

Relationship between Parental Attachment and Moral Judgment Competence
of Today's College Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation between parental attachment and the moral judgment competence of college students in the context of their Millennial generation characteristics. Participants (N=1,272) from two campuses of a major university system in the northeastern United States completed surveys that measured each of these variables. Overall, no significant relationship was found between perceived parental attachment and moral judgment competence, although the research did find significant differences by demographic characteristics.

In the new millennium, parents have shown increasing levels of involvement in their children's collegiate life. Observers have speculated this is based partly on the tenacious parenting style of the baby boomer generation (Levin Coburn, 2006). In addition, the explosion of technology has enabled closer communication between college students and their parents (Rainey, 2006). An overwhelming majority of students have indicated closer bonds with their parents than any previous generation (Atkinson, 2004; Wills, 2005). These trends have caused observers to give parents the label "helicopter parents," a term that illustrates the "hovering" tendencies they demonstrate (Levin Coburn, 2006).

Millennial Generation

Traditional college students are part of what is referred to as the Millennial generation, a subset of the population born between 1982 and 2002. Howe and Strauss (2000) characterize "Millennials" with dichotomous principles. They value achievement and money, but they are

also community-oriented and strive for positive social change. They are more populous, prosperous, educated, and diverse than previous generations. They also suffer from elevated degrees of anxiety and stress due to high parental and societal expectations (Atkinson, 2004).

Millennials are more deferential to the role of parents in their lives than any previous generation (Howe & Strauss, 2003). They have been considered “special” by their parents and have always been sheltered, and they respond with acquiescence to rules, order, and expectations (DeBard, 2004). Strange (2004) has speculated that Millennials might progress through the cognitive-structural models of moral development differently than previous generations. With their acceptance of authority, convention, and structure, Millennials may not advance through the stages predicted by cognitive developmental models suggested by theorists. These schemas, such as Kohlberg’s (1976) theory of moral development, require individuals to shift from accepting authoritarian views to making their own meaning of the world.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1977) defined attachment as “the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others” (p. 201). The basic functions for attachment are proximity maintenance, safe haven and secure base (Bowlby 1951, 1979, 1982). This is a process where a child is alarmed by a perceived danger and seeks comfort from an attachment figure and then feels more secure to explore the environment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Will, 1978). There are four recognized patterns of parental (caregiver) attachment. A child demonstrating secure attachment will use the mother or caregiver as a secure base from which to explore an unfamiliar environment. A child demonstrating anxious-avoidant attachment has a decreased need for physical contact from the caretaker after a separation. Like secure children, anxious-avoidant

children explore the new environment but are not bothered by the departure of the attachment figure. Children who are classified as anxious-resistant display intense distress when their caretaker leaves, and they are unable to be calmed when the caretaker returns. Disorganized-disoriented children appear to be confused about how to respond to their caregivers (Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998; Main & Solomon, 1990), and they are more likely to have been maltreated by parents (Lyons-Ruth, Connell, Zoll, & Stahl, 1987). They seem frightened by the caregiver, and may tend to avoid or resist his/her approaches.

Although attachment seems most evident in infants and children, researchers have found that attachment behavior is relatively steady throughout life (Sroufe, 1988; Waters, Hamilton & Weinfield, 2000). As children age, their attachment style becomes the working model for expectations of their relationship with others. A working model has been defined as “a self creation of the individual based on historical experiences with actual attachment figures” (West & Sheldon-Keller, 1994, p. 54). By understanding how early attachment behaviors create working models one can begin to predict future behavior (Bowlby, 1982).

Separation-individuation is a key process of adolescent development. This process is related to their attachment to parents. When a student goes to college they face a transition from childhood to adulthood. They begin to disengage from childhood and learn to function in the college environment on their way to becoming an autonomous adult (Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). While experiencing this stress, their parent(s) may serve as a secure base of support by offering help, which enables students to feel more confident (Kenny, 1994). While it may seem counterintuitive, connection with one’s parents is important in facilitating autonomous behavior (Josselson, 1988).

