

# Desires to Achieve and Fit In: Social motives predict adjustment to college



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## INTRODUCTION

Four social motives shape human social goals and behavior; these are the attachment, caregiving, dominance and sexual motives. Dysregulated attachment needs and low social dominance link to symptoms of anxiety and depression (Bowlby, 1988). High social dominance motivation and coercive social dominance strategies are associated with substance abuse, narcissism, intimate partner abuse, and strained relationships (Johnson, Leedom, & Muhtadie, 2012). Thus, healthy life balance requires a balance in these strivings, as well as social skills that enable an individual choose the most productive strategies for achieving social goals. While social motives and social goals are important, individuals also have the need to achieve "to make something of their lives." The desire for achievement is called achievement motivation.

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental time as individuals strive to form an identity and establish important social ties. The balance between motives to achieve, gain social power and connect with others shape the course of early adulthood as they help to determine how individuals spend their time and energy. College is a social place where students hope to achieve academic as well as social goals. Research on early adolescence has shown that striving for dominance as well as aggressive and manipulative behavior is prevalent and important to social and academic adjustment (Kiefer, Matthews, Montesino, Arango, & Preece, 2012; Kiefer & Ryan, 2008; Hawley, Little, & Card, 2007). Social dominance goals in early adolescents are associated with lower levels of engagement for achievement. They also have a negative impact on academic and social adjustment (Kiefer et al., 2012; Kiefer & Ryan, 2008). How this phenomenon may extend to college settings has not yet examined (Shim & Ryan, 2012; Hawley, Shorey, & Alderman, 2009).

## Research Question

How do social bonds and social motivation interact with achievement motivation to predict adjustment to college?

## Hypothesis

Achievement, social dominance and attachment motivation and behavior impact adjustment to college. Specifically, good adjustment to college requires a balance between social and academic effort. That balance is facilitated by secure relationships and a balance between prosocial and coercive dominance strategies. Students anxious about or preoccupied with social relationships either because of attachment anxiety or dominance strivings are predicted to have poor adjustment to college.

## Study Objectives

1. To measure and examine the interaction between attachment and dominance behaviors in college students.
2. To measure achievement motivation in college students.
3. To examine the impact of attachment and dominance motive profiles on adjustment to college.
4. To identify whether attachment and dominance motive profiles interact with achievement motivation to predict adjustment to college.

## METHODS

### Participants

113 (27 male and 82 female) students received extra credit for participation in this study. Data from 4 were incomplete and excluded. The final sample included 18 freshmen, 37 sophomores, 23 juniors, and 30 seniors. The students were recruited from a variety of different level college courses.

### Measures and Procedure

All of the following measures were completed in a computer laboratory, during the same 1-2 hour session.

1. **College student adjustment:** The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Syrik, 1984) is a 67 item measure, that yields subscale scores for academic, personal, social and institutional adjustment. College Activities and Behaviors Questionnaire (CABQ; Pennebaker, Colder, Sharp, 1990) is a 22 item measure.
2. **Attachment:** The Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Feeney, Noller, Hanrahan, 1994) is a 40 item measure.

