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## PARENTAL ATTACHMENT OF STUDENTS AS THEY MOVE THROUGH TINTO'S RITES OF PASSAGE: SEPARATION, TRANSITION, AND INCORPORATION

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### ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	This study explored the connection between Tinto's notion of "rites of passage" and Kenny's parental attachment. Specifically, this study sought to explain how students' parental attachment (i.e., affective quality of parental relationships, parents' ability to facilitate independence, and parents as source of support) influenced their rites of passage (i.e., separation, transition, incorporation) and how this may differ based on different demographic data. By understanding students' connections to their parents, student affairs/life administrators will be better able to offer programming that helps students move through the rites of passage in order for the students to become more academically and socially integrated within the institution and ultimately persist.
Background	There is little doubt that academic and social integration play a major role in college student persistence. Yet, there remains considerable interest in how students reach this integration. One factor that continues to be explored is parental influence. However, little is known about students' connections to their parents and how this connection influences their ability to move through Tinto's "rites of passage."
Methodology	This study employed survey design. For this study, 129 students were surveyed at two institutions in the South.
Contribution	By further exploring these relationships, this study will add to the growing body of research on persistence, parental attachment, and historically underrepresented groups in higher education.
Findings	Findings from this study suggest that programming provided through student affairs/life offices should focus on the facilitation of independence, so students become more comfortable relying on themselves, new friends, and the institu-

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tion to assist them as they overcome the new challenges that come with attending college. In doing so, the students can become more integrated into the university and ultimately persist.

**Recommendations for Practitioners** These findings could be instrumental in shaping the freshmen experience of traditional age enrollees specifically through the admissions process, New Student Orientation programming, and Freshmen Seminar courses. Findings suggest that students may benefit from facilitating their own admission process; therefore, institutions should encourage this independence by sending literature to students, requiring students to take action or respond to requests, and facilitating student campus visits prior to orientation. During New Student Orientation, institutions could offer breakout sessions to parents and students to help with the separation, transition, and incorporation processes. Break-out sessions for parents will focus on what these different stages look like and what they can do to assist their students overcome them. Additionally, break-out sessions for students will focus on helping them identify stages, develop strategies for moving through them, and maintaining good relationships with their parents in the process. Finally, the Freshmen Seminar course should reinforce lessons taught at New Student Orientation regarding separation, transition, and incorporation by providing lessons that allow students to explore the different stages via case studies, identify strategies that one can employ to address issues that arise at the various stages, evaluate services of offices created to assist with stages, and other lessons.

**Recommendations for Researchers** Although this study has limitations the findings are useful in identifying future research opportunities. A study is required with a larger sample, with a diverse population to allow for rigorous testing of all variables. I suggest a larger and more diverse sample at varying institutional types to fully capture differences among the different groups. Although there were a number of significant correlational findings, the relationships were weak. This suggests that these variables need to be further explored to determine the strength of parental attachment and separation, transition, and incorporation.

**Impact on Society** This study is important to society because it not only addresses where the issues occur as students move the rites of passage (i.e., separation, transition, incorporation) but also identifies strategies that institutions can employ to assist students as they move through those rites. By understanding how connected students are to their parents, institutions can better prepare their students to work more independently to achieve their educational goals. In doing so, the students will be better able to join the work force and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

**Future Research** Future research should further study parental attachment and persistence at varying institutional types and link student success services to addressing some of the issues related to separation, transition, and incorporation of these students.

**Keywords** persistence, parental attachment, rites of passage

## INTRODUCTION

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Transitioning into college can be the best of times and the worst of times for college freshmen. During this time, freshmen are embarking on a new chapter in their lives in which they will have many ups and downs. As noted by Clark (2005), college success for freshmen can easily be measured by how well the students transition into their new environment. Many times, students draw upon the

support from their parents to assist them in these new endeavors. Therefore, we need to know more about how students' connections to their parents impact their ability to adjust transition into college, which could have serious implications for persistence. To help understand this phenomenon, I rely on background literature that focuses on both persistence (e.g., academic and social integration, rites of passage) and parental influence (e.g., educational level, income, attachment) on student outcomes.