Moral Development Theory

Moral development is a process of assimilating or accommodating cognitive dissonance when faced with unfamiliar situations (Wadsworth, 1979). Moral judgment is the foundation of Kohlberg's theory of moral development and is thought to drive behavior (Blasi, 1980; Kohlberg, 1984; Rest, 1986). Kohlberg theorized that moral judgment evolves sequentially through a series of stages (Kohlberg, 1976). Each stage represents the way a person relates the external world during that period of individual development. The three stages of Kohlberg's theory are: (a) Preconventional, a state where the individual lacks awareness of or concern with the rules of society; (b) Conventional, where individuals develop an awareness and respect for societal rules; and (c) Post-Conventional, where an individual's own value system supersedes the rules of society.

Building on Kohlberg's (1959; 1964; 1984) definition of moral judgment competence and criteria for a successful measurement, Lind created the Dual-Aspect Theory of Moral Behavior and Development focusing on moral judgment competence (Lind, 2008). Kohlberg defined moral judgment competence as "the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (i.e., based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments" (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 425; Kohlberg, 1984, p. 523). This innovative concept made it clear that the moral person must not only understand what is moral, he or she must also have the ability to actually act upon it. Moral judgment competence also defines morality in the context of a person's internal feelings of what is acceptable, not only the recognition of social norms and values. Thus, the concept of moral judgment competence brings together the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of morality into one component to be measured as a whole.

According to Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito, “the college environment serves as an excellent laboratory for moral development” (1998, p. 172). Piaget (1952) suggested that moral development can only occur when maturation and circumstances are ripe for the change. Rest (1979a) believed that higher education encourages movement from conventional to post-conventional levels in Kohlberg’s theoretical framework. In a review of 172 studies on the moral development of college students, King and Mayhew (2002) only found two that did not positively correlate moral development with higher education.

Parental Attachment & Moral Development

Attachment and moral development have been studied extensively as separate topics, but very little research has considered the association between the two topics (Van Ijzendoorn & Zwart-Woudstra, 1995). Researchers and theorists generally agreed that children need parents to develop moral judgment (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964; Boyes & Allen, 1993; Haan, Langer, & Kohlberg, 1976; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967; Parikh, 1980; Powers, 1988; Rogers, 1994; Stilwell, Galvin, Kopta, Padgett, & Holt, 1997; Thompson, 2006; Van Ijzendoorn & Zwart-Woudstra, 1995; Walker & Henning, 1999; Walker & Taylor, 1991). Kohlberg (1969) postulated that children must develop the ability to reason and engage in role-taking to develop morally, and parents provide these opportunities. He did not emphasize parental influence on moral development, however, allowing for increased influence by peers and involvement in society.

Most research on the relationship between attachment history and moral development in young adults has focused on members of Generation X. Rogers (1994) was the first to examine this relationship on a small sample of White freshmen and sophomore college students. The research revealed no significant influence of parental attachment history on moral development.

Van Ijzendoorn and Zwart-Woudstra (1995) conducted a research study of 47 college students aged 18 to 22 years. Results showed that overall parental attachment made no difference in the overall moral development score, but that Type A and B moral reasoning was impacted by attachment style. Type B reasoning was related to autonomous (secure) attachment. Kohlberg (1984) depicted Type B individuals with the ability to balance individual and societal demands. This research seems to indicate that individuals with secure attachments are more likely to reach higher levels of Kohlberg's conventional reasoning.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine parental attachment and moral judgment competence of college students in the context of their Millennial generation characteristics. Four research questions, with corresponding null hypotheses, regarding the correlation of parental attachment and moral judgment competence of Millennial generation college students were addressed.

Methods

Participants

The survey yielded 1,272 valid responses from a population of 6,091 (20.88% response rate) enrolled in two regional campuses of a public university located in the northeastern United States. All participants were undergraduate students between the ages of 18-25 at the time of data collection. Table 1 reports the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Instrumentation

Parental attachment questionnaire. The Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) measures perceived attachment in adolescents and young adults (Kenny, 1985). The 55-item

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Female	566	44.5
Male	699	55.0
Missing	7	0.5
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	1007	79.2
Non-Caucasian	265	20.8
Class Standing		
Freshman	357	28.2
Sophomore	347	27.3
Junior	285	22.4
Senior	283	22.2
Age Group		
18-19	463	36.4
20-21	524	41.2
22-23	218	17.1
24-25	67	5.3

N=1272

instrument contains three scales derived from factor analysis: (a) Affective Quality of Attachment; (b) Parental Fostering of Autonomy; and (c) Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support. The items are presented on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 is not at all and 5 is very much), and scores are calculated for each scale. The PAQ has a .92 test-retest score over a 2-

week interval for the instrument as a whole, and scores ranging from .82 to .91 for each of the three scales (Kenny, 1990). Cronbach's alpha was .96 for the first scale, .88 for the second, and .88 for the third (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991), and internal consistency as .93 for male and .95 for female students (Kenny, 1987). The PAQ has been favorably compared with subscales from other instruments measuring similar constructs (Moos, 1985; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Olson, 1986; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Heiss, Berman & Sperling, 1996).