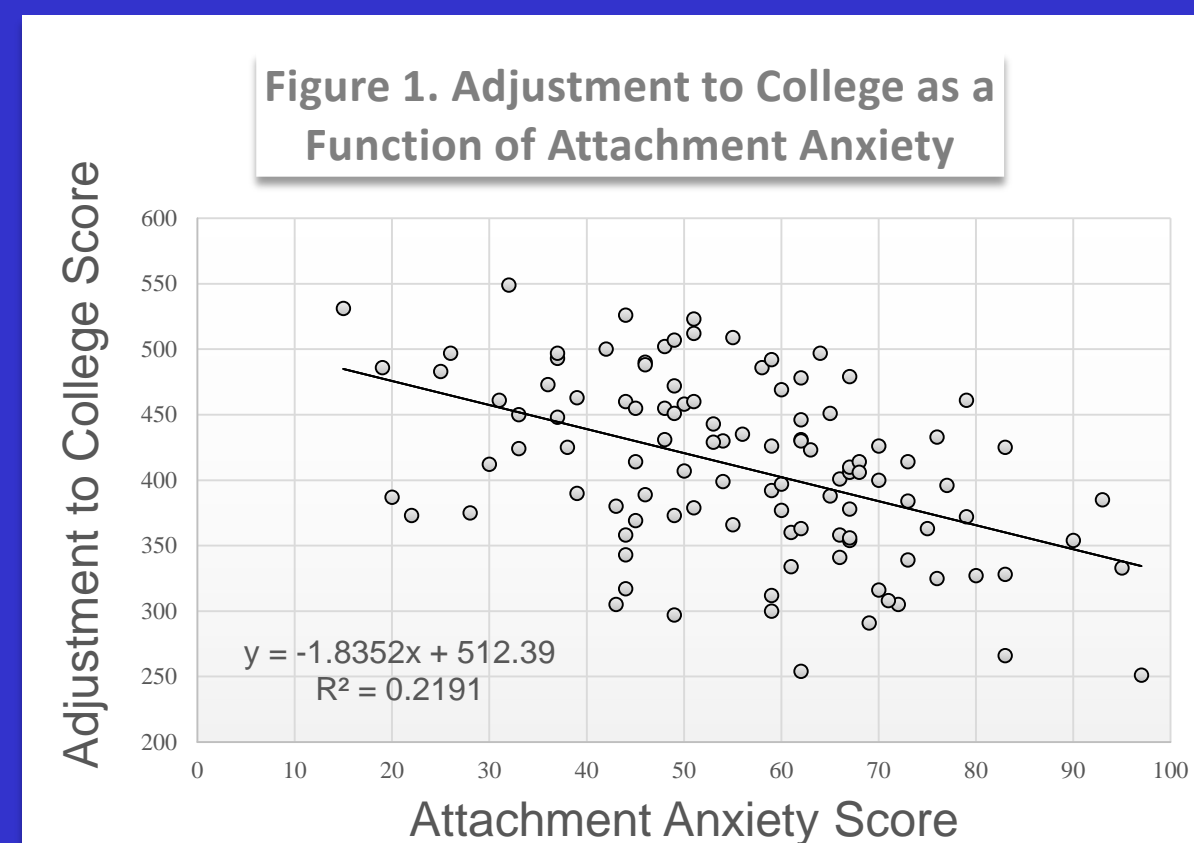
## METHODS CONTINUED

3. **Achievement motivation:** Picture Story Exercise Questionnaire (PSE-Q; McClelland, 1953) is a 30 item measure and Picture Story Exercise (PSE; McClelland, 1953) is a 4 item measure (with 4 questions each).
4. **Resource control strategy:** Resource Control Strategy Inventory (RCSI; Hawley, 2009) is a 22 item measure that assess coercive and prosocial dominance strategies and classifies individuals accordingly.

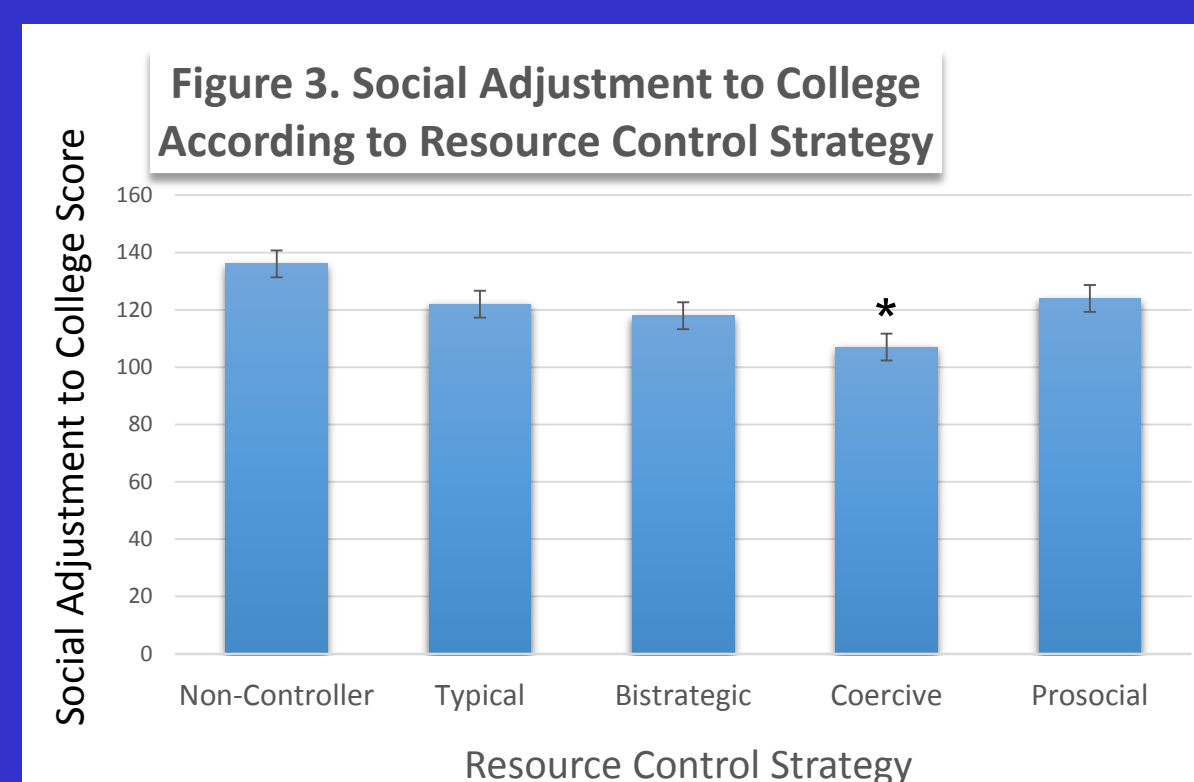