For this study, the literature that focuses on *persistence* explored factors that contribute to students continued enrollment or potential enrollment at a particular institution. In Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Departure, he postulated that students' decision to persist is based on their interactions over time within the institution as it relates to a number of factors: family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling, intentions and goals, external commitments, and academic and social integration. Tinto defined academic systems as structures that focus on students' formal education; thus, academic integration focuses on how students interact with activities within the classrooms and/or laboratories. Additionally, he defined social systems as structures that focus on students' daily life and personal needs; thus, social integration focuses on how students interact with faculty and staff outside of the classroom. Subsequently, he concluded that students who are able to become academically and socially integrated are more likely to persist. According to Bensimon (2007), Tinto's model is one of the most studied theories in higher education, yielding volumes of research on the two main factors that impact student persistence: academic integration and social integration.

In order for academic and social integration to occur, Tinto (1993) posited that students must progress through "rites of passage." These rites include separation, transition, and incorporation. *Separation* from their past communities; *transition* into the new system by understanding the values and norms associated with the college environment; and *incorporation* into the college system, which is achieved once the individual is able to respond accordingly to collegial expectations. In doing so, students adopt new values, develop new ways of knowing and behaving, and ultimately persist. However, this integration process can differ based on students' background characteristics, forcing scholars (e.g., Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2014; Guiffrida, 2004; Metz, 2002; Nora, 2002; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000) to question the veracity of Tinto's use of "rites of passage" or how students move through separation, transition, and incorporation. Nora (2002) provided a "theoretical depiction of the interrelations between the three stages" of the rites of passage, specifically taking into consideration support and encouragement from family and friends (p. 41). Nora pointed out that during the separation stage students are able to view themselves as mature individuals able to make their own decisions. He added that during the transition period students are not strongly connected to their past communities and nor are they fully committed to the institution. This phase is critical for academic and social integration to occur because as students move further away from their past communities, it becomes even more important for institutions to fulfill that void. Finally, the incorporation period is a period of commitment on the part of the student. Nora added that if students are fully academically and socially integrated, they incorporate the norms and behaviors of the institution into their daily lives that encourage success. "Persistence is not possible without incorporation into the life of the college" (Nora, 2002, p. 47). Guiffrida (2004) specifically interviewed 99 African American students and found that notions of "break away," a key component of separation, varied depending on the students' academic achievement (e.g., leavers, lo-achievers, high achievers). Guiffrida concluded that leavers and low achievers attributed their poor performance to their obligations to family while high achievers saw their families as important assets in performance. In fact, Guiffrida argued that Tinto's model needed to be expanded to include parental support once students arrive at college. Although these studies confirmed that students of diverse backgrounds experience integration differently, they do not go far enough to delve into how students' family background impacts how they become academically and socially integrated.

Thus, parental factors (e.g., educational level, income, attachment) also play a pivotal role in students' persistence especially with regard to how they become academically and socially integrated. Studies that have focused on parents' educational level (Gofen, 2009; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Lohfink &

Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolnaik, & Terenzini, 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005; Pike, 2005), students' socioeconomic level (SES; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Titus, 2006; Walpole, 2003), and students' parental attachment (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Feenstra, Bayanrd, Rines, & Hopkins, 2001; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Yazedjian & Toews, 2006). Research (Gofen, 2009; Hahs-Vaughn, 2004; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2005; Pike, 2005) has consistently shown that first-generation students have different college experiences from their non-first-generation peers. Using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), Hahs-Vaughn (2004) found that the actual college experience, itself, was more influential in determining educational outcomes of first-generation college students while their non-first-generation peers were more influenced by their pre-college predictors. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found that a number of variables could negatively impact persistence of first-generation students: being at smaller institutions, being a female, and participating in social activities. Also, finances play an equally critical role in persistence. Walpole's (2003) study, which used longitudinal data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) of more than 12,000 students, found that students from lower socioeconomic status (SES; parental income, parent educational level, and parents' occupation prestige) tend to work more, study less, and have lower grade point averages than their peers—making them likely candidates for attrition; these findings were also consistent with Lohfink and Paulsen's (2005) study of first-generation college students also using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). Walpole (2003) attributed her findings to differences in *habitus*, which explained why students may employ different strategies. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) attributed this to the financial nexus, which looks at unmet need and available resources. Without having adequate resources, students are more likely to engage in activities that are counterproductive to persisting (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Titus, 2006).