Moral judgment test. The MJT was chosen for this research because it is the only instrument available that places emphasis on moral tasks rather than just moral attitudes which can allow participants less ability to fake their scores upward (Lind, 2008). The instrument measures the consistency of an individual's moral reasoning rather than their preference for a particular stage (Rest, Thoma, & Edwards, 1997). The MJT is a multiple choice instrument consisting of two hypothetical situations. Participants are instructed to read each dilemma, evaluate the choice of the character in the story, and then rate six arguments in favor of the character's decision (pro arguments) and six arguments against the character's decision (contra arguments) on a scale of -4 (strongly reject) to +4 (strongly accept). Results are converted in a C scores which represents the participants' moral judgment competence, "the ability of a subject to accept or reject arguments on a particular moral issue consistently in regard to their moral quality even though they oppose the subject's stance on that issue" (Lind, 2008, p. 200). In a paper presented at an AERA meeting, Lind (1995) said that the use of indicators of validity and reliability such as Cronbach's alpha and criterion correlation are detrimental to the understanding of cognitive-structural models of moral development. Therefore, these indicators were not

available for the MJT. To test this assertion and provide more information to moral development researchers regarding instrument selection, Bell (1998) compared the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and Moral Judgment Test (MJT). Findings indicated that the MJT was the superior instrument in measuring participants' cognitive structure in terms of moral reasoning.

Procedure

Data were collected via instruments delivered to students electronically using the web software Zoomerang®. The instrument questions and instructions were identical to the paper-and-pencil version. Research has shown that in general, adapting paper-and-pencil questionnaires into web versions has not impacted validity and reliability of the instruments (Best, Krueger, Hubbard & Smith, 2001). In an attempt to reduce nonresponse error, five contacts and specific methods of survey implementation were used as recommended by Dillman (2000).

Once collected, data were entered and assessed using the software SPSS to determine relationships between the variables. Due to the relatively low response rate, wave analysis was conducted to investigate possible nonresponse bias. Wave analysis is based on the assumption that participants who responded later were more like non-respondents (Armstrong & Overton, 1977, p. 397). An ANOVA was used to compare means for the scales of the PAQ and the MJT scores for responses in the four waves analyzed. There were no significant difference in mean scores between waves. It was determined by using an ANOVA that there was a significant difference in the rate of responses between genders and ethnicities (Table 2). These tests reveal that males and non-Caucasians were more likely to respond later than females and Caucasians. Based on these results, it was determined that males and non-Caucasians were more likely to be nonresponders.

Table 2

ANOVA for Demographics by Response Wave

Demographic		SS	df	MS	F	<i>P</i>
Gender	Between Groups	2.47	3	0.82	3.34	0.019*
	Within Groups	310.29	1261	0.25		
Caucasian or non-Caucasian	Between Groups	2.09	3	0.70	4.25	0.005**
	Within Groups	207.71	1268	0.16		
Class Standing	Between Groups	8.15	3	2.72	2.19	0.088
	Within Groups	1,574.00	1268	1.24		
Age	Between Groups	0.75	3	0.25	0.34	0.797
	Within Groups	938.56	1268	0.74		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$, 7 missing values for gender

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question asked if there was a correlation between students' perceived parental attachment and their overall percentage of demonstrated moral judgment competence. There was no significant correlation between the total PAQ score and the C score ($r = 0.017, p > .05$); the Affective Quality of Attachment subscale score and the C score ($r = 0.023, p > .05$); the Parental Fostering of Autonomy subscale score and the C score ($r = 0.054, p > .05$); or the Parental Role in Providing Support subscale score and the C score ($r = -0.038, p > .05$).

