Introduction

Previous research has demonstrated links between positive aspects of close relationships and adaptation to college, academic achievement, college retention rates, and emotional well-being among college students (Abby, Abrams, & Caplan, 1995; Brooks & DuBois, 1995; Fass & Tubman, 2002; Uppcraft & Gardner, 1989; Zea, Janama, & Bianchi, 1995). Thus, it is important to identify precursors of positive friendships and romantic relationships among college students.

Bowlby (1969) postulated that parent-child attachment security would be linked to the quality of subsequent close relationships, and recent evidence supports this view (Roisman, Collins, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2005). However, the process by which attachment to parents influences other relationships is not fully understood.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between attachment to parents and both ease forming and satisfaction in close friendships and romantic relationships. Given evidence that attachment security is linked to emotional dispositions (Papini, Roggman, & Anderson,1991), which in turn are linked to relationship quality (Le Greca & Lopez, 1998), social anxiety was examined as a mediator of the relationship between attachment to parents and these close relationship outcomes.

Hypotheses

1. Students who are more securely attached to their parents prior to college will report greater ease forming close friendships and romantic relationships.
2. Students who are more securely attached to their parents prior to college will report more satisfaction in their close friendships and romantic relationships.
3. The positive association between attachment security and ease forming and satisfaction within close friendships and romantic relationships will be mediated by social anxiety.

Introduction (continued)

As illustrated in Tables 1 and 2 the mediation hypothesis was supported and indirect effects were significant in all five cases as indicated by the fact that the confidence intervals did not include zero:

- Full Mediation was demonstrated for relationship satisfaction with closest group of friends and dating partner.
- Partial Mediation was demonstrated for relationship satisfaction with best friend and interpersonal competence initiating friendships and romantic relationships.

Results (continued)

Findings are consistent with Bowlby’s (1969, 1973, 1980) proposition that attachment security directly influences expectations for and experiences in other close relationships. Consistent with prediction, social anxiety mediates these associations. Students with secure internal working models appear to have lower social anxiety which may prompt them to:

- Evaluate their relationships through a more positive lens than students with insecure internal working models, contributing to a greater sense of relationship satisfaction.
- Behave in ways that elicit positive responses from their peers and romantic partners, enhancing the quality of their relationships and their evaluations of those relationships.
- Experience greater ease forming new relationships because their positive prior experiences in close relationships make them comfortable in seeking out new relationships.

Discussion

Limitations include the predominantly White female sample and the use of self-report measures only. Directions for future research include following students from junior or senior year of high school over the transition to college as well as collection of data from multiple sources and from more racial minority and male participants.