**Adding to information related to parental factors, students' level of parental attachment may also influence their educational outcomes.** According to Kenny and Rice (1995), the quality of parental relationships can influence the students' collegial experiences. According to Kenny and Rice, the more secure the parental attachment, the more likely the student will explore new environments and create new relationships. Kenny and Rice's attachment to family inventory has been related to social adjustment (Feenstra et al., 2001; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Holt, 2014; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Yazedjian & Toews, 2006) and academic success (Dennis et al., 2005). This secure attachment promotes autonomy and exploration, which enhances the students' adjustment to college (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003). Holt's (2014) study of 204 first-year students found the longer students remain in college, the more likely they were to lessen their attachment to their parents and seek help. Hannun and Dvorak (2004) studied 102 first year students and found that parental attachment was one of the strongest and consistent predictors of college adjustment; they also found that large amounts of family conflict and being head of households negatively impacted student college adjustment. Adding to that, Kalsner and Pistole (2003) studied 252 students and "[parental] attachment, ethnic identify, and separation-individuation contribute to the college adjustment of students who do not identify themselves as White" (p. 104). In their study, Kalsner and Pistole (2003) found that females were more likely than males to report higher levels of attachment related to emotional support and caregiving sensitivity. In looking at a group of 100 students, Dennis et al. (2005) found that family and peer support were more predictive of student outcomes than family and peer availability. However, findings from Schwartz and Buboltz's (2004) indicated that secure attachment did not necessarily facilitate psychological separation. They found that in order for this psychological separation to occur, the students have to experience some level of low trust in order to assert their independence. Simply stated, students become more independent if they believe their parents are not able to address *all* of their needs. This becomes important because *separation* is the first step in Tinto's rites of passage.

In summary, understanding factors that influence persistence and parental attachment is important. The research shows that academic and social integration are needed in order for students to persist. However, in order for that integration to occur, students have to move through the "rites of pas-

sage”: separation, transition, and incorporation. Studies show that not all students move through these rites the same. One area of importance that requires more study is students’ attachment to their parents and how that influences their ability to move through the “rites of passage.” Thus, the purpose of this study was to further explore how students’ attachment to their parents influenced their ability to move through the “rites of passage.” This study employed Kenny and Rice’s publication (1995) to assess level of parental attachment (e.g., affective quality of relationships, parents as facilitators of independence, parents as source of support) and Tinto’s “rites as passage” (Nora, 2002; Tinto, 1993) to frame this study. In doing so, several questions were answered: Is there a difference among students’ background characteristics and their parental attachment levels? How does parental attachment relate to how the student progresses through the rites of passage (i.e., separation, transition, and incorporation)? By further exploring these relationships, this study will add to the growing body of research on: persistence (e.g., Fischer, 2007; Guiffrida, 2004; Nora, 2002; Tinto, 1993) and parental attachment (e.g., Feenstra et al., 2001; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Holt, 2014; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Schwartz & Boboltz, 2004).

## **METHODOLOGY**

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### ***DESIGN***

This study employed a survey research design. That is, a survey or questionnaire was used to collect data from a large number of participants in a short period of time (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Scott, 2012; Solomon, 2001). According to Scott (2012), “survey researchers collect data about larger populations than experimental researchers” (p. 112). Specifically, this study used a web-based survey design for this study because it provided minimal disruption to class instruction, allowed for automated data entry with quick results, and was cost efficient (Solomon, 2001). Using Zoomerang, a web-based survey software, the researcher was able to collect data for multiple variables: background characteristics, parental attachment, and rites of passage.

### ***PARTICIPANTS***

A web-based survey was administered to 129 freshmen enrolled in freshmen/academic orientation courses at two, four-year institutions in the southern region of the United States. One institution was a midsize, residential, master-granting institution. The other institution was a midsize, non-residential, doctoral-granting institution. To recruit participants, I contacted the program directors to ask if I could administer the survey to students enrolled in their classes. I also offered to serve as a guest lecturer in those classes to help students and instructors understand the significance of transitioning into college. Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, each director sent students enrolled in specific freshmen seminar courses (that the instructor agreed to allow me access to) a link to the survey in Zoomerang to their students in six sections of the freshmen seminar course.