Research Question 2

The next research question asked the students' demonstrated moral judgment competence, and if there were differences between the following groups: males and females; Caucasians and non-Caucasians; students by class standing; and age. The students' demonstrated moral judgment competence was in the low range ($M=17.16$, $SD=13.63$). Findings indicated that there was no difference in the mean C scores of males and females ($t = -1.731$, $p > .05$); mean C scores of Caucasians and non-Caucasians ($t = 0.484$, $p > .05$); mean C scores of students by class standing ($F = 1.081$, $p > .05$); or mean C scores of students by age group ($F = 1.094$, $p > .05$).

Research Question 3

The third research question asked the students' overall scores and the scores on the subscales of the Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ), and if there were differences between the following groups: males and females; Caucasians and non-Caucasians; students by class standing; and age. The mean PAQ total score was 194.15 (26.42). The mean score on the Affective Quality of Attachment subscale was 97.72 (14.34). The mean score for the Parental Fostering of Autonomy subscale was 50.46 (7.88). Finally, the mean score for the Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support subscale was 45.97 (8.21).

Findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the males and females and the mean total PAQ score ($t = 1.306$, $p > .05$); the mean Affective Quality of Attachment score ($t = 0.763$, $p > .05$); or the mean Parental Fostering of Autonomy scores ($t = -1.669$, $p > .05$). However, there was a significant difference between males and females on the Parental Role of Providing Emotional Support subscale ($t = 4.48$, $p < .001$), with women reported a

higher score ($M = 47.12$, $SD = 8.40$) on this scale than did their male counterparts ($M = 45.04$, $SD = 7.90$).

Significant findings were present for some of the PAQ scales between Caucasians and non-Caucasians. The mean total PAQ scores between Caucasians and non-Caucasians were significantly different ($t = -5.97$, $p < .001$), with Caucasians ($M = 196.57$, $SD = 25.14$) scoring higher than non-Caucasians ($M = 184.92$, $SD = 29.06$). The mean Affective Quality of Attachment scores between Caucasians and non-Caucasians were significantly different ($t = -6.58$, $p < .001$), with Caucasians ($M = 99.17$, $SD = 13.60$) scoring higher than non-Caucasian students ($M = 92.21$, $SD = 15.72$). The mean Parental Fostering of Autonomy scores between Caucasians and non-Caucasians were significantly different ($t = -6.45$, $p < .001$), with Caucasians ($M = 51.23$, $SD = 7.50$) scoring higher than non-Caucasians ($M = 47.50$, $SD = 8.61$). There were no significant differences in the Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support score between Caucasians and non-Caucasians, ($t = -1.70$, $p > .05$).

Differences in students by class standing and the PAQ scores varied. There was no significant difference in mean total PAQ score by class standing ($F = 1.30$, $p > .05$); in mean score on Affective Quality of Attachment by class standing ($F = 1.51$, $p > .05$); or in mean score on the Support scale by class standing, ($F = 1.07$, $p > .05$). However, there was a significant difference in mean scores on the Autonomy scale by class standing ($F = 5.27$, $p < .001$). The Tukey HSD post-hoc procedure found significant pairwise differences between the mean scores of freshmen students and the mean scores of both junior and senior students on the Autonomy scale of the PAQ. Freshmen students ($M = 49.27$, $SD = 7.91$) scored significantly lower on this scale than did juniors ($M = 51.30$, $SD = 7.21$) or seniors ($M = 51.39$, $SD = 8.21$).

For age group, there was no significant difference in mean score on the total PAQ score ($F = 1.01, p > .05$) and on the Affective subscale ($F = 1.55, p > .05$). . There was a significant difference in mean scores between age groups on the Autonomy subscale, ($F = 7.86, p < .001$). The Tukey HSD post-hoc procedure found significant pairwise differences between the mean scores of 18-19 year old students and the mean scores of both 23-24 and 24-25 year old students. The mean score for students age 18-19 ($M = 49.38, SD = 7.88$) was lower in Parental Fostering of Autonomy than the 22-23 age group ($M = 51.52, SD = 8.15$) and the 24-25 age group ($M = 53.57, SD = 8.17$). There was a significant difference in mean scores between age groups on the Support subscale, $F(3,1268) = 2.72, p < .05$. The Tukey HSD post-hoc procedure found significant pairwise differences between the mean scores of 18-19 year old students and the mean scores of 24-25 year old students. The mean score for students age 18-19 ($M = 46.62, SD = 8.22$) was higher in Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support than the 24-25 age group ($M = 43.82, SD = 8.66$).

