

## AROUND THE HOUSE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF ATTACHMENT STYLES, LIVING ARRANGEMENT, AND INVOLVEMENT IN UNDERGRADUATE COMMUTER STUDENTS

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*Most undergraduate students still commute to their undergraduate institution, and previous research identified parental involvement as a factor when determining whether a student will be a commuter. It is also assumed that these students are disengaged from their co-curricular experiences. Yet, little research has explored this dynamic of parental attachment and commuter student involvement. Self-reported living arrangements, student involvement, and attachment styles were explored in a singular institutional study of commuter students (n=1,452). The findings were that there was no relationship between attachment style and involvement, but there was between attachment style and living arrangement. Most participants self-disclosed they were involved, which disrupts assumptions of commuter student disengagement. Implications for practice and future directions for research are suggested connected to the study findings to suggest ways in which institutions can facilitate increased commuter student involvement.*

Residential college students living in luxury, single-occupancy, suite-style, or independent living formats have been the preferences among Millennials and Generation-Z traditional (full-time) undergraduate students (Varga & Lingrell, 2018). These different residential formats are a stark contrast to the community-oriented features preferred by the previous generations of students who craved social connectedness and roommates (Tolman & Trautman, 2018). Having roommates was commonly thought of as part of the ubiquitous “college experience” (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015). However, higher education institutions (HEIs) have catered to this shifting trend to generate revenue, especially during the “college arms race” in which public and private institutions succumbed to market forces as they became more tuition-dependent in the face of increased student consumerism and declining state appropriations which previously supported operations (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015).

HEIs have constructed extravagant student amenities such as wave pools and a tertiary market of private housing companies formed to address student consumer market demands (Varga & Lingrell, 2018). All these trends facilitate a focus on residential students as revenue generation streams (Tolman & Trautman, 2018). However, this limited focus fails to acknowledge the “commuter student,” a forgotten undergraduate population (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015). Commuter students are often defined as those undergraduates who do not live in university-supervised or sponsored housing (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015).

Moreover, changing college attendance behaviors suggest more Generation-Z students are intentionally living at home with their parents to reduce their cost of attendance or due to fears of disrupting their parent attachments (Passmore, 2015). Generation Z, like Millennials, have stronger connections and dependency on their immediate family (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020). Foundational research suggested relationships between parents and college students are demonstrated to be a strong indicator of academic success (Cutrona et al., 1994; Lantz & McCrary, 1955) and likely a factor in whether a student will commute (Nelson et al., 2016).

Approximately 25% of undergraduate students are full-time and live on campus (Nelson et al., 2016). The commuter student in American higher education has been profiled as a student who parked in the farthest, most inconvenient parking lot and has spent the least amount of physical time on campus (Passmore, 2015). They are often measured by the distance traveled to campus, not living in university-affiliated housing, or being unable to walk to campus (National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], 2015; Kuh, Gonvea, & Palmer, 2001). Research suggested students are more engaged in co-curricular experiences if they live on campus. The further away a student lives from campus, the less likely they will be involved in their undergraduate experience outside of the classroom (Kuh et al., 2001). Astin's theory of student involvement (1984) postulated that for students to be considered involved, they must devote considerable time on campus to actively participate in student organizations and engage with their academic experience. However, commuter students are less likely to spend time on campus (Ishitani & Reid, 2015).

This often makes commuter students an invisible population to those in student affairs, particularly those within the student engagement areas of student involvement or leadership programs. Commuter students are perceived as disengaged, immature, apathetic, or inferior, despite a void of research to support these claims (Weiss, 2014). These students have little connection or affiliation with their campus in which they have an academic transactional relationship with their institution and engage mostly with academic support (Darling, 2015). Student affairs professionals must be aware of commuter students and their campus experiences, particularly for their engagement and involvement levels (Mussi, 2004). However, practitioners bemoan that this is a challenging student population to engage and facilitate their involvement (Passmore, 2015).

This lack of depth of understanding exists because commuter students are featured across scant research in which we cannot better describe their experiences or their student life beyond campus (Biddix, 2015). Moreover, it is unclear "who" they live with and "what" they do. It is unclear who commuter students live with, such as with parents or if there are any potential relationships with their student involvement. Given the high level of parental attachment among Generation-Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016), the researchers assumed this was an opportunity to better describe the experiences among commuter students to advance our understanding in addressing this gap in the research. Thus, the researchers of this study attempted to better describe parental attachment and student involvement in commuter students. A common profile of commuter students and two theories were applied to this study to conceptualize parental attachment and student involvement.