The average age of the participants was 22. The sample was made up of 59 (46%) males and 70 (54%) females. A majority of the participants were White/Caucasian, 87 (67%); other ethnic groups were as follows: 27 (21%) Black/African American; 5 (4%) Latino/Hispanic; 4 (3%) Asian; 2 (2%) American Indian/Native Americans; and 3 (2%) other (e.g., bi/multiracial). Adding to that, 73 (57%) of the participants’ parents had not earned a baccalaureate or higher degree (i.e., first-generation; McConnell, 2000). Students’ family income varied as well: 6 (5%) at \$0-11,000, 26 (21%) at \$11,001-30,000, 37 (31%) at \$30,001-60,000, 32 (26%) at \$60,001-100,000, and 21 (17%) at \$100,001-higher.

### ***DATA COLLECTION/INSTRUMENTATION***

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct this study, I met with administrators at both institutions to discuss the best ways to collect the data. I was then allowed to send emails to students enrolled in specified sections of the freshmen orientation course; students were able to click on the survey link that was housed in Zoomerang. Once the surveys were completed, I

visited each class to explain the survey and facilitated discussions with students regarding concepts introduced in the survey and provided examples of how to make connections to home while at the institution. Then, the survey data were downloaded from Zoomerang and placed in an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was imported into SPSS 23. The data were coded, recoded, and analyzed. Per Kenny and Rice (1995), several items needed to be reversed prior to running any analyses. Additionally, because of the uneven distribution of cases for race/ethnicity, income, and parents' educational level, they were recoded. Race/ethnicity was recoded as a dichotomous variable: White (n=22) and nonwhite (n=54). Income was recoded into three distinct categories: Low (0-\$30,000; n=24), Middle (\$30,001-60,000; n=23), and High (\$60,001 and higher; n=29). Parental educational level was recoded as a dichotomous variable. Parents who had not earned a bachelor's degree was coded as first generation (n=44) while parents who had earned a bachelor's degree or higher was coded as non-first-generation (n=32).

### **Instrumentation**

The survey was designed to take approximately 15-20 minutes complete. It included four major sections: background characteristics, parental attachment, rites of passage, use of institutional resources (not included in this study).

**Background characteristics.** *Background characteristics* included the following: gender (e.g., male and female), parental educational level (e.g., first-generation and non-first-generation), race/ethnicity (e.g., Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, American Indian/Native Americans, and other [i.e., bi/multiracial]), and family income (\$0-11,000, \$11,001-30,000, \$30,001-60,000, \$60,001-100,000, and \$100,001-higher).

**Parental attachment.** *Parental attachment* was measured using the Parent Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ; Kenny, 1985). The PAQ is a 55-item inventory whereby students were able to respond to each statement as they best describe their relationship, feelings, and experiences on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Statements were related to the affective quality of relationship (AQR), the parents' ability to foster independence (PFI), and the parents as a source of support (PSS). Examples of statements are as follows: "In general, my parents support my goals and interests;" "During my last visit, my parents were persons I looked forward to seeing;" "When I go to my parents for help, I feel more confident in my abilities to handle the problems alone." The higher the score, the more secure the parental attachment. Internal reliabilities were computed as follows: AQR (.89), PFI (.82), and PSS (.61; Kalsner & Pistole, 2004). According to Gall et al. (2007), the coefficients show that the constructs are sufficiently reliable for measuring parental attachment. The closer to 1.00, the more reliable the scale. To determine the internal consistency of the scales of the PAQ for this study, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated as follows: AQR (.88), PFI (.72), and PSS (.85). The more secure the students' attachment to their parents, the more likely they are to explore new environments. The more insecure the attachment, the less likely the students are to explore and relate to others around them (Schwartz & Buboltz, 2004). A number of studies (e.g., Dennis et al., 2005; Feenstra et al., 2001; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Holt, 2014; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003; Yazedjian & Toews, 2006) have used the PAQ to measure parental attachment among college students, making the use of this instrument appropriate for this study.

**Rites of passage.** Finally, Tinto's "*rites of passage*" was measured by indicators that represented students' ability to separate, transition, and incorporate themselves into the collegial environment (Nora, 2002). Students were asked to rate 16 of 55 statements on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). I amended the number of items used to shorten the instrument and a pilot study had indicated that the other 38 were not significant in predicting students' intent to persist. Statements were such as "I must lessen my relationship with my family while in college;" "No matter how difficult things got, I knew I could count on my friends;" "I feel that I have been introduced to new and different views." This study will be one of few studies that specifically operationalize and/or test Nora's (2002) constructs of separation, transition, and incorporation.

## ***DATA ANALYSIS***

Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed in SPSS 23. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, means, and standard deviation of all variables. Additionally, inferential statistical analyses included both multifactor analyses of variance (MANOVA) and a Spearman *rho*. The MANOVA allows for the investigation of the interactions between multiple independent and dependent variables while reducing the chance of a Type I error (Gall et al., 2007). The MANOVA “yields a separate F ratio for each independent variable and one for each interaction” (p. 360). Variables included in the MANOVA included independent variables, such as background characteristics (e.g., gender, parental educational level, race/ethnicity, income) and the dependent variables (e.g., PAQ, AQR, PFI, PSS). Adding to that, the Spearman *rho* was conducted, thus, resulting in a correlation coefficient between -1.00 and +1.00 (Gall et al., 2007). Variables selected for the Pearson *r* included the subscales for the PAQ (e.g., AQR, PFI, PSS) and the 16 indicators for the “rites of passage” (e.g., separation, transition, and incorporation). Findings of the inferential statistics are explained in two sections: PAQ and Background Characteristics and PAQ and “rites of passage”.

## **RESULTS**

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### ***PAQ AND BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS***

According to Coolidge (2013), the *p* value is traditionally set at .01 or .05. However, Coolidge indicated that a *p* value of .051 to .10 may be considered either “approaching significance” or significant at .10 (which is higher than then .05 or .01, p. 148). For this study, I will use “approaching significance” for *p* values ranging between .051 to .10 and “significant” at .05. Findings from the MANOVA illustrated that there was no statistical difference among PAQ score and its subscales of AQR, PFI, and PSS and background characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, parents’ educational level, income). Parents’ educational level was considered approaching significance for PSS, parents as source of support at  $[F(1, 128) = 3.127, p < .10]$ . First generation students were slightly more likely than their non-first-generation peers to use parents as sources. When variables were combined, they had more power with regard to parental attachment. For example, race and gender combined was approaching significance with regard to PSS  $[F(1, 128) = 2.836, p < .10]$ . White males were slightly more likely than any other group to use parents as sources. Additionally, parental educational level and gender was also approaching significance with regard to PSS  $[F(1, 128) = 2.934, p < .100]$ . Non-first-generation males were slightly more likely than any other group to rely on parents as a source. Parental educational level and income also was approaching significance for PFI, parents as facilitators of independence,  $[F(1, 128) = 2.847, p < .10]$ . First generation with high income were slightly more likely than any other group to indicate that their parents were facilitators of independence. Finally, gender, race, income, and parents’ educational level was significant with regard to PFI  $[F(1, 128) = 4.830, p < .05]$ . That is, first-generation, White female with high income students were more likely than any other group to indicate that their parents fostered independence.

### ***PAQ AND “RITES OF PASSAGE”***

A Pearson *r* test was performed using the PAQ and its three subscales (e.g., AQR, PFI, PSS; Kenny & Rice, 1985) and 16 indicators of Tinto’s (1993) “rites of passage” prepared by Nora (2002): separation, transition, and incorporation. According to Coolidge (2015), correlation coefficients range between  $\pm 1.00$ . Specifically, .00 to .30 is weak, .31 to .49 is moderate, and .50 to 1.00 is strong. The (-) is indicative of a negative relationship (as one number increases the other number decreases) while the (+) is indicative of a positive relationship (as one number increases so does the other one). See Table 1 for Pearson *r* details.

**Table 1. PAQ and Indicators of Rites of Passage**

	AQR	PFI	PSS	PAQ
Exposed to new viewpoints (SEP)	.083	.053	.039	.056
Former beliefs are inappropriate (SEP)	.102	-.121	-.032	-.025
Lessen my close relationships with family (SEP)	-.066	<b>-.279**</b>	<b>-.282**</b>	<b>-.341**</b>
Lessen my close relationships with friends (SEP)	-.145	-1.61	-.053	<b>-.282**</b>
My relationship with family has suffered (SEP)	.117	<b>-.196*</b>	-.135	-.196
It is hard to concentrate on study (1 <sup>st</sup> month; SEP)	<b>.221*</b>	.061	-.035	.146
It is hard to focus when thinking of going home (SEP)	.170	.115	.098	.134
My high school friends have supported me (TRAN)	.185	<b>.280**</b>	<b>.268**</b>	<b>.291**</b>
My family has supported me (TRAN)	-.149	<b>.382**</b>	<b>.468**</b>	.231
I often felt like leaving college because I missed family/friends (TRAN)	.018	.036	.067	.059
I often felt like I do not have support on this campus (TRAN)	-.035	-.088	.062	-.110
No matter how hard things get, I know my family is there for me (INC)	-.089	<b>.406**</b>	<b>.417**</b>	<b>.254*</b>
No matter how hard things get, I know my friends are there for me (INC)	.061	<b>.282**</b>	<b>.233**</b>	.174
No matter how hard things get, I know my faculty were there for me (INC)	.015	-.047	-.008	.002
Part of going to college is breaking away from family (INC)	.090	.097	.155	-.029
Part of going to college is breaking away from friends (INC)	-.056	.008	-.017	-.033
I feel a sense of connectedness with other on this campus (INC)	-.022	.129	.124	.046

\*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

### Separation

According to Tinto (1993), separation is the first step in the “*Rites of Passage*” to integration. *Separation* measures the extent to which the students separate from their past communities. Ideally, students who have a secure attachment to their parents will be able to separate from their past communities with little to no anxiety. Four of the seven indicators used in this study to measure separation developed by Nora (2002) were significantly correlated to parental attachment. Overall, “I feel like I have to lessen my close relationships with friends” was significantly correlated to overall parental attachment ( $r = -.282^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ). That is, the more students believed they had to lessen their close relationships with their friends, the less attached they were to their parents. Additionally, “It is necessary for me to lessen my close relationships with my family” to PAQ ( $r = -.341^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ) while it was also significantly correlated with PFI ( $r = -.279^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and PSS ( $r = -.282^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Although the correlations were significant, they were moderate (PAQ) and weak (PFI). The more likely students



were to indicate that they needed to lessen their relationships with their parents, the less attached to their parents they were. Additionally, “My relationship with my family has suffered” was significantly correlated with PFI ( $r = -.196^*$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This relationship is negative and weak. The more students experienced difficulties with their family, the less attached to their parents they were. Also, “It is hard to concentrate on my studies during the first 1<sup>st</sup> month of school” was significantly correlated to AQR ( $r = -.221$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Again, this relationship was negative and weak. The more that students indicated that it was hard for them to concentrate because they were missing home, the less likely that believed they had a quality relationship. Overall, students who were less attached to their parents were better able to separate because they understood that they needed to lessen their relationships with their family and friend because either their relations suffered or they were unable to concentrate on their studies.

### Transition

According to Tinto (1993), *transition* occurs when the students are able to understand the values and norms associated with the college environment. It is likely that the more secure the parental attachment, the more likely the students are to understand the environment in which they now live. With regard to parental attachment, two of the four indicators that measure transition were significantly correlated. “My family has supported me this first year in college” was significantly correlated to PFI ( $r = .382$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and PSS ( $r = .468$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The relationships were positive and moderate. The more likely students indicated that their parents facilitated independence and that the students relied on their parents as a source of support, the more likely students indicated that their families supported them their first year in college. Adding to that, “My high school friends have supported me this first year in college” was significantly correlated to several constructs. For example, it was significantly correlated to PFI ( $r = .2801$ ,  $p < .1$ ), PSS ( $r = .268$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and PAQ ( $r = .291$ ,  $p < .01$ ); the relationships were positive and weak. The more likely the students were to report that their parents facilitated independence, the more likely they relied on their parents as a source of support and the more they were attached to their parents, the more likely they were to indicate that their friends also supported them their first year in college. Students who relied on their parents heavily were also more likely to see their parents as supportive and believe their friends from high school were supportive.

### Incorporation

According to Tinto (1993), *incorporation*, the final step in the “Rites of Passage,” occurs when students are able to respond accordingly to the norms of their new environment. There were two of the six indicators of incorporation that were significantly correlated to parental attachment. One, “No matter how hard things become, I know that my family is there for me” was significantly correlated to PFI ( $r = .406$ ,  $p < .01$ ), PSS ( $r = .417$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and PAQ ( $r = .2594$ ,  $p < .01$ ), which was positive and moderate (e.g., PFI, PSS) and weak (PAQ). That is, students who relied on their parents, believed they fostered independence, and served as a support were more likely to indicated that they knew their family would be there for them. Two, “No matter how hard things become, I know that my friends are there for me” was significantly correlated with PFI ( $r = .282$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and PSS ( $r = .233$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These relationships were positive and weak. The more likely students who believed their parents fostered independence and rely on their parents as a source of support, the more likely they believed their friends will be there for them. Overall, students who believe their parents foster independence and use parents as a source are more likely to know that they can rely on their family and friends which facilitates their incorporation into college.

## DISCUSSION

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Significant and approaching significant findings from this study provide insight into students’ parental attachment and background characteristics, as well as how their parental attachment impacts their ability to move through the rites of passage. This study sought to delve deeper into Tinto’s “rites of passage” by exploring students’ attachment levels to their parents. The “rites of passage” was meas-

ured by separation, transition, and incorporation. Parental attachment was measured by the affective quality of the relationship with parents (AQR), the parents' ability to foster independence (PFI), and the reliance on parents as a source of support (PSS; Kenny & Rice, 1995). If students have a secure attachment to their parents, they are more likely to move through the "rites" with little to no anxiety; they are able to separate from their past communities, explore new boundaries in their current environment, and make the necessary adjustments in order to move through the rites and become integrated.

In this study, I found that there was no statistical difference among PAQ score and its subscales of AQR, PFI, and PSS and the individual background characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, parents' educational level, income). Affective quality relationship was not significant for students in this study as it related to parental attachment; however, parents as facilitators of independence and parents as source of support appeared to vary among the students. Parents' educational level was considered approaching significant when determining their ability to see their parents as source. When variables were combined, I found that race and gender was approaching significance with regard to parents as source of support. Parent educational level when combined with gender was approaching significance with regard to parents as source of support and when combined with income it was approaching significance with parents as facilitators of independence. Finally, gender, race, income, and parents' educational were significant with regard to parents as facilitators of independence.

The extent to which students are attached to their parents can impact their ability to become move through the rites of passage at their institution. Overall, these findings indicate that although students have a secure attachment to their parents, in some ways, it negates their ability to fully separate, transition, and become incorporated. The higher the students' level of parental attachment, the less likely they are to become integrated within their new environment.

The more likely students are to have a quality relationship with their parents, believe their parents foster independence, and rely on their parents as a source of support, the less likely they are to believe that they need to "lessen their relationships" and report that their relationships are less likely to suffer. Adding to that, they are more likely to indicate that their family supports them during their first year in college and that they can count on their family and friends when things become difficult. Furthermore, students who have a quality relationship with parents and rely on them as a source of support are more likely to indicate that their friends from high school supported them during their first year of college. Adding to that, students with high quality relationships with their parents and who report that their parents are able to foster independence are more likely to indicate that they did not have any support on campus. Finally, students who have quality relationships with their parents are less likely to believe that they need to "break away" from their family.

Contrary to other studies (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003), students in this study who had higher levels of attachment to their parents were less able to separate, transition, and incorporate. They were less likely to lessen their relationships with the families, form new friendships, and rely on faculty and new friends within their new environment. This becomes a little disconcerting because the less likely students are to become integrated into their new environment, the less likely they are to stay or persist (Bean, 1990; Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 1993). These findings are consistent with Schwartz and Buboltz's (2004) findings that secure attachment does not necessarily facilitate psychological separation. Secure attachment, in this case, does not necessarily foster autonomy and exploration (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Kalsner & Pistole, 2003).

## IMPLICATIONS

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This study went beyond the usual persistence study that explored academic and social integration and examined the relationship of students' parental attachment and "rites of passage." These significant and approaching significant findings have implications for research and practice.

With regard to research, this study is promising in the field by expanding notions of helping students separate from their past communities in order to transition into and become better incorporated at their institutions. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize a number of research limitations. This study used a small sample of students enrolled in two institutions in the Southern United States. Adding to that, this study used approaching significance for findings, which may be less traditional for a MANOVA. Although there were a number of significant correlational findings, the relationships were weak. Another limitation to take into consideration is that a Cronbach's alpha was not performed for Nora's (2002) indicators of separation, transition, and incorporation; therefore, internal reliability of the items has not been determined. Although this study has limitations, the findings are useful in identifying future research opportunities. A study is required with a larger sample, with a diverse population to allow for rigorous testing of all variables. I suggest a larger and more diverse sample at varying institutional types to fully capture differences among the different groups. Although there were a number of significant correlational findings, the relationships were weak. This suggests that these variables need to be further explored to determine the strength of parental attachment and separation, transition, and incorporation.

With regard to practice, these findings could be instrumental in shaping the freshmen experience of traditional age enrollees specifically through the admissions process, New Student Orientation programming, and Freshmen Seminar courses. Findings suggest that students may benefit from facilitating their own admission process; therefore, institutions should encourage this independence by sending literature to students, requiring students to take action or respond to request, and facilitating student campus visits prior to orientation. To not leave out the parents, who may facilitate independence, make sure to involve them in a separate parental admission process. That is, this process would identify fail-safe processes to alert parents when certain benchmarks have not been met. That way, they can continue to provide the support to their child while fostering their independence. During New Student Orientation, institutions could offer breakout sessions to parents and students to help with the separation, transition, and incorporation processes. Break-out sessions for parents will focus on what these different stages look like and what they can do to assist their students overcome them. Additionally, break-out sessions for students will focus on helping them identify stages, develop strategies for moving through them, and maintaining good relationships with their parents in the process. Also, it is important for parents to help their child set good boundaries as they lessen their past relationships. For example, a session could focus on when to direct your child to certain services. The more parents know about what is to come for their child, the more likely they are to let go. Finally, the Freshmen Seminar course should reinforce lessons taught at New Student Orientation regarding separation, transition, and incorporation by providing lessons that allow students to explore the different stages via case studies, identify strategies that one can employ to address issues that arise at the various stages, evaluate services of offices created to assist with stages, and other lessons. Adding to that, institutions should incorporate a lesson in the freshmen orientation course on exploring how students make connections to home (i.e., look for similarities in activities that were familiar at home) that allow the students to systematically explore how they may ease their transition into their new environment. An exercise can be developed that discusses the strain on family and school time. This lesson could assist students in creating a priority list, identifying institutional and community resources, as well as encouraging interaction among peers.

## CONCLUSION

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Going to college, in itself, is a rite of passage for many students. As college students seek academic and social integration, they have to separate from their past communities, transition into their new environment, and become incorporated within the institution. It is an opportunity for students to break away from the comforts of home and begin to forge new relationships on campus and create a new community. Overall, students are entering college with secure parental attachment, which would allow them to feel safe as they explore their new environment. However, a number of students continue to rely heavily on their parents and are not separating from their past and transitioning into col-

lege. Therefore, they are not becoming incorporated into college and are leaving because they have not fully academically or socially become integrated. It is increasingly important for student affairs/life administrators working with students in this transitional period of their lives to help them build more secure relationships on campus with their peers, faculty, and staff. By understand the necessity to “break away” and build new communities, students are more likely to progress through Tinto’s “rites of passage” and ultimately persist.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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