Research Question 4

The final research question asked if there were differences in the correlation between students' overall percentage of demonstrated moral judgment competence and perceived parental attachment between the following groups: males and females; Caucasians and non-Caucasians; students by class standing; and age. There was no significant correlation in between PAQ total scores and MJT scores for males ($r = 0.049, p > .05$) or females ($r = -0.017, p > .05$); the Affective subscale score and MJT scores for males ($r = 0.059, p > .05$) or females ($r = -0.019, p > .05$); the Autonomy score and MJT score for males ($r = 0.072, p > .05$) or females ($r = 0.027, p$

> .05); or the Support score and MJT score for males ($r = -0.016, p > .05$) or females ($r = -0.047, p > .05$).

There was no significant correlation in between PAQ total scores and MJT scores for Caucasians ($r = -0.008, p > .05$) or non-Caucasians ($r = 0.090, p > .05$); between Affective scores and MJT scores for Caucasians ($r = -0.006, p > .05$) or non-Caucasians ($r = 0.112, p > .05$); or between Support scores and MJT for Caucasians ($r = -0.044, p > .05$) or non-Caucasians, ($r = -0.023, p > .05$). There was a significant correlation between the MJT score and Autonomy score for non-Caucasians ($r = 0.123, p < .05$), but not for Caucasians ($r = 0.031, p > .05$).

For freshman there was no difference in terms of the correlation of perceived parental attachment and moral judgment competence in PAQ total scores ($r = 0.005, p > .05$), the Affective score ($r = 0.024, p > .05$), the Autonomy score ($r = 0.029, p > .05$), and the Support score ($r = -0.054, p > .05$). There was a significant correlation for sophomores in PAQ total scores and MJT scores ($r = 0.110, p < .05$); in Affective subscale scores and MJT scores ($r = 0.111, p < .05$); and in Autonomy subscale scores, ($r = 0.139, p < .01$), but not in Support subscale scores and MJT scores ($r = 0.024, p > .05$). Juniors had no difference in terms of the correlation of perceived parental attachment and moral judgment competence in PAQ total scores ($r = 0.020, p > .05$), the Affective score ($r = 0.024, p > .05$), the Autonomy score ($r = 0.057, p > .05$), and the Support score ($r = -0.029, p > .05$). Seniors also showed no difference in the correlation of perceived parental attachment and moral judgment competence in PAQ total scores ($r = -0.082, p > .05$), the Affective score ($r = -0.084, p > .05$), the Autonomy score ($r = -0.002, p > .05$), and the Support score ($r = -0.117, p > .05$).

The only significant finding in terms of the correlation of perceived parental attachment and moral judgment competence for the various age groups was for 18-19 year old students in Autonomy scores ($r = 0.097, p < .05$). Students aged 18-19 showed no difference in the correlation between moral judgment competence and total PAQ score ($r = 0.084, p > .05$), Affective score ($r = 0.089, p > .05$), and Support score ($r = 0.023, p > .05$). Students aged 20-21 had no significant findings in the correlation between moral judgment competence and total PAQ score ($r = -0.006, p > .05$), Affective score ($r = 0.012, p > .05$), Autonomy score ($r = 0.040, p > .05$), and Support score ($r = -0.078, p > .05$). Students aged 22-23 had no significant findings in the correlation between moral judgment competence and total PAQ score ($r = -0.052, p > .05$), Affective score ($r = -0.051, p > .05$), Autonomy score ($r = 0.000, p > .05$), and Support score ($r = -0.083, p > .05$). Students aged 24-25 had no significant findings in the correlation between moral judgment competence and total PAQ score ($r = -0.033, p > .05$), Affective score ($r = -0.077, p > .05$), Autonomy score ($r = 0.123, p > .05$), and Support score ($r = -0.092, p > .05$).

Discussion

This study found no significant correlation between parental attachment and moral judgment competence in the population studied. This finding harmonizes with Kohlberg's (1969) theory that parents have less influence on moral development as children reach adolescence and early adulthood. This finding also concurs with the results of similar studies using different instruments to measure the same variable (Rogers, 1994; Van Ijzendoorn & Zwart-Woudstra, 1995) using two different instruments to measure the same variables.

This study attempted to quantitatively analyze Strange's (2004) speculation that Millennials progress through the cognitive-structural models of moral development differently

than previous generations due to the unique characteristics of the generation, including their attachment to parents. When comparing the findings of this research with that of research on Generation X college students, this speculation is refuted. Millennial generation students studied in this research project seemed to follow the same path as the Generation X students studied previously.

According to Lind (2008), MJT C scores can be thought of as very low (1-9), low (10-19), medium (20-29), high (30-39), very high (40-49), and extraordinary high (above 50). In the population studied, the mean moral judgment competence score was 17.16%, falling in the low range. While no normative data exists, this is a surprising finding as most studies using the Moral Judgment Test found college students to score in the medium range (see Comunian & Gielen, 2006; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Kim, 2006). One reason for MJT scores in this study to be lower than comparable populations could be that the MJT has not been extensively used on American college students. College students typically score in the mid-range or higher on other measurements of moral development as well. The most widely used instrument to measure moral development in college students is the Defining Issues Test (King & Mayhew, 2002). The composite DIT score for college students is 42.3 (Rest, 1979b). DIT scores can range from 0-95, with 35 as an average (Rest & Narvaez, 1997).

The reason MJT scores in this study are in a lower range than DIT scores for similar populations could be attributed to one of the benefits of using the MJT instrument. The MJT empirically tests the connection between moral development and social behavior (Lind, 2008). Unlike the DIT, the MJT places emphasis on moral tasks rather than just moral attitudes and allows the subject less ability to fake their scores upward.

In terms of demographic variables, there were no significant differences between males and females. This is in line with most findings on MJT scores (see Slova'cjkova' & Slova'cjek, 2007). According to most studies using the Defining Issues Test, men and woman have demonstrated the same level of moral reasoning as well (Pearson & Bruess, 2001). A 1984 review of studies revealed that women score lower than men on the DIT only if educational level is not controlled (see Walker, 1984).

There were also no significant differences between Caucasians and non-Caucasians. The MJT has been used in many different cultures, but it has not been used extensively on underrepresented groups within the United States. The Defining Issues Test also provides little comparative data. King and Mayhew (2002) found only two studies out of 172 using the DIT that specifically intended to study the difference in moral development by college student ethnicity.

Students of different class standings and of different age groups also showed no significant differences in moral judgment competence. In studies using different instruments, namely the Defining Issues Test, moral reasoning tends to increase with age and level of education (Rest, 1979a; Narvaez, 1998). Again, these differences could be attributed to the type of moral development the instrument is intended to measure. The MJT measures not only attitudes but the propensity of the participant to actually act on this attitude, whereas the other instruments tend to focus on mainly moral attitudes rather than moral action.

Findings in this research project varied between the populations studied in terms of demographic characteristics and PAQ scales. Females reported a higher level of emotional support from parents. This finding is consistent with Kenny's (1994) research in which she

studied students enrolled in a post high school program and also her research with college seniors (Kenny, 1990). She found that women described their parents as providing higher levels of emotional support than their male counterparts.

There has been little research on parental attachment by race or ethnicity. This study found that the Caucasian students studied perceive their total parental attachment higher than non-Caucasians. They also perceive a higher level of affective quality of the attachment and that their parents or primary caregivers foster higher levels of autonomy than non-Caucasians. Hinderlie and Kenny (2002) found that a sample of African-American students were indistinguishable from Caucasian students in terms of parental attachment and college adjustment. In this study non-Caucasian students included those of African Americans, Hispanic, Asian and Native American backgrounds. The number of African-American students in the sample was not large enough to draw conclusions regarding differences in parental attachment for this group alone in order to compare the results to Hinderlie and Kenny's (2002) research.

No differences were found in total PAQ score, Affective Quality of Attachment or the Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support by class standing. However, the research found that freshmen students scored lower on the Parental Fostering of Autonomy. By the same token, younger students (18-19) rated their parents lower on fostering autonomy than older students, but higher on parental role in providing emotional support. There were no other differences in age. These findings differ from Lapsley, Rice & Fitzgerald's (1990) research that found no difference in attachment between freshman and senior students.

No significant correlation between moral judgment competence and total parental attachment, affective quality of attachment, parental role in providing emotional support, or parental fostering of autonomy was found in males or in females.

A significant correlation between moral judgment competence and parental fostering of autonomy was found for non-Caucasian students. This finding adds to the literature on both parental attachment and moral judgment competence as there is a significant dearth of research findings for non-Caucasian college students in these areas. No other findings revealed any relationship between moral competency and the parental attachment scales studied in either Caucasians or non-Caucasians.

In terms of class standing, sophomore students were the only group to reveal significant correlations between various parental attachment scales and moral judgment competence. For sophomores, there was a positive relationship between total parental attachment and moral judgment competence, between parental fostering of autonomy and moral judgment competence, and between affective quality of attachment and moral judgment competence. Freshmen, juniors, and seniors did not have any significant correlations between the two constructs.

There was one correlation between moral judgment competence and parental attachment in the different age groups. Students aged 18-19 had a significant correlation between moral judgment competence and parental fostering of autonomy. No other findings were present in this population. The findings are interesting as one might expect younger students to reveal more of an impact of parents on their moral judgment competence. According to this study, however, this is not the case except perhaps in the area of parental fostering of autonomy.

Limitations

The researcher recognizes several limitations to this study. The survey yielded a response rate of 20.88% which may have led to possible nonresponse bias. A wave analysis indicated that male and non-Caucasian students were more likely to be nonresponders. Due to the correlation design of the study, causal relationships cannot be inferred from statistically significant results. This study was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal so it cannot be determined whether positive parental attachment leads to more advanced moral judgment competence and vice versa.

Future Directions

Strange (2004) hypothesized that current college student development models may need to change to accommodate the Millennial generation's unique characteristics, but the findings from this study indicate that this is not necessary where the cognitive structural theory of moral development is concerned. The relationship Millennial generation college students have with their parents does not positively or negatively impact their ability to develop morally through their college years.

Higher education administrators are expected to work with parents on a greater level than ever before (Levin Coburn, 2006). Because students' moral development in this study did not correlate with parental attachment, higher education administrators can worry less about parental interference negatively impacting college students' ability to progress through moral development models.

These findings do not mean, however, that higher education administrators can dismiss their concerns that parental attachment might impact student development in other domains. More research is needed on other aspects of student development to make this conclusion. Also,

it should be noted that different demographic groups did indicate a correlation between moral judgment competency and elements of parental attachment. Non-Caucasians, sophomore students, and students aged 18-19 years may need guidance and programming to overcome any detrimental aspects of parental attachment to their moral judgment competence.

There is evidence that Caucasian students and female students have greater levels of parental attachment than their counterparts. This may indicate a need for colleges and universities to develop programs and services to nurture this attachment in females and Caucasians, as well as identify strategies for developing parental attachment in males and non-Caucasians. Younger freshman students have reduced levels of Parental Fostering of Autonomy, indicating a need for programs and services supporting 18-19 year-old freshman students in developing independence from their parents. In general, programs and services are needed to enhance the understanding of the changing nature of their relationship that the students have with their parents.

The findings from this research lead to several suggestions. First, research using quantitative and qualitative techniques, or other methodology is needed. Using different methodology may lead to a higher response rate. Future research might also investigate peer and/or societal influence on Millennials to test Kohlberg's (1969) theory that these two elements influence moral development more highly than parental attachment. More research using the Moral Judgment Test on similar populations of American students is also needed.

The correlation between moral judgment competence and parental attachment, specifically Parental Foster of Autonomy, in non-Caucasians was significant in this study. Similar research with a larger sample of non-Caucasian students may provide additional

information on how parental attachment is related to moral development among non-Caucasian students of various races and ethnicities. Research based on race and/or ethnicity may lead to additional insight on cultural influences on both parental attachment and moral development.

The findings of this research revealed that sophomore students showed a significant correlation between moral judgment competence and parental attachment. The sophomore year of college is typically neglected in research despite the evidence that more sophomores drop out of college at a higher rate than freshmen students (Lipka, 2006). More research on sophomore students' moral development and attachment to parents could clarify these initial findings and add to the literature about this subject.

Students at two small to mid-sized regional campuses of a public institution were studied. Similar research with students at different types of institutions may yield different findings. Research regarding students' collegiate housing status: on-campus residence hall, off-campus housing, or commuting from parents' home, would add another dimension to learning more about the possible influences on moral development. Research including students' majors or fields of study would also be beneficial.

Finally, research using data collected from both students and their parents may provide additional insight on how each perceives the child-parent relationship and if the moral judgment competence of the parents is related to the moral judgment competence of the students. An in-depth, longitudinal study is needed to investigate a causal link between parental attachment and moral judgment competence.

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