Commuter students were defined by Kuh et al. (2001) as those who did not live in the residence halls or could not walk to campus, which is consistent with Biddix (2015), who broadly defined them as not living in official campus housing and commute to campus regardless of travel modality. To better conceptualize different forms of parental attachment, Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory was used. This theory has three styles (secure, avoidant, and anxious) and suggests that the association or strength of relationship to parental figures influences the development of the depth of extra-familial intimate partnerships, collegial relationships, or friendships. Commuter students are more likely to live with their parents, and their attachment style may influence how they are involved in co-curricular experiences. Tinto (1999) and Guiffrida (2006) posited that social integration into the college environment is a precondition for involvement in co-curricular experiences. The researchers postulated that the process of social integration for commuter students could be shaped by their prior attachment style, which may influence how they experience co-curricular involvement. To conceptualize commuter student involvement with co-curricular experiences, Astin's (1984) theory was used in this study to examine this relationship with parental attachment.

The relationship between parental attachment and student involvement has yet to be examined within higher education research. In addition, the type of attachment style can affect an individual throughout the lifetime and is the basis for future interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1969). The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the prevalence of the three attachment styles among commuter students?
2. How do attachment styles differ in commuter students who live in varying situations (i.e., living with other students, with parents, with a romantic partner, etc.)?
3. What is the relationship between attachment style and level of involvement within commuter students?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review expands beyond the introduction to further describe the constructs of this study and is organized into three subsections: commuter students, student involvement educational outcomes, and attachment theory. Commuter students are profiled to highlight misperceptions. General student involvement educational outcomes are summarized, and specific benefits are emphasized for commuter students. The three styles of Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory are defined along with their potential application to commuter students.

### COMMUTER STUDENT IDENTITY

A large part of the college student population commutes to their campuses and can be seen as the largest and most complexly diverse group of students in higher education (Kuh et al., 2001; Weiss, 2014). Research has shown that 85% of college students commutes (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014), increasing this number (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Commuting students (commuters) are an essential part of college campuses, given their scope and enrollment (Mussi, 2004). Different definitions exist of commuter students, which include: (1) live at home and travel to campus, or they live with classmates off-campus (Mussi, 2004); (2) those who do not live-in university-owned housing (Weiss, 2014); or (3) all students who drive to campus rather than walk are commuter students (Kuh et al., 2001). These definitions hold the concept of some distance or travel to campus as a part of their college experience, which features noncognitive barriers towards degree persistence.

Research suggests commuters are different from residential college students (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014). Commuters have fewer opportunities for academic and social integration, making them less open to diversity and tolerance (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014). Commuter students are increasingly composed of first-generation and students of color (Newbold, 2015) as well as "post-traditional students," who are part-time, adult learners (Passmore, 2015). Commuter students are more likely to be married, student-parents (Weiss, 2014), or live with their parent(s) if they are full-time undergraduates (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001; Newbold, 2015). They are also more likely to come from a working-class background (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Newbold, 2015). These present as risk factors or barriers to persistence towards degree completion as often measured by academic success (Nelson et al., 2016). More than half of all commuters do not persist to graduation (Roberts & McNeese, 2010).

Perceptions from student affairs professionals further make this student population invisible. It is assumed commuters are disengaged because of their backgrounds, not because institutions focus more on residential student populations (Weiss, 2014). They are perceived as more transactional students in which they are less committed to academics, distracted, not involved, apathetic towards campus issues, and have fewer educational goals (Gianoutsos & Rosser, 2014; Kuh et al., 2001). Thus, they are often left out of policies and practices (Newbold, 2015; Weiss, 2014).

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Student involvement is often measured as the time one spends in educationally related activities. Astin's theory of student involvement (1984) was placed-based. He suggested that the more physical time they spend on campus, the more likely they will participate in organizations, activities, and interact with faculty. Students learn more when involved in both the academic and social aspects of the college experience (Astin, 1999). Astin (1984) generated five tenets, or "postulates" which included student involvement: (1) has qualitative and quantitative features; (2) requires an investment of psychosocial and physical energy; (3) of a continuous process in which students invest varying energy; (4) development directly proportional to quality and quantity; and (5) educational effectiveness is related to the levels. Astin (1984) conceptualized involvement theory as a student-centered theory rather than engagement which is in an institutional theory (Kuh, 2009). He suggested the responsibility for engagement rests with the student in which authentic involvement requires an investment of energy in relationships, academics, and activities related to the on-campus experience. The student holds the power to decide how and who they spend their time with; family, friends, academics, and other outside activities (Astin, 1984). These sorts of responsibilities and proximity to campus often deter commuters from the educational benefits of student involvement and lead to a lack of academic and social integration (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009).

These benefits include a sense of belonging and institutional affinity, which relate to individual student persistence (Weiss, 2014). One of the ways these affiliations are developed through student involvement (Astin, 1999). Involvement increases when students feel supported outside the classroom and challenged and supported in their coursework, promoting the integration of their college experience (Wolf-Wendle et al., 2009). Commuter students are less likely to feel their institution supports them or feel a sense of belonging, which may contribute to their lack of involvement (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Commuters are less engaged and involved than residential students (Alfano & Eduljee, 2013), and only 59% of commuters participate in cocurricular activities compared to 75% of residential students (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Campus activities may be seen as inaccessible to commuter students (Weiss, 2014). However, this is not connected to their persistence towards graduation (Darling, 2015; Ishitani & Reid, 2015).

For commuters, involvement is not as important as a sense of belonging. A sense of community and connectedness contributes to their individual persistence (Biddix, 2015; Ishitani & Reid, 2015; Johnson, 1997). There is a lower sense of community within the commuter student population, which they tend to develop through classroom networks (Kirk & Lewis, 2015). Commuter students' persistence towards graduation increases when they make connections with faculty and other students within the classroom (Darling, 2015; Roberts & McNeese, 2010).

This would suggest that commuters may have increased academic success (Hawkins, 2010). This interaction with other students reinforces academic learning and other areas of life such as religious, political, or philosophical discussions (Roberts & McNeese, 2010). How commuter students individually facilitate a sense of belonging and create a sense of connectedness is unclear. Beyond that, it occurs in formal academic spaces rather than co-curricular experiences of the "extra-curriculum." Attachment theory may better conceptualize how this occurs in commuter students.

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS

Research has suggested there is a bias from student affairs professionals and other college administrators in cooperating with parents of undergraduates because they feel their involvement impedes their integration into college and reduces their capacity for independence (Hofer & Moore, 2010). Seminal university retention theories such as Tinto's theory of student departure (1999) also assume that students must be disconnected and removed from their families to thrive in college (Guiffrida, 2006). This assumes that parental relationships inhibit social integration into college (Tinto, 1999), but Guiffrida (2006) noted that first-generation students' and students' of color needs might depend on their parents even more than other peers for emotional support and transmission of culture. Guiffrida (2006) purported the important role that parental support serves, which can further support student social integration that Tinto (1999) found essential for student involvement. Moreover, levels of parental social support correlate positively with GPA attainment in college (Cutrona et al., 1994). These outcomes of parental involvement are especially salient among the current undergraduates of Generation-Z who have stronger attachments to their parents (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Generation-Z students are omnipresently connected to their parents via text messaging and social media, facilitating greater parental attachment and connection (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020). Cullaty (2011) found different parental styles, particularly when intervening for their student to reduce barriers to their learning, such as registration or financial holds. It was noted that while parental involvement varied across cultures, student attachment to their parents often moderated student perceptions of their own autonomy. This made them less likely to become involved (Cullaty, 2011). Thus, parental involvement and attachment styles could potentially influence student involvement. This is especially salient for commuter students who must make extra efforts to socially integrate into their campus environment (Biddix, 2015).

Other research explores parental relationship qualities and perceived attachment style (Kenny & Donaldson 1992; Kenyon & Koerner 2009). Parent and student relationship levels have no difference for commuter students compared to residential students, but socio-psychological and relationship patterns are a factor for students when determining whether to commute (Lantz & McCrary, 1955). In general, research suggests positive outcomes about parental involvement for college students (Sax & Wartman, 2012). Attachment theory is one of the most efficacious approaches better to understand these dynamics between students and their parents.

The attachment between a parent and child endures throughout one's lifetime and is commonly referred to as the Parental Attachment Style theory developed by Bowlby (1969). Specific parental attachment style (attachment style) starts when we are children, such as when we seek our attachment figure when feeling threatened or upset. Attachment style is shown to be supported and universal across cultures. The theory helps define parent-child relationships, how it emerges, endures, and influences the development of the child. Children are biologically programmed to form attachments with others to survive, with 0-5 years of age as a critical time to develop an attachment. If a child does not develop a positive attachment style, they will suffer developmentally, which can be irreversible (Bowlby, 1969).

Parental Attachment Style theory is an internal working model - a mental representation for individuals to understand themselves, others, and the world (Bowlby, 1969). There are three types of attachment styles, one positive and two negative. The secure attachment style is positive, while avoidant and anxious-ambivalent or resistant attachment styles are negative.

A secure attachment style is when the parent-child relationship is positive. The child will feel protected and loved by their caregiver. Children may have some distress when their caregiver leaves, but they are able to compose themselves as they know their caregiver will come back (Bowlby, 1969). A secure attachment style will help a child with skill acquisition, exploration, discovery, and development of self-confidence. It also helps them to create a positive schema of themselves, master new situations and cope effectively. It allows them to explore without anxiety and self-doubt getting in the way (Cutrona et al., 1994). Children with a secure attachment style develop into adults who are more positive and integrated. They have more cohesive self-structures, are tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity, are less likely to be depressed, and are less likely to have low self-esteem (Rice & Lopez, 2004). Those closer to their parents report more self-confidence and independence than those emotionally distant from their parents (Cutrona et al., 1994). However, overly secure relationships may be related to dependence which is related to higher levels of depression and anxiety (Schiffirin et al. 2014) or even feelings of lower quality of parent-child communication, family satisfaction, and increased entitlement (Segrin et al. 2012). Moreover, not all parent-child relationships are positive.

Negative experiences with caregivers in childhood are more likely to promote an insecure-type attachment style (Rice & Lopez, 2004). The two insecure-type attachment styles are avoidant and anxious-ambivalent or resisting. A child with an avoidant attachment style will feel unloved and rejected by their parent(s). They will ignore or avoid their caregiver, will not explore as often, and are not distressed when their caregiver leaves and avoids them when they return (Bowlby, 1969). As adults, those possessing an avoidant attachment style will experience discomfort with closeness and intimacy and have a strong desire for interpersonal distance. A child will be more self-sufficient, suppress negative emotions more frequently, are more likely to have low self-esteem, and think of relationships as less supportive (Rice & Lopez, 2004).

Anxious-ambivalent or resistant attachment style is defined as a child having unpredictable responses to their relationship with their caregiver. They have feelings of anger, confusion, and helplessness. Children with this attachment style will explore little, be wary of strangers, and are highly distressed when the caregiver leaves and are ambivalent when they return (Bowlby, 1969). As adults, they fear rejection and abandonment, are overwhelmed by negative emotions, are more likely to have low self-esteem, and think of relationships as less supportive (Rice & Lopez, 2004).

Securely attached students are more self-reliant in their environment and situations and see college as a challenge, not a threat (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2002; Lopez & Gormley, 2002). Secure attachment styles have also been known to adjust better when transitioning into college and higher education academics (Ames et al., 2011). Students who have a secure attachment style are more confident in their ability to attract and engage with a romantic partner, use more adaptive problem-focused coping styles, have fewer problems within the college setting, and report fewer depressive symptoms (Lopez & Gormley, 2002). These students are also more likely to seek out and benefit from close relationships than those with anxious-ambivalent or resistant and avoidant attachment styles which tend to use social support ineffectively and avoid group settings (Marmarosh & Markin, 2007).

Anxious-ambivalent or resistant and avoidant attachment styles are more likely to have an excessive fear of failure

and seek help when needed (Ames, et al., 2011). In addition, these negatively attached students demonstrate high scores in depressive symptoms and problems overall (Lopez & Gormley, 2002). Resistant and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles are often related to issues such as adjustment and career choice (Wintre & Yaffe 2000), identity development (Schultheiss & Blustein 1994), and mental health challenges such as drug/alcohol misuse, self-esteem, or depression (Gentzler et al. 2011). Mental health and these other challenges all can serve as barriers to student involvement (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015). This is because attachment style is the basis for all future relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Research also shows attachment styles are relatively stable across a lifespan (Lopez & Gormley, 2002). Thus, attachment styles are related to a student's college experience and are a framework to better understand how parental relationships may relate to commuter students.

Attachment styles relate to how individuals adjust to the college setting and moderate feelings towards group settings (Ames, et al., 2011; Marmoarosh & Markin, 2007). This is especially salient when students attend college for the first time as they leave their secure parental base, which helps and supports their development of competence and autonomy (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). They also inform how adults cope with stressors, such as attending college and entering a new environment (Sasso & DeVitis, 2015). In addition, there is an association between students' relationships with their parents and their overall level of adjustment when attending college (Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993).

All this research suggests that parental relationships determine attachment styles which influence how commuter students adjust to college or may affect how they socially integrate into their undergraduate experience in seeking out co-curricular involvement. Therefore, exploring attachment style may better help describe how commuter students facilitate a sense of belonging based on their living arrangement with parents or others since the research has highlighted their lack of involvement. This study addresses this gap in the research by exploring the relationships between attachment styles and living arrangement or student involvement among commuter students.

## METHODS

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between attachment as defined by Bowlby's (1969) theory of parental attachment styles and levels of student involvement in a sample of commuter students. The independent variables were Bowlby's (1969) three attachment styles: secure attachment (feeling loved, supported, and positivity from parents), avoidant attachment (feeling rejected and unloved from parents), and anxious or resistant (feeling confused and angry about relationship with parents). The dependent variable, level of involvement, was based on a subscale from the National Survey of Student Engagement and the number of hours committed to these co-curricular activities. The commuter students' sample was defined based on their living situations, whether they lived with parents, significant other or partner, classmates/friends, children, or alone.

The study analyzed the relationship between attachment styles and involvement in a sample of traditional-age undergraduate commuter students. This study was a quantitative, quasi-experimental design. The groups are attachment styles of students: (1) anxious; (2) avoidant; or (3) secure. The levels of involvement were: (1) low; (2) medium; or (3) high. Data were collected using survey methodology, using two forced-choice questionnaires.

### SAMPLE

This was a singular institutional study on which the host institution was a mid-sized, Midwestern HEI with a Carnegie Classification of doctoral/professional. There was a target population of 10,073 undergraduate commuter students. A convenience sampling procedure was used, which generated a response rate of 14.41% (n=1,452). Inclusion criteria included using the definition of *commuter* by Kuh et al. (2001) as those who did not live in the residence halls or could not walk to campus. The demographic sample data reflected the institution demographics (see General Trends section) and national trends in higher education institutions as aforementioned within the literature review and introduction sections of this paper. Thus, the results of this study have high external validity as applied to mid-size, midwestern public institutions or doctoral/professional class institutions.

## INSTRUMENTATION

This study utilized two previously created, validated, and reliable instruments - the Fraley, Niedenthal, Marks, Brumbaugh, & Vicary (2006) Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) questionnaire and selected questions from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that describe student involvement as identified by Kuh (2009). Each of these instruments consisted of forced-choice surveys with close-ended questions that are limited to self-report. The researcher also used a demographic questionnaire asking which class rank, whether they were a full-time student, and to self-report their GPA, fraternity/sorority membership, and their living situation (lived with parents, other students, with children, with a romantic or marital partner, or living alone).

The ECR-RS measures attachment style patterns across four close relationships (targets): (1) mother/mother-like figure; (2) father/father-like figure; (3) romantic partner; and (4) best friend. The same nine closed-ended items are used to assess the attachment style for all four targets (Fraley et al., 2006). The ECR-CS uses a Likert scale (7 points from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The test-retest reliability is approximately .65 regarding romantic relationships and .80 for parental relationships. Additional validation of the ECR-RS has indicated the efficacy of the instrument (Fraley, 2011, 2015).

The NSSE was developed in 1999 (NSSE, 2015) has served as a national benchmark survey to measure the extent to which students are satisfied with student services, how students spend their time on campus, and engagement with others such as faculty or peers. The NSSE questions used a Likert scale (very often, often, sometimes, never). The construct validity of the NSSE is .70 or higher across all subscales. The reliability is .80 or higher across all scales and subscales (NSSE, 2016). This study selected items from the student involvement subscale centered questions from civic engagement, global learning, inclusiveness, engagement with cultural diversity, first-year experiences, senior transition, and hours committed to co-curricular activities.

## PROCEDURE

The office of the registrar provided the researcher with a list of more than 10,000 students who were sent an email solicitation and offered an incentive to participate in the study for a random gift card drawing. Potential participants were contacted using a standardized recruitment statement containing a link to the demographic survey, ECR-CS, and NSSE instruments. A standardized debriefing statement concluded the surveys, and a separate link collected the participant's name and contact information for a random drawing. Personal information was not connected to the data and was collected in a separate form for the participant incentive.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Survey data was exported from the online survey platform into SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics by research questions, including Chi-Square, an independent samples t-test, or Pearson correlation. ECR-RS scores were computed using standardized scoring as outlined by Fraley et al. (2006). The NSSE involvement subscale was organized into low, medium, and high by total score. Community service and co-curricular time on task were averaged.

## RESULTS

### GENERAL TRENDS

Overall trend data reported by percentages demonstrate that students self-report high levels of involvement, regardless of attachment style and different living arrangements. About 31.9% of the participants were 24 or older, and the rest of the sample was between 18-23. Approximately 90% of the sample were full-time students. Most of the sample comprises upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) at 55.6%.

Results revealed approximately a third of participants live with other students off-campus. About 26% of partici-

pants lived with their parents, another significant proportion of the population, and 21% lived with their romantic or marital partner. These percentages are comparable to the percentages of anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

Without disaggregating by attachment style, scores from the NSSE involvement subscale were that at least 80% of the participants reported medium or levels of involvement. However, participants self-reported that 96.2% of them spent low levels of time towards involvement each week. This suggests that while participants self-report high levels of involvement, not very much time is spent on these efforts. Involvement included 11% involvement in fraternities and sororities, and 28.5% of students may hold on- or off-campus employment. Attachment styles measured from the ECR-RS did not demonstrate any meaningful trends by time or levels of involvement. For example, higher levels of time towards involvement did not reveal a greater secure attachment style, with 50.0% also having an avoidant attachment style. Those with low levels of time involved also had a significant amount of insecure attachment styles (39.4% for avoidant and 7.1% for anxious/resistant). These data suggest a more complex relationship between the variables analyzed.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**What is the prevalence of each type of attachment style in commuter students?** Table 1 disaggregates the percentage of participants in each attachment style from the ECR-RS and represents a binomial distribution. The avoidant attachment style was 39.3% of participants, and 53.6% of participants were securely attached, while the anxious/resistant attachment style had 7.1%.

**Table 1.** *Frequency of Attachment Style*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Avoidance .....	571 .....	39.3
Anxious .....	103.....	7.1
Secure .....	778 .....	53.6
Total .....	1452.....	100.0

How do attachment styles differ in commuter students who live in varying situations (i.e., living with other students, with parents, with a romantic partner, etc.)? A Chi-Square statistical test was performed to determine any potential aggregate relationships between the study variables of attachment style, living situation, and involvement (see Table 2). Living situation of the participants demonstrated a significant interaction with their attachment style ( $X^2(8) = 40.763, p < .01$ ).

An independent samples t-test was performed to investigate the difference in attachment style between participants who lived with other students and those who lived with their parents, using the mean attachment style score whereby higher scores were more secure than lower scores which were insecure (avoidant or anxious). There was a statistically significant difference between attachment style of participants who lived with other students ( $M=1.2847, SD=.92011$ ) and those who lived with parents ( $M=.9922, SD=.95181$ );  $t(4.722) = 937, p > 0.05$ . The validity of the t-test did not violate Levene's Test for Equality of Variances  $F(1, 936)=3.630, p= .057$ .

**Table 2.** *Attachment Style Living Situation Independent T-Test*

<b>Living Situation</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Std. Error Mean</b>	<b>t-test</b>
Living with other students.....	1.2847 .....	.92011 .....	.03906.....	4.722
Living with parents .....	.9922 .....	.95181 .....	.04857 .....	Ns

Table 4 disaggregates the other living situations participants identified. 38.2% lived with other students, 26.4% lived with parents, 5.4% with their children, and 20.7% with a romantic or marital partner. There was no significant difference in attachment style related to the other categories beyond living with other students and living with parents.



**Table 4. Living Situation Frequency**

<b>Living Situation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Living with other students.....	555.....	38.2
Living with parents .....	384.....	26.4
Living with children .....	78.....	5.4
Living with a romantic or marital partner .....	300.....	20.7
Living alone .....	135.....	9.3
Total .....	1452.....	100.0

To further investigate the significant differences demonstrated by the independent samples t-test, the researcher disaggregated participant living situation and the attachment style. Secure students were more likely to be living with other students than the other categories of students. Those living with parents were slightly more likely to have an avoidant attachment style (45.6%) compared to having a secure attachment style (44.8%). An avoidant coping style was most common among living with parents, children, and romantic or marital partners. Living alone also saw higher percentages of avoidant attachment styles (45.9%) and secure attachment styles (45.0%) compared to anxious/resistant attachment styles (8.1%).

**Table 5. Living Arrangement x Attachment Style Frequency**

<b>Living Situation</b>	<b>Attachment Style</b>		
	<b>Avoidant</b>	<b>Anxious</b>	<b>Secure</b>
Living with other students.....	32.1%.....	7.4%.....	60.5%
Living with parents .....	45.6% .....	9.6%.....	44.8%
Living with children .....	52.6% .....	3.8%.....	43.6%
Living with romantic or marital partner .....	38.3%.....	3.7%.....	58.0%
Living alone .....	45.9% .....	8.1%.....	45.9%

**What is the relationship between attachment style and level of involvement within commuter students?** Many participants reported having medium to high levels of involvement despite attachment style (see Table 6). All levels of involvement reveal moderate levels of participants with an avoidant attachment style (100% for low involvement, 38.9% for medium involvement, and 39.5% for high involvement). High levels of secure attachment style were common in moderate (51.4%) and high (56.0%) levels of involvement. An anxious/resistant attachment style had a slight presence in medium (9.7%) and high (4.6%) levels of involvement compared to avoidant and secure attachment styles.

**Table 6. Involvement x Attachment Style Frequency**

<b>Living Situation</b>	<b>Attachment Style</b>		
	<b>Avoidant</b>	<b>Anxious</b>	<b>Secure</b>
Low .....	100%.....	0% .....	0%
Medium .....	38.9%.....	9.7%.....	51.4%
High.....	39.5% .....	4.6% .....	56.0%

## DISCUSSION

A saturation of research and programming on residential college students facilitates a lack of understanding to better describe the experiences of commuter students at HEIs. Practitioner knowledge and understanding are scant despite their existence on campuses since the 1960s. Using the ECR-RS (to find the attachment style of the participant) and select questions from the NSSE (for student involvement) in this study provided a better understanding

of attachment style, living arrangements, and involvement. Overall, there were no significant findings to conclude that a student's attachment style prohibits them from being involved on campus. These data suggested a high percentage of participants, regardless of their attachment style, spent a low amount of time involved, but reported medium to high levels of involvement. These data also suggested that even though participants stated they were highly involved, they were not as committed to that involvement. Additional results indicated many commuter students work part-time jobs and attend college, which is why they must be more intentional with their time committed towards involvement. These findings can be contextualized as they contribute to the existing research and provide a better description of commuter students.

Students reported moderate to high levels of involvement in off-campus employment and student organizations. These results also are consistent with Bowlby (1969) in that those with secure and avoidant attachment styles were the most common. However, there was no relationship between attachment style and involvement, but there was a significant correlation between attachment style and living situation.

Specifically, those participants who had a secure attachment style were more likely to live with fellow classmates. Those with an avoidant or anxious/resistant attachment style were more likely to be living alone or with parents. These results support previous research on attachment style, which suggests that those who are more secure in their relationships will be more willing to be put in new environments and succeed, such as living with roommates (Chemers et al., 2002; Lopez & Gormley, 2002).

There were slight differences between living with parents or classmates and attachment style. The results indicated a higher percentage of students who lived with their parents were more likely to be anxiously attached than those who were securely attached, and avoidant-attached lived with classmates or friends. This supports previous research suggesting those who have an anxious/resistant attachment style tend to avoid group settings and thus would rather live with their parents than with roommates (Marmarosh & Markin, 2007). This was further supported when comparing participants who lived with other students and those who lived with their parents. The means of those two categories were significantly different, suggesting a difference in attachment style depending on living situation.

Those living alone were related to an avoidant or secure attachment style compared to an anxious/resistant one. Bowlby's (1969) theory suggested that individuals who avoid attachment will struggle with maintaining and developing friendships. They will also be more likely to avoid group situations. Conversely, those with secure attachment styles may be more comfortable with themselves, have higher self-esteem, and be more likely to live alone. The percentages of secure and avoidant attachment styles are significantly higher than that of the anxious/resistant attachment style for participants who live with a romantic or marital partner. The high percentage of students who have an avoidant attachment style living with their romantic or marital partner is because they are un-trustful of their partner and depend on them in an unhealthy manner (Simpson, 1990). Thus, they would feel the need to cohabitate with their partners. Bowlby (1969) suggested attachment styles are carried through adulthood and influence the relationships one has. Student affairs professionals should consider these nuanced findings to engage these students and increase their involvement in educationally purposeful activities.

The anxious attachment style was the most prevalent and is associated with using social support ineffectively, avoiding group settings, having an excessive fear of failure, and demonstrating high scores of depressive symptoms (Ames et al., 2011; Lopez & Gormley, 2002; Marmarosh & Markin, 2007). Thus, student involvement offices should partner with counseling or wellness centers to further engage with commuter students.

Self-reported data by commuter students indicated that commuter students have diverse living arrangements. Institutions should consider a larger "good neighbor" initiative to build external "town-gown" relationships with community partners. A component of this initiative, commuters should have their own advisory board solely to make their voices heard on campus and inform faculty and staff of the support they need. Community partners should also be invited to attend, or the institution can create a community liaison position within the board. It is simply not enough for just the institution to hear the needs of commuter students, but they should be inclusive of community members too.

Results from this study suggested commuters might be more intentional with their time on campus regarding involvement. Student involvement offices should consider the addition of daytime “common hours,” which are blocks of time for campus programming where no courses or labs are scheduled. To implement this, student affairs divisions must cooperate with academic affairs and the registrar to implement this approach. Common hours may allow commuter students to better connect to involvement experiences while they are on campus.

## LIMITATIONS

There are limitations of both the internal and external validity of this study. Self-report instruments were used in this study and featured a convenience sample which may facilitate response bias. The researchers also had to rescore the ECR-RS to include securely attached individuals, and the selected NSSE student involvement questions are a researcher-constructed subscale. These are not empirically validated and could have impacted the findings. Participants were not asked to disclose their multiple identities, including race, gender, or class. Particularly, participants were not prompted to differentiate romantic partnerships. There was no differentiation between learning formats, including distance learners, transfer, and “on-grounds” students. This study also did not consider how commuter students travel to campus, such as with public transportation.

The generalizability of this study might be limited as this was a singular institutional study. The findings presented are not causal in which the study was only exploratory and correlational using primarily descriptive data. This study is not predictive, and its findings cannot claim which attachment styles influence involvement. Future research should explore different types of commuter students to identify the most invisible or marginalized by existing economic or social systems.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of conducting this study, the researchers intended to facilitate awareness about the population of commuter students who are often invisible. More research needs to be done on the commuter student population as current research is dated and limited. The findings provided some insight into their self-reported living arrangements, involvement, and attachment styles. There was no relationship between attachment style and involvement; it identified potential connections between attachment style and living arrangement. A surprising result of this study was most participants self-disclosed they were involved, which disrupts assumptions of commuter student disengagement. Institutions should recognize these behavioral trends in their programming and outreach. Future research should seek to identify new patterns of involvement and disaggregate these across different subpopulations to better target these effects to facilitate the involvement of commuter students. Additional research should be sensitive to consider all characteristics and expand the definition of a commuter student as it may not always include students who can afford to have a car, pay for parking, or to be a full-time student. These considerations may shape policy to include commuter students more effectively.

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