical population is merely all of the

scores on a particular variable. The use of sampling in public opinion polls is very familiar, thus one should need little convincing of the value of the samples. For the purpose of equality, the current study adopted a random sampling technique. This was achieved by placing the names of various third level Irish institutions in a hat and then, selecting the necessary three names from the hat randomly. The study was concerned with first year college students, as such, a number of departments from the randomly selected institutions were contacted and all the relevant students had an equal chance of being selected. One of the institutions drawn (DIT) has a number of campuses, therefore, a random sample of first year students from a range of the different campuses were selected. Although random sampling is not difficult, it does require a systematic approach.

### **3.4: Participants**

While 250 questionnaires were compiled, a total of 125 first-year undergraduate students (30, males, 95 females), aged between 17 and 23 years, from a number of Dublin Institute of Technology campuses (DIT Mount Joy Square, DIT Kevin Street, DIT Bolton Street and DIT Portland Row), participated in the current study (n=59). Some of the participants attended the large, metropolitan universities; Trinity College (n=35) and University College Dublin (n=31). The reduced number of completed questionnaires was most likely due to the timing in which they were distributed. During the final week of the final semester, many students are very busy organising the necessary materials for exam preparation and were unwilling to spend 20 minutes completing the survey.

The majority of the participants were aged between 17-19 years of age (63%), 20-22 year olds represented 26% of the population, whilst only 11% of the participants were aged 23 years or older. This sample was representative of a wide range of first-year students. Nevertheless, most of the participants were Irish nationals (86%), with only 14% of participants being non-nationals. Participation in the study was voluntary and students received no extra credit in their perspective course for participation.

### **3.5: Procedure**

For the purpose of the current research study a number of heads of department were contacted via telephone regarding the nature of the current research and requesting the permission to administer the questionnaires at the end of class in the final week of the first academic year. The researcher received permission from the Engineering, Early Childhood Education, Social Care, Fine Art, Automative Technological Management and Architecture departments at DIT, while the Social Studies Department at Trinity College and the Business and Geomatics departments at UCD also permitted the researcher to gain access to the student sample in their respective first year classes. It was decided that questionnaires would be administered via classroom announcements as more could be completed at the end of class as opposed to postal distribution which often results in very few completed surveys being returned. All the participants completed the same battery of questionnaires. Each questionnaire contained an explanatory letter that detailed the nature of the research. For the purpose of the SACQ items, each questionnaire had to be hand-scored and calculated. The IAQ has four sub-scales with 11 items in each, as such each item had to be categorised into the appropriate sub-scale. The possible range of scores for each subscale is from 1-44. Each of the sub-scale scores can be classified as high or low, relative to the median score of that population. Once the necessary adjustments were made, the completed questionnaire responses were entered onto a computer database (SPSS) and analysed.

### **3.6: Measures**

The research materials used for the current study consisted of a 126 Item questionnaire (See Appendix A), that utilised two different individual self-report psychological scales and background information was gathered via a questionnaire containing 15 questions about such demographic variables as gender, age, nationality, urban or rural origin, living status, who they live with, where parents live, how often they see parents, parents marital status, father's occupation, mother's occupation, whether they have siblings, siblings ages, siblings gender, and the course they study at college. The complete questionnaire addressed the demographic questions firstly, after which the attachment-individuation questionnaire was utilised to assess the participant's fear of/and need for both attachment and individuation, followed by the

Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire, which measured the participant's adaptation to college by way of four subscales. Each of the scales included clear instructions as to the correct way in which to answer the questionnaires. More detailed information on each of these standardised measures is presented below:

**The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ):**

In addition to the demographic and individuation-attachment questionnaires, students completed the SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1989). This 67-item scale measures the quality of adaptation to university life, and assumes that adjustment to university is multifaceted in that it requires adaptation to a number of demands. The domains include academic adaptation, social adaptation, personal-emotional adaptation, and goal commitment/institutional attachment. The Academic Adjustment subscale measures how well the adolescent manages the educational demands of the college experience. Social Adjustment measures how well the adolescent deals with interpersonal experiences at the university (e.g. meeting people, joining groups). Personal-Emotional Adjustment taps whether the student experiences general psychological distress or the somatic consequences of distress. The Goal Commitment/Institutional Attachment subscale assesses the degree of institutional affiliation the adolescent feels towards the university. The SACQ also yields a full-scale score as an index to overall adaptation to university. On the basis of two independent samples, Baker & Siryk (1986) reported coefficient alphas for Academic Adjustment (.82 and .87), Social Adjustment (.88 and .88), and Personal-Emotional Adjustment (.82 and .79), all of which illustrated that there was good internal consistency for the instrument (Rice, 1992).

Nevertheless, on two separate samples, Cronbach's alpha's yielded .91 and .92, respectively. Convergent validity has been illustrated via the statistically significant correlations that have been established between the subscales and a variety of relevant variables, such as grade point average, involvement in social activities, attrition, election to an academic honour society, and appeals for psychological services (Baker & Siryk, 1984).



### **The Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire (IAQ):**

This questionnaire was developed by Kaplan (1988), and was designed to measure adult attachment style on a bidimensional level. It has the potential to provide quick and convenient measure of personality development and clarify the dynamics, which underlie relationship stress. The IAQ includes 44 items, 11 items in each of four factors: Need for Attachment (NA) (the need to form close relationships: e.g., “I need to share my feelings with others.”), Fear of Attachment (FA) (the fear of forming close relationships: e.g., “a close relationship makes it harder to be yourself.”), Need for Individuation (NI) (the need to make one’s own decisions: e.g., “it is important for me to do what other people think I should do.”), and Fear of Individuation (FI) (the fear of making one’s own decisions: e.g., “it is important for me to do what other people think I should do.”). Participants rated each item on a Likert Scale ranging from “strongly agree” (5) to “strongly disagree” (1). Attachment according to Kaplan (1988, p. 221), “is the capacity to connect or bond affectionately to another person (and) to remove interpersonal walls. Fear of attachment reflects the difficulties in taking down the walls. “Individuation is defined as the capacity to differentiate one’s self from another, i.e., to have healthy self-other boundaries” (Kaplan, 1988, p. 221). Fear of individuation reflects the difficulties in forming these boundaries. Kaplan (1990) recommended classifying individuals into eight categories based on each individual’s combination of scores on the four factors. However, the classification lacks sufficient empirical validation (Weisel & Kamara, 2005). The IAQ was translated into Hebrew by Avnon (1997, C.F. Weisel & Kamara, 2005) who reported alpha coefficients of internal consistency of .75 and .84 for the FA and FI respectively. The score for each scale was the sum of the responses of each participant to the scale’s items where higher scores indicated more FA or FI (Weisel & Kamara, 2005). Moreover, the IAQ has been employed in a number of studies involving over 2,000 respondents at various ages across the life-span, both clinical and non-clinical, both male and female. Reliabilities on the four sub-scales ranged from .75 (FI) to .84 (NA) and inter-correlations between the four sub-scales are quite low (.22 to -.19). Validity coefficients of the four scales with independent clinical assessments of these same characteristics ranged from .58 (FI) to .71 (NI) (Parker et al, 2004). If the IAQ is to be used in future research, there is a need for psychometric information to increase confidence in the utility of the test (Parker et al, 2004).

- Each of the scales included clear instructions as to the correct way in which to answer the questionnaires.
- Attached to each questionnaire was a statement that guaranteed the confidentiality of the answers, thus encouraging honesty from the participants.
- Details of the researcher were provided including, name, telephone numbers and email address. Therefore participants with any queries were able to contact the researcher. However, as most questionnaires were completed in the classroom setting, the researcher was present, so any questions from participants were answered directly.
- All the items on the questionnaire were derived from commonly occurring themes in individuation-attachment and adaptation literature, in particular, that which pertained to undergraduate students.

### **3.7: Data Analysis**

The current study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistics in order to analyze the data that was entered onto the statistical database-SPSS. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies were initially examined in relation to the predictor variables of the study, such frequencies were then illustrated in both textual and graphical format. The inferential statistics that the current study adopted included: the statistical analysis of Pearson r, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out for the purpose of the current study. Pearson r is a statistical technique that allows a researcher to describe the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The relationship between full-scale adjustment and adjustment subscales (academic, social, personal-emotional and attachment) was investigated using Pearson r technique. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity occurred. The analysis of each adjustment subscale showed strong positive correlations with the scores on the full scale adjustment measure.

An independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean score, on some continuous variables, for two different groups of subjects. For the purpose of the

current study Independent samples t-test were conducted in order to compare the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) and IAQ subscales with gender, family structure, family setting, and accommodation.

Finally, the current study wanted to examine whether there would be significant differences in the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) across the various academic majors. Therefore, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of academic major on the full-scale adjustment score.

### **3.8: Ethical Considerations**

There are not as many ethical issues to consider when quantitative analysis is being conducted as opposed to qualitative analysis. While qualitative research does occupy a useful and important role in social science inquiry, elements of risk may be neglected. Such risks are often associated with the protection of confidentiality of both the participants and the third parties that may be mentioned in transcribed narratives. Moreover, qualitative research has the potential to induce negative psychological states (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001; Sarantakos, 2005). Sackett (1979; Blaxter, 1996) identified 56 possible 'biases' that may arise in what he refers to as 'analytic research', with over two-thirds of these biases relating to the aspects of study design and execution. Furthermore, Altman (Altman, 1981; Blaxter, 1996) indicates where there is greatest need for statistical expertise-in the design of quantitative research, as discrepancies in design are nearly always irremediable.

For the purpose of the current study, the researcher contacted the relevant heads of department informing them of the nature of the current study and to gain permission for access to the necessary sample. Once permission had been granted, the researcher administered the surveys to the participants. The first page of the survey outlined the nature of the study and ensured participants complete anonymity, thus encouraging honesty from the participants. No names or I.D. numbers were necessary, as such; no individual participant could be identified.

The researcher also considered the likely consequences of collecting and disseminating various types of data and guarded against predictable misinterpretations and misuse. The researcher also made sure not to exaggerate the accuracy or

explanatory power of their data. Furthermore, the researcher accounted for the limits of the reliability and applicability of the data (Bell, 1999).

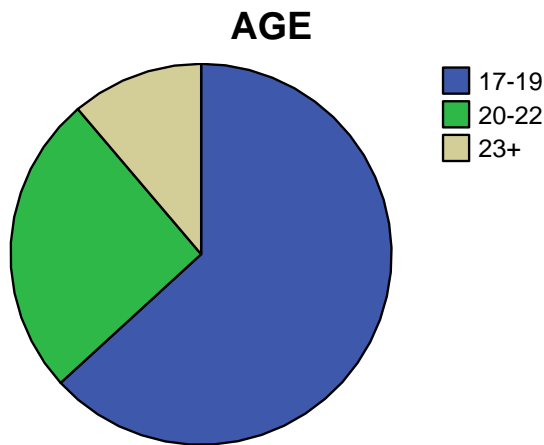
## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings**

The main aim of the current study was to examine the adaptation of first-year students to college life (as measured on the SACQ). Such adaptation was examined in terms of (1) Academic Adjustment, (2) Social Adjustment, (3) Personal-Emotional Adjustment and (4) Attachment to the institution. Another aim of the study was to examine the relationship between Individuation-Attachment (as measured on the IAQ) and the SACQ full-scale and sub-scale scores. The effects that demographic variables may have on both the IAQ and SACQ scores have also been studied. The findings of the current research are outlined below. (See attached Appendix B for the full data output). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data in the study and descriptives also compared first year college students scores across the IAQ and the SACQ. Descriptive statistics can be obtained in a number of different ways, using Frequencies, descriptive's and explore (Howitt & Cramer, 2005).

### **SAMPLE COMPOSITION:**

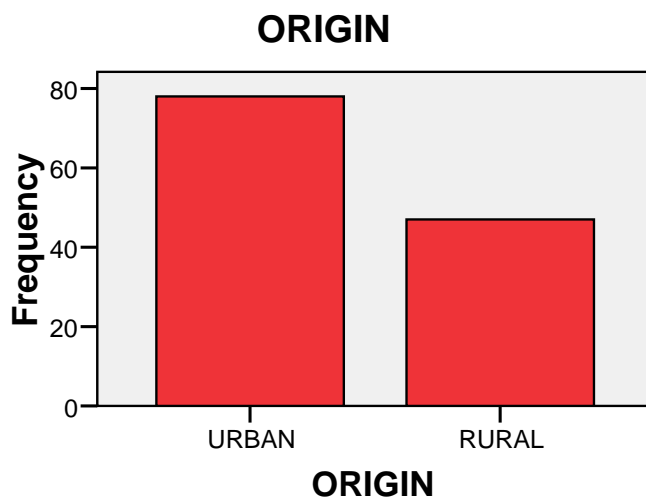
This section outlines and presents a breakdown of the sample composition by age, gender, nationality, urban/rural background, current accommodation and the type of course that the student is currently registered on. Descriptive statistics show one-hundred and twenty five first year college students took part in the current study. Of the one-hundred and twenty-five participants 78 were female (76% of the sample population) and 47 were male (24% of the sample population). The age range of the current sample was 17-23 years with the majority of students (63%; n=79) falling into the 17-19 age category. Just over one quarter of the students (25.6%; n=32) were between the ages of 20 and 22 years. Finally, a minority of students (11.2%; n=14) were in the oldest category representing 23 years of age and over. This is graphically demonstrated in **Fig. 4.1** below:

**Figure 4.1**



The majority of participants were Irish nationals (85.6%; n=107) while non-nationals represented 14.4% (n=18) of the sample. The participants were also divided according to their background. The majority of students came from an urban background (62.4%; n=78), while the remaining participants came from a rural setting (37.6%; n=47). This is graphically demonstrated in **Fig. 4.2** below:

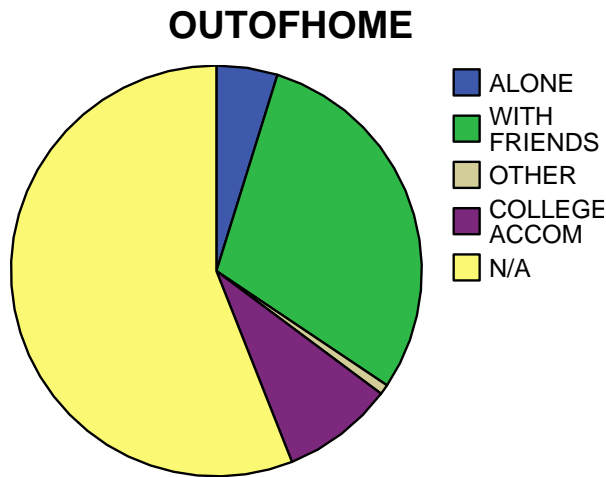
**Figure 4.2**



Descriptive statistics also illustrate that 71% of the participants live at home with the family, while 29% live out of the home. The majority of those who live out of the home are living with friends (29.6%; n=37), with 11 (8.8%) of students living in

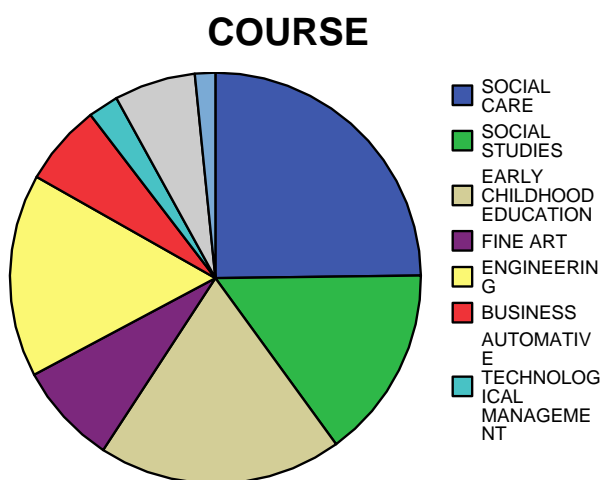
college accommodation and the remainder living alone (4.8%; n=6). This is graphically demonstrated in **Fig. 4.3** below:

**Figure 4.3**



Descriptives also demonstrated that participants fell into nine different academic courses. When social care and social studies are combined, they are the courses that the majority of participants are engaged in (n=50), Early Childhood Education (n=24) and Engineering (n=20), with few participants engaged in the remaining courses as outlined in **Fig. 4.4** below:

**Figure 4.4**



## **STUDENT ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE: ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN FULL-SCALE ADJUSTMENT AND ADJUSTMENT SUBSCALES**

The statistical analysis of Pearson  $r$ , independent samples  $t$ -tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out for the purpose of the current study. Pearson  $r$  is a statistical technique that allows a researcher to describe the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The relationship between full-scale adjustment and adjustment subscales (academic, social, personal-emotional and attachment) was investigated using Pearson  $r$  technique. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity occurred. The analysis of each adjustment subscale showed strong positive correlations with the scores on the full scale adjustment measure.

### ***Full-Scale Adjustment to College and Academic Adjustment:***

The relationship between the Full-Scale Score (as measured by the SACQ) and the Academic Subscale (as measured by the SACQ) as investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson  $r$ ), found a strong positive relationship between the two variables ( $r = .576$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with high scores attained on the full-scale score associated with high level scores on the academic-adjustment subscale.

### ***Full-Scale Adjustment to College and Social Adjustment:***

Similarly, the relationship between the Full-Scale Score and the Social Adjustment Subscale (as measured by the SACQ) was investigated using Pearson  $r$ . and a strong, positive relationship in the form of ( $r = .515$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was found between the two variables, with high scores attained on the full-scale category associated with high level scores on the social-adjustment subscale.

### ***Full-Scale Adjustment to College and Personal-emotional Adjustment:***

The relationship between the Full-Scale Score and the Personal-Emotional Subscale (as measured by the SACQ) was also investigated using Pearson  $r$ . and preliminary analysis suggests a strong, positive relationship exists between the two variables ( $r = .542$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), with high scores attained on the full-scale category associated with high level scores on the personal-emotional subscale.



***Full-Scale Adjustment to College and Attachment to the Institution:***

Finally, investigated using Pearson r, the relationship between the Full-Scale Score and the Attachment subscale (as measured by the SACQ) suggests that a strong, positive relationship exists between the two variables ( $r = .536$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), with high scores attained on the full-scale category associated with high level scores on the attachment subscale.

**STUDENT ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE AND INDIVIDUATION-ATTACHMENT:**

The present study further investigated possible relationships between scores on the Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire and student adjustment to college. Relationships among the four subscales (Need for Individuation, Fear of Individuation, Need for Attachment and Fear of Attachment) of the Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire were examined. Again, this was achieved by utilizing the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a positive, significant relationship found between the Need for Individuation (NI) subscale (as measured by the IAQ) and the Need for Attachment (NA) subscale (as measured by the IAQ) in the form of ( $r = .193$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), with high level scores of NI associated with high level scores of NA. However, the relationship between the variables NI and Fear of Individuation (FI, as measured by the IAQ), found a non-significant correlation when investigated using Pearson r. ( $r = .085$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), with levels on the NI and FI subscale scores having no effect on each other. The relationships between the NI and FA subscales and the NA and FI subscales were also investigated using Pearson r technique, and in both cases strong, positive correlations were found, ( $r = .265$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and ( $r = .384$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) respectively.

The relationships found between the subscales on individuation/attachment scale are graphically represented in **Fig. 4.5** below:

Individuation-Attachment	Individuation-Attachment
Need for Attachment	Need for Attachment
Fear of Attachment	Fear of Attachment
Need for Individuation	Need for Individuation
Fear of Individuation	Fear of Individuation

Figure 4.5

When the relationship between the full-scale score of the SACQ was investigated against the subscales on the IAQ, mixed results occur. Investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, there was non-significant relationships found between the full-scale score adjustment variable (as measured on the SACQ) and the NI (Need for Individuation) variable (as measured on the IAQ) and the full-scale score variable and the NA variable with ( $r = -.142, n=125, p>0.05$ ) and ( $r = 0.085, n=125, p>0.05$ ) respectively. However, there was a positive relationship found between the full-scale score and FI variables ( $r = .233, n=125, p>0.01$ ). Furthermore, there was a strong, positive correlation between the full-scale adjustment and FA variables ( $r = .341, n=125, p>0.01$ ), with high levels of full-scale adjustment associated with high levels of fear of attachment. A high score on any of the IAQ subscales can be interpreted as a lower level of that particular variable (e.g. a high score on the FI subscale can be interpreted as the individual having a low fear levels of individuation).

The significant relationships that existed between the Full-Scale Adjustment and the Individuation-Attachment subscales are listed in **Fig. 4.6** below:

Full-Scale Adjustment	Individuation-Attachment
Overall adjustment to college	Need for Attachment
	Fear of Attachment
	Need for Individuation
	Fear of Individuation

Figure 4.6

The relationships between the subscales on the SACQ and the IAQ were also investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a

positive correlation found between the academic adjustment variable and the FI and FA variables ( $r = .186, n=125, p>0.05$ ), ( $r = .210, n=125, p>0.05$ ) respectively, with high levels of academic adjustment associated with high levels of FI and FA, therefore, those who demonstrated good academic adjustment also reported less fear of both individuation and attachment. Moreover, there was only a slightly significant relationship between Academic Adjustment and the Need for Attachment and Need for Individuation Sub-scales, ( $r= 0.84, n=125, p>0.05$ ) and ( $r= -.157, n=125, p<0.05$ ) respectively. The aforementioned significant relationships are further demonstrated in the **Fig. 4.7** table below:

<b>Student Adjustment to College</b>	<b>Individuation-Attachment</b>
Overall adjustment to college	
Academic Adjustment	Need for Attachment
Social Adjustment	Fear of Attachment
Personal and Emotional Adjustment	Need for Individuation
Attachment to Institution	Fear of Individuation

**Figure 4.7**

The relationships between the personal-emotional adjustment variable (as measured by the SACQ) and the FI and FA variables (as measured by the IAQ) were strong and positive ( $r = .305, n=125, p<0.01$ ) and ( $r = .320, n=125, p<0.01$ ) respectively, with high levels of personal-emotional adjustment associated with high levels of Fear of Individuation and Fear of Attachment. While a non-significant relationship was found to exist between the personal-emotional variable and the NA variable ( $r = .103, n=125, p>0.05$ ). These relationships are further demonstrated in **Fig. 4.8** below:

<b>Student Adjustment to College</b>	<b>Individuation-Attachment</b>
Overall adjustment to college	
Academic Adjustment	Need for Attachment
Social Adjustment	Fear of Attachment
Personal and Emotional Adjustment	Need for Individuation
Attachment to Institution	Fear of Individuation

**Figure 4.8**

With regard to the attachment to the college variable (as measured on the SACQ) and the FA variable (as measured on the IAQ), a strong, positive relationship was found

( $R = .316$ ,  $N=125$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), with high levels of attachment to college associated with high levels of Fear of Attachment (as measured by the IAQ). This significant relationship is demonstrated on the **Fig. 4.9** table below:

<b>Student Adjustment to College</b>	<b>Individuation-Attachment</b>
Overall adjustment to college	
Academic Adjustment	Need for Attachment
Social Adjustment	Fear of Attachment
Personal and Emotional Adjustment	Need for Individuation
Attachment to Institution	Fear of Individuation

**Figure 4.9**

### **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE:**

An independent samples t-test is used when one wants to compare the mean score, on some continuous variable, for two different groups of subjects. For the purpose of the current study Independent samples t-test were conducted in order to compare the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) for males and females. There was no significant difference in scores for males ( $M=1.76$ ,  $SD= .504$ ) and females [ $M=1.77$ ,  $SD= .56$ ;  $t(123)= -.106$ ,  $p>.05$ ]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small.

An Independent samples t-test was also utilized to compare SACQ subscale scores for males and females. Again, there was no significant difference in scores for:

- (1) Males ( $M=1.73$ ,  $SD= .449$ ) and females [ $M=1.84$ ,  $SD= .551$ ;  $t(123)= -.981$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], on Academic Adjustment.
- (2) Males ( $M=1.66$ ,  $SD= .546$ ) and females [ $M=1.87$ ,  $SD= .569$ ;  $t(123)= -1.75$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], on Personal-Emotional Adjustment.
- (3) Males ( $M=1.90$ ,  $SD= .480$ ) and females [ $M=1.72$ ,  $SD= .534$ ;  $t(123)= 1.67$ ,  $p>0.05$ ], on Social Adjustment.

When attachment (as measured by the SACQ) was examined across gender, it was clear to see that females scored higher than males on this subscale, yet not in a significant way; males ( $M=1.73$ ,  $SD=.449$ ) and females [ $M=1.91$ ,  $SD=.476$ ;  $t(123)=-1.85$ ,  $p>0.05$ ].

#### **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SCORES ON INDIVIDUATION-ATTACHMENT:**

An Independent samples t-test was also utilized to compare gender across the four subscales of the IAQ, no significant differences were found except for gender differences on the Fear of Attachment (FA) subscale. There was a strong significant difference in scores for males ( $M=34.8$ ,  $SD=6.11$ ) and females [ $M=38.4$ ,  $SD=5.68$ ;  $t(123)=-3.02$ ,  $p<0.01$ ]. The fact that females scored higher, suggests that they demonstrate lower levels of FA than their male counterparts.

#### **STUDENT ADJUSTMENT AND FAMILY STRUCTURE:**

An independent-samples t-test was also conducted to compare the 4 adjustment subscale scores from the SACQ with parent's marital status. On the full-scale adjustment, there was no significant difference in scores for married parents ( $M=1.77$ ,  $SD=.573$ ) and non-married parents [ $M=1.76$ ,  $SD=.436$ ;  $t(123)=.128$ ,  $p>0.05$ ]. There was also no significant difference in scores for married and non-married parents across academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, or social adjustment. The scores for married ( $M=1.78$ ,  $SD=.515$ ) and non-married parents [ $M=1.95$ ,  $SD=.589$ ;  $t(123)=-1.298$ ,  $p>0.05$ ] against academic adjustment suggest that the magnitude of the differences in the means was very small. Similarly, the scores for married parents ( $M=1.77$ ,  $SD=.538$ ) and non-married parents [ $M=1.71$ ,  $SD=.462$ ;  $t(123)=.512$ ,  $p>0.05$ ] against social adjustment and ( $M=1.82$ ,  $SD=.581$ ) and [ $M=1.80$ ,  $SD=.511$ ;  $t(123)=.127$ ,  $p>0.05$ ] for personal-emotional adjustment, suggests that the magnitude of the differences in the means was also very small for these categories.

## **INDIVIDUATION-ATTACHMENT AND FAMILY STRUCTURE:**

Another aim of the current study whether there would be significant differences in the mean individuation-attachment scores (as measured by the IAQ) and participants' parents' marital status. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to investigate such effects, but no significant differences were found:

- (1) Married (M=27.9, SD= 3.96) and Non-Married [M=28.7, SD= 4.53;  $t(123) = -.824, p > 0.05$ ] against Need for Individuation.
- (2) Married (M=32.8, SD= 4.58) and Non-Married [M=33.5, SD= 4.15;  $t(123) = -.582, p > 0.05$ ] against Fear of Individuation.
- (3) Married (M=27.02, SD= 4.45) and Non-Married [M=28.38, SD= 4.58;  $t(123) = -1.26, p > 0.05$ ] against Need for Attachment.
- (4) Married (M=37.6, SD= 5.93) and Non-Married [M=37.4, SD= 6.32;  $t(123) = .130, p > 0.05$ ] against Fear of Attachment.

All these results suggest that the magnitude of the differences in the means was very small.

## **URBAN-RURAL DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT ADJUSTMENT:**

The current study aimed to address whether there would be significant differences between the means of the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) and individuals' place of origin. Therefore, an independent-samples t-test was utilized once again. There was no significant difference in scores for students living in an Urban setting (M=1.75 SD= .562) and those living in a rural setting [M=1.80, SD= .537;  $t(123) = -.510, p > 0.05$ ]. The magnitude of the differences in means was very small.

## **STUDENT ADJUSTMENT AND CURRENT ACCOMMODATION:**

An additional aim of the current study was to examine whether there would be significant differences in the means of the four SACQ subscales and whether the participant lived at home with the family/ or out of the family home. Independent-Samples t-tests were conducted but no significant differences were found:

- (1) Live at home with family (M=1.76, SD= .589) and Live out of the family home [M=1.78, SD= .498;  $t(123) = -.212, p > 0.05$ ] against the full-scale adjustment scores.
- (2) Live at home with the family (M=1.82, SD= .631) and Live out of the family home [M=1.82, SD= .437;  $t(123) = -.051, p > 0.05$ ] against the personal-emotional adjustment scores.
- (3) Live at home with the family (M=1.73, SD= .527) and Live out of the family home [M=1.80, SD= .525;  $t(123) = -.711, p > 0.05$ ] against the social adjustment scores.
- (4) Live at home with the family (M=1.82, SD= .536) and Live out of the family home [M=1.80, SD= .525;  $t(123) = .147, p > 0.05$ ] against the Academic adjustment scores.

As such, the magnitude of the differences in the means was very small. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between the means of the IAQ subscales and whether or not the participant lived at home or out of the home, suggesting that the magnitude of the differences between the means were again very small.

## **STUDENT ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC MAJOR:**

Finally, the current study wanted to examine whether there would be significant differences in the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) across the various academic majors. Therefore, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of academic major on the full-scale adjustment score. Subjects were divided into nine groups according to their academic major. There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.01$  level in full-scale adjustment scores for the academic majors ( $F(8, 116) = 3.00, P = .004$ ). The effect size, calculated using the eta squared was .17. Using Cohen's (1988) criterion, this value can be classified as a large effect size which indicates a large difference in mean scores between the groups. Post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Social studies ( $M = 1.3, SD = .495$ ), Social Care ( $M = 1.9, SD = .597$ ) and Early Childhood Education ( $M = 2.0, SD = .417$ ) were significantly different from the rest of the academic majors. This is graphically outlined in **Fig. 4.10** below:

<b>Student Adjustment to College</b>	<b>Student Major</b>
Overall adjustment to college	Early Childhood Education
Academic Adjustment	Social Studies
Social Adjustment	Social Care
Personal and Emotional Adjustment	
Attachment to Institution	

**Figure 4.10**

There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in academic adjustment scores for the academic majors ( $F(8, 116) = 2.17, P = .034$ ). The effect size, calculated using the eta squared was .13. Using Cohen's (1988) criterion, this value can be classified as a large effect size which indicates a large difference in mean scores between the groups. Post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Social studies ( $M = 1.52, SD = .512$ ) and Early Childhood Education ( $M = 2.12, SD = .448$ ) were significantly different from the rest of the academic majors. Such relationships are further outlined in the table **Fig. 4.11** below:

<b>Student Adjustment to College</b>	<b>Student Major</b>
Overall adjustment to college	Early Childhood Education
Academic Adjustment	Social Studies
Social Adjustment	
Personal and Emotional Adjustment	
Attachment to Institution	

**Figure 4.11**



There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < 0.05$  level in social adjustment scores for the academic majors ( $F(8, 116) = 2.03, P = .048$ ). The effect size, calculated using the eta squared was .12. Using Cohen's (1988) criterion, this value can be classified as a large effect size which indicates a large difference in mean scores between the groups. Post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Social studies ( $M = 1.42, SD = .507$ ) and Engineering ( $M = 2.00, SD = .561$ ) were significantly different from the rest of the academic majors. Such relationships are further outlined in the table **Fig. 4.12** below:

<b>Student Adjustment to College</b>	<b>Student Major</b>
Overall adjustment to college	Engineering
Academic Adjustment	Social Studies
Social Adjustment	
Personal and Emotional Adjustment	
Attachment to Institution	

**Figure 4.12**

To conclude this chapter, it is clear to see that, in general, overall college adjustment was good for the participants of the current study, with the subscales of the SACQ proving to be good predictors of overall adaptation to college. A positive relationship was also found between the adjustment subscales and low level fears of both individuation and attachment. Therefore, students who reported less fear of individuation/attachment demonstrated good adjustment across the SACQ subscales.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

The main aim of the current research was to explore the adaptation of First-Year college students to third level education in Ireland today. Furthermore, the study aimed to assess whether or not a relationship would exist between the students' sense of Individuation-Attachment and their adaptation to college life in terms of Academic, Social and Personal-Emotional adjustment, in addition to their Attachment to the institution and their Full-Scale adjustment [as measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)]. Although past studies have shown that both secure attachment to parents and healthy separation-individuation additively predict college adjustment (Blustein et al, 1991; Rice et al, 1991; and Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994), the present study seeks to demonstrate the extent to which demographic variables in addition to individuation-attachment (in terms of needs and fears), can actually affect college adjustment. The particular effects of 'gender' for both adjustment to college and individuation-attachment is of particular interest to the current study. Within this chapter the findings of the present study that emerged as a result of SPSS statistical analysis on the Demographic variables, SACQ and Individuation-Attachment Questionnaire (IAQ) scores will be outlined and discussed with reference to previous studies of a similar nature.

### **5.1: SACQ: Relationships between Full-scale Adjustment and Subscale Adjustment**

For the purpose of examining student adaptation to third level education in Ireland, the associations between the full-scale score on the SACQ and its adjustment subscales (academic, social, personal-emotional and attachment) were measured. Such an examination is in keeping with the propositions of Kenny and Rice (1995), who suggested that the transition into college is influenced by social, emotional and academic adjustments, new relationships, self-organisation of course-work, and exam preparation, in addition to career and identity issues. The current study examined the full-scale and sub-scale associations by implementing a within-subjects design in order to assess the differences as measured by the SACQ, which is a subjective self-report measure of college adjustment.

A strong relationship was found between the participants' full-scale adjustment to college (as measured by the SACQ) scores and all of the SACQ sub-scale scores. The relationship between the Full-Scale score and the Attachment Subscale suggests that a strong, positive relationship exists between the two variables ( $r = .536$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), with high scores perceived on the full-scale category associated with high level scores on the attachment subscale.

The relationship between academic adjustment and full-scale adjustment had a score of ( $r = .576$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), the relationship between the Social Adjustment Subscale and Full-scale had a score of ( $r = .515$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) between the two variables, the relationship between the Full-Scale and the Personal-Emotional Subscale had a score of ( $r = .542$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). All of the above scores demonstrate significant and positive relationships.

## **5.2: Full-Scale Adjustment and Individuation-Attachment**

The current study aimed to address whether or not significant relationships would exist between students overall adjustment to college and their fears/need for individuation-attachment. While non-significant relationships were found between full-scale adjustment (as measured by the SACQ) and need for both individuation and attachment, ( $r = -.142$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and ( $r = 0.085$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) respectively. Furthermore a positive relationship was found to exist between the full-scale adjustment and the fear of individuation subscale ( $r = .233$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p>0.01$ ). Therefore, students who reported less fear of individuation also demonstrated good overall college adjustment. Furthermore a strong and positive relationship was also found to exist between full-scale adjustment and fear of attachment ( $r = .341$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p>0.01$ ), with students who reported lower level of fears of attachment also demonstrating good overall adjustment to college life. Such findings are not surprising as one would expect those who demonstrate good overall adjustment to college, to also express positive levels of individuation and attachment. Moreover, the capacity to maintain and regulate a healthy balance between object closeness and distance in relationships with parents is critical to the successful adjustment to college life for first year students (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987, Lapsley et al, 1989, Lopez et al, 1988; Rice et al, 1990).

Nevertheless, statistical analysis also found a positive and significant relationship to exist between the Fear of Attachment (FA) and Fear of Individuation (FI) subscales, with students who express a need for attachment also reporting a fear of individuation. Moreover, findings of the current study also suggest that students experiencing a need for individuation (NI) will also report a fear of attachment (FA).

These findings are somewhat contradicting the aforementioned full-scale adjustment relationship with the low level fear of both individuation and attachment. A reason for the contradictory findings may lay with the IAQ measure itself, as it has been more widely utilized in clinical samples and may not be sensitive enough to accurately measure the need for individuation and attachment in a normative sample.

However, it is suggested that individuation involves a renegotiation of familial relationships in such a way that independence and autonomy are attained within a context of ongoing relationships with care-givers (Allison & Sabatelli, 1988). While this would suggest that the young-adult needs to shed parental dependencies, the actual goal of individuation is 'relational autonomy', whereby independence and self-governance are affirmed within the context of continuous, mutually validating relationships (Josselson, 1988, p86)

The belief that a significant relationship would exist between individuation and attachment is based on the foundation that both variables are comprised of related and complementary developmental processes that are compulsory for the development of an independent and separate identity (Blain et al, 1993). Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the present study addressed adults' attachment and individuation, not childhood attachment. Bowlby (1979) viewed early childhood and adult attachment as being extremely related; nevertheless, the measurement of this association is frequently seen as problematic due to the time gap between the age when childhood and adult attachment is usually measured (before two years of age) and adulthood. The fact that childhood and adult attachment may be interrelated, does not rule out the possibility that adult attachment is influenced by a number of factors during the developmental process (Weisel & Kamera, 2005).

One such factor may be the adaptation to college life and all the psychological and geographical changes that it may bring. Furthermore, the transition to college challenges students with the sort of analogous experiences that possibly evoke the attachment behavioural system well (Rice, 1992).

### 5.3: Student Adjustment to College Subscales and Individuation-Attachment

The relationships between the subscales on the SACQ and the IAQ were also investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. A positive correlation was found between the academic adjustment subscale (as measured by the SACQ) and both the fear of attachment ( $r = .210, n=125, p>0.05$ ) and fear of individuation ( $r = .186, n=125, p>0.05$ ) subscales (as measured by the IAQ). More specifically, a higher level of academic adjustment was associated with high scores on both the FI and FA subscales. Therefore, the students who demonstrated good academic adjustment also reported less fear of both individuation and attachment as higher scores on the IAQ are associated with lower level fear/need for individuation/attachment. This finding partially contrasts with that of Rice (1992), who found no significant relationship between individuation and academic adjustment. Nevertheless, the current study investigated both 'need for individuation' and 'fear of individuation', while Rice (1992) only examined individuation in general and individuation per se is not a reliable predictor of academic adjustment. However, students who demonstrate a fear of individuation (in other words, who may not have sufficiently achieved/sought independence, autonomy, their own identity with respect to their families) are less likely to demonstrate the ability to adjust academically to their new college environments.

However, it must be pointed out that there was only slightly significant relationships between Academic Adjustment and the Need for Attachment ( $r= 0.84, n=125, p>0.05$ ) and Need for Individuation ( $r= -.157, n=125, p<0.05$ ) subscales in the current study. Such a verdict is somewhat congruent with the findings of Wintre and Yaffe (2000), who suggest that there is no link between separation-individuation and familial attachment and students' academic achievements. Nevertheless, these findings may go some way to explaining the lack of models of transition from school to university which focus on the importance of familial influences for academic achievement. It is thought that children who report secure familial attachments will be better adjusted individuals overall. Consequently, Wintre & Yaffe (2000) argue that a model which differentiates other forms of college adjustment from academic achievement would seem inadequate if it overlooks the role of parents; therefore it is necessary for such a model to include parental influences and their impact on college adjustment.

Results of the current study also found strong relationships between scores on the personal-emotional subscale (as measured by the SACQ) and both the FI ( $r = .305$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and FA ( $r = .320$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) subscales (as measured by the IAQ). Students who reported lower levels of fear of both individuation and attachment had higher personal and emotional adjustment to college life. Such findings were expected by the researcher as the importance of psychological well-being is congruent with Chickering's (1969) vector of managing emotions: achieving a sense of competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing one's own identity, interacting with others with increasing tolerance, developing a sense of purpose, and clarifying a personal and consistent set of beliefs.

Consistent with Wintre & Yaffe (2000), the results of the current study indicate that students demonstrating low levels of fear of individuation or attachment are less likely to demonstrate negative emotions which could lead to poorer physical and psychological adjustment to college life. Similarly, Allen (1995) suggests that positive attachment to parents in adolescence can facilitate the adolescent's social competence and well-being, which will be reflected in characteristics such as self-esteem, emotional adjustment, and physical health. Another similar study suggests that adolescents who have secure relationships with their parents demonstrate higher self-esteem and better emotional well-being (Black & McCartney, 1995; Mattanah et al, 2004).

The researcher also aimed to investigate the relationship between students 'Institutional Attachment' (as measured by the SACQ) and their individuation-attachment. The 'institutional attachment' subscale of the SACQ is designed to explore the student's feelings about being in college, in general, and the college that they are attending, in particular. The quality of the bond between the institution and the students is a primary focus (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Results of the current study suggest that a strong and significant relationship exists between high scores on the institutional attachment subscale (SACQ) and high scores on the fear of attachment subscale ( $R = .316$ ,  $N=125$ ,  $P<0.01$ ), therefore those who had a strong level of institutional attachment, had low level fears of attachment. This finding is not surprising. However, few studies have examined such a relationship, with the exception of Baker & Siryk's (1984) study at Clarke University which found a

significant relationship to exist between females and the 'Attachment' subscale of the SACQ, with females having the higher mean in that instance.

#### **5.4: Gender and Student Adjustment to College**

The current study aimed to further examine how a number of demographic variables might affect student's adjustment to college life. Consequently, a further aim of the current study was to assess gender differences with regard to adaptation to third level education in contemporary Ireland. This is in keeping with a number of studies concerned with gender differences and college adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Lopez et al, 1986; and Albert, 1988).

With regard to the current study, no significant difference in scores for males and females were found and the magnitude of the differences in the means and standard deviation show little variation in full-scale adjustment between genders. This finding is partially concurrent with the Clark University study conducted by Baker and Siryk (1984) which expected to find significant relationships to exist between the SACQ subscales and gender differences.

In accordance with the current study, Baker & Siryk (1984) found no statistically significant relationship to exist between full-scale adjustment and gender differences, nor gender differences and the 'academic adjustment' subscale of the SACQ.

Furthermore, the present study found no significant relationships to exist between gender differences and the Personal-Emotional or Social adjustment subscales. This result is inconsistent with the findings of Baker & Siryk (1984), who did find significant differences in relation to the Social and Personal-Emotional subscales, with females scoring higher in the former and males scoring higher in the latter.

The current study also examined attachment to the institution across gender and found females reported greater attachment to the institution than their male counterparts.

This finding is concurrent with the Baker and Siryk (1984) study which found females to have higher means than their male counterparts on the attachment subscale.

Moreover, at other institutions, Hogan (1986) and Lopez et al (1986) found higher scores for males than for females on the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale, and Albert (1988) obtained higher scores for females in the Social Adjustment and Attachment subscales. Nevertheless, Flescher et al, (1986), Gerdes (1986), and Harris

(1988), who also examined individuals from other institutions, reported no differences associated with gender.

### **5.5: Gender Differences across Individuation and Attachment**

Scores were also examined in relation to gender differences that might exist across the IAQ subscales. It is important to note that the adjustment to college and gender debate is multifaceted. Statistical analysis of the current study only found significant differences to exist between gender and the Fear of Attachment subscale. Female students scored higher on the FA subscale of the IAQ, suggesting that they demonstrate lower levels of fear of attachment than their male equivalents. Nevertheless, this finding may be due to the small percentage of male participants in the current study. Schultheiss and Blustein (1994b) used canonical correlational procedures and found that the combined additive effects of secure attachment (corresponding with the NA subscale in the present study) and separation-individuation (NI) constituted the best predictor of college student development for females and of college student adjustment for males. Likewise, Blustein et al. (1991) established that the combination of secure attachment and separation-individuation was the best predictor of progress in career developmental process for both males and females. Furthermore, another study found both attachment and individuation to be predictive of female's subsequent vocational development. (O'Brien, 2000; Mattanah, Brand & Hancock, 2004).

### **5.6: Family Structure, Individuation-Attachment and College Adjustment**

In addition to gender and other predictive variables, family structure has been shown to be very influential on SACQ scores. As a result, the current study was also concerned with the way in which family status can have an affect on one's transition into third level education. A number of investigators have used the SACQ to study the relationship between environment-related experience in the family and adjustment to college. Wick and Shilkret (1986) reported indications from qualitative analysis of non-test data that parental and familial difficulties were less evident among students who scored high on the SACQ Full Scale score than among students who scored low.



Nevertheless, results from the current study found no significant relationship to exist between full-scale adjustment and parents' marital status (married or not married), or even marital status across the Academic, Personal-Emotional or Social adjustment subscales of the SACQ.

This finding is in partial contrast to Albert's (1988) study, where students whose parents were married had higher Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale scores than students whose parents were not married. Nevertheless, the findings of the current study suggest that students scores on the full-scale and subscales of the SACQ were not affected in any significant way by their familial structure. This finding is in accordance with Lopez et al (1986) who found no SACQ differences between students whose parents were divorced and for others for whom the parental relationship was intact. Furthermore, Garner (1986) and Stoltenberg (Stoltenberg, 1986; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000) reported no differences between students for whom the primary relationship in the family was between themselves and a parent (lone parent) and those for who the primary relationship in the family was between the parents (married parents). Similarly, Lopez (in press, C.F. Baker & Siryk, 1999) found no differences among groups of students categorized according to different forms of interfamilial coalitions.

Furthermore, when the scores of the Individuation-Attachment subscales were examined in relation to familial structure, again, no significant differences were found. It seems therefore that having parents that are married or not, does not affect students' need/fear of individuation or attachment in a significant fashion.

It is also interesting to note the differences in scores between students who come from a rural background as opposed to an urban one and vice versa. Following on from the study conducted by Savino et al. (1986), who obtained small but significant correlations between students from a rural or urban hometown and four of the five SACQ indexes, results of the present study found no significant relationship to exist between college adjustment for those living in a either a rural or urban setting. Savino et al (1986) found students from the urban setting to have higher scores on the SACQ than those from a rural background.

The current study also assessed the relationship between college adjustment (as measured by all the SACQ subscales) of students living at home compared with those

who lived outside of the home, but no significant differences were found. In contrast to these findings, Albert (1988) found that students who live in college accommodation have higher Social Adjustment subscale scores than students who commute from home, yet Hogan (1988) found no relationship between distance from home and any SACQ variable.

Furthermore, there was no significant relationship found to exist between the students' need/fear of attachment and/or individuation when examined against their place of residence, suggesting that the place of residence has no effect on the individual's individuation or attachment.

### **5.7: Student Adjustment and Academic Major**

Finally, the current study wanted to examine whether there would be significant differences in the full-scale adjustment scores (as measured by the SACQ) across the various academic majors. Therefore, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of academic major on college adjustment. Subjects were divided into nine groups according to their academic major (Social Studies, Architecture, Geomatics, Fine Art, Automotive Technological Management, Engineering, Social Care, Early Childhood Education and Business). Results of the current study indicated statistical significance for students who are majoring in 'Engineering' and 'Social Studies' across the 'Social Adjustment' subscale. The participant's majoring in 'Early Childhood Education' and 'Social Studies' demonstrated better 'Academic Adjustment', while the participants engaged in 'Social Care' and 'Social Studies' reported a better 'Full-Scale Adjustment' than their counterparts. Results do not indicate any significance in the relationship between 'Personal-Emotional Adjustment' and their academic major.

Nevertheless, the study conducted by Plaud, Baker & Groccia (1990) obtained significant positive correlations between certainty of major and all the SACQ indexes for engineering students, with the strongest correlations occurring in the case of the Academic Adjustment subscale. In accordance, the study conducted by Savino et al (1986), tested in both semesters and found significant correlations in the expected direction between having a major and the Academic and Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscales in both semesters, but only the Attachment subscale in the second semester. Nevertheless, the current study only examined academic 'course' in

relation to its effects on the full-scale adjustment score of the SACQ, and not the relationship between 'course' and effects on academic adjustment. This could be an interesting relationship to explore in the future.

Similarly, to the current findings, Allen (1985) examined the full-scale score on the SACQ and found a positive relationship regarding the certainty of major. Martin (1988), also reporting data for the Full Scale score for the Clark University samples for seventeen semesters, reported no statistically significant differences between gender for either the Academic Adjustment subscale or the Full Scale.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, correlations between academic, personal-emotional, social adjustment, institutional attachment in conjunction with full-scale adjustment, found strong significant relationships. Therefore, those who scored well on each of the SACQ subscales also demonstrated good overall adjustment to college life. Such findings could go some way in assuming the participants had good adjustment prior to their entry to college. For example, if students are demonstrating good academic adjustment in their first year of college, it follows that they probably had good academic adjustment throughout the latter years of second level education also.

With regard to the relationships between individuation-attachment and college adjustment, results were varied and at times contradictory. For example, when the 'academic adjustment' subscale was examined in relation to individuation and attachment, results indicate correlations between both 'fear of individuation' and 'fear of attachment' with good academic adjustment. However, this may be due to a certain amount of students failing to complete the measure honestly or accurately.

Furthermore they might have recorded option 'C' on a lot of the items (option 'C' refers to 'undecided'), thus their scores may have fallen in the middle of both fear of/need for attachment.

In relation to the demographic variables, it was believed that they would go some way in accounting for college adjustment. Nevertheless, very little significant difference was found, suggesting instead, that they may be a consequence of adjustment and not causality. Family structure had no significant effect on college adjustment or sense of individuation and attachment, this finding is concurrent with Lopez et al (1986) who found no SACQ differences between students whose parents were divorced and for others for whom the parental relationship was intact.

Furthermore, it was thought that the effects of gender on college adjustment would illustrate significant findings similar to previous studies (e.g. Schultheiss and Blustein (1994), but only found significance between females and lower fear of attachment was established. In contrast, Blustein et al. (1991) recognized that the combination of

secure attachment and separation-individuation was the best predictor of progress in career developmental process for both males and females.

Finally, with regard to the 'course' studied and college adjustment; it appears that the participants engaged in the social sciences demonstrate better adjustment across the SACQ. Therefore, students concerned with children, family and society in general, might have a better understanding of themselves, and as such, demonstrate better adjustment.

The current study is not without its limitations. One of the methodological limitations of the current study pertains to data collection. The data was collected during the final week of the first year of college. Hence, the present results do not rule out the possibility that previous grievances in the student's life, prior to their entry into college, may make the student vulnerable to adjustment problems after their transition to college.

Another methodological limitation of the present study was the small sample size and the very high ratio of females to males participating in the study. When there is a small sample size it is more difficult for statistical effects of low to moderate size to reach significance (Cohen, 1988). A possible reason for such a high volume of female participants may be due to the fact that the majority of participants were engaged in Social Care, Social Studies and Early Childhood Education courses, all of which are dominated by female students. Future research would benefit from recruiting a much larger initial sample in longitudinal work in order to guard against decreased statistical power as a result of attrition.

Moreover, the sample of the current study was not ethnically representative. Ireland has increasingly become a multi-cultural society; therefore, future studies should examine the links between individuation, attachment, and college adjustment across different ethnic and cultural groups. Furthermore, while the colleges utilized in the current study were randomly selected, they were all Dublin institutions and therefore nor representative of Irish colleges as a whole. Nevertheless, a number of the participants in the current study did come originate from a rural background.

Additionally, future research could further explore questions pertaining to direction of effects and the nature of ‘emerging adulthood’ transitions by assessing adjustment and relationship variables prior to, and after the transition to, the university. As follow-up studies can address the stability or change in the student’s levels of individuation-attachment and adjustment over time.

Another limitation of the current study pertains to the design, which is essentially correlational and therefore cannot establish causality. It may be that some of the predictor variables are actually outcomes for students who were well adjusted before attending college. For example, who is to say that living away from the family home is going to be a predictor of poorer college adjustment than those living at home? As such, the current study found no correlation between these variables. Therefore, if data pertaining to students’ pre-college life were to become available, it would be possible to test for such longitudinal relationships among the variables. Longitudinal investigations in this literature have been rare (with the exception of Rice, 1991) but will be necessary in the future if researchers are to identify which factors are causally related to college adjustment and also to examine the long-term effects of individuation-attachment on college adjustment.

The utilization of the IAQ enabled the current study to find students who reported less fear of attachment to report better full-scale adjustment to college, consistent with the view that separation-individuation that expect less fear of individuation to predict better adjustment (Blos, 1979; Kaplan, 1990). Furthermore Kaplan (Kaplan, 1990) suggests that ‘teaching individuals to live together’ (TILT) assumes an inherent ambiguity in our traditional definitions of near and far, therefore, employs the IAQ to separate out the often fine distinctions found in relation to these dynamics.

Nevertheless the IAQ appears to be more suited to clinical research (Weisel & Kamara, 2005) and may not have been sensitive enough to account for a normative sample. Consequently, the present study would have benefited more from using the ‘Psychological Separation Inventory’ (Hoffman, 1984), which is used for assessing independence from parents, by way of; functional, emotional, conflictual and attitudinal independence.

The current study was also flawed by the lack of subjective attitudes pertaining to the students' perception of child-parent relationships and parenting style. Parents are very important figures for adolescents' new identity development (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Perhaps if a parenting style had been established, they could account for particular outcomes on the different adjustment subscales for both male and female participants. Moreover, more familial background information could have been garnered had the researcher conducted interviews in addition to the quantitative research; this is something that could be accounted for in future research.

Finally, future college adjustment would be significantly benefited by an increased focus on intervention studies; to determine whether or not college support/counselling service interventions with first-year students will enhance their adjustment across the college years. As it stands, student counsellors are faced with the challenge of facilitating adolescent individuation while supporting their need for emotional connection with others (Mattanah et al, 2004). Consequently, the aforementioned type of intervention research could be improved by including a focus on individuation and attachment, as demonstrated by the current study.

Regardless of the aforementioned limitations, a study of this nature has not been conducted in Ireland to-date. The concept of 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 1998) and the transition into third level education is an important aspect within the developmental psychology realm. Furthermore, the effects of familial relationships on college adjustment are very significant in relation to the young-adult's sense of individuation and attachment. The current study did not find poor levels of individuation or attachment or college adjustment among the current sample. Instead, young-adult college students demonstrated good overall adaptation to college and low level fears of both individuation and attachment. Furthermore, the fact that the predictor variables did not affect college adjustment in a significant way, suggests that future research must examine other predictor variables that may conjure significant results ascertaining to college adjustment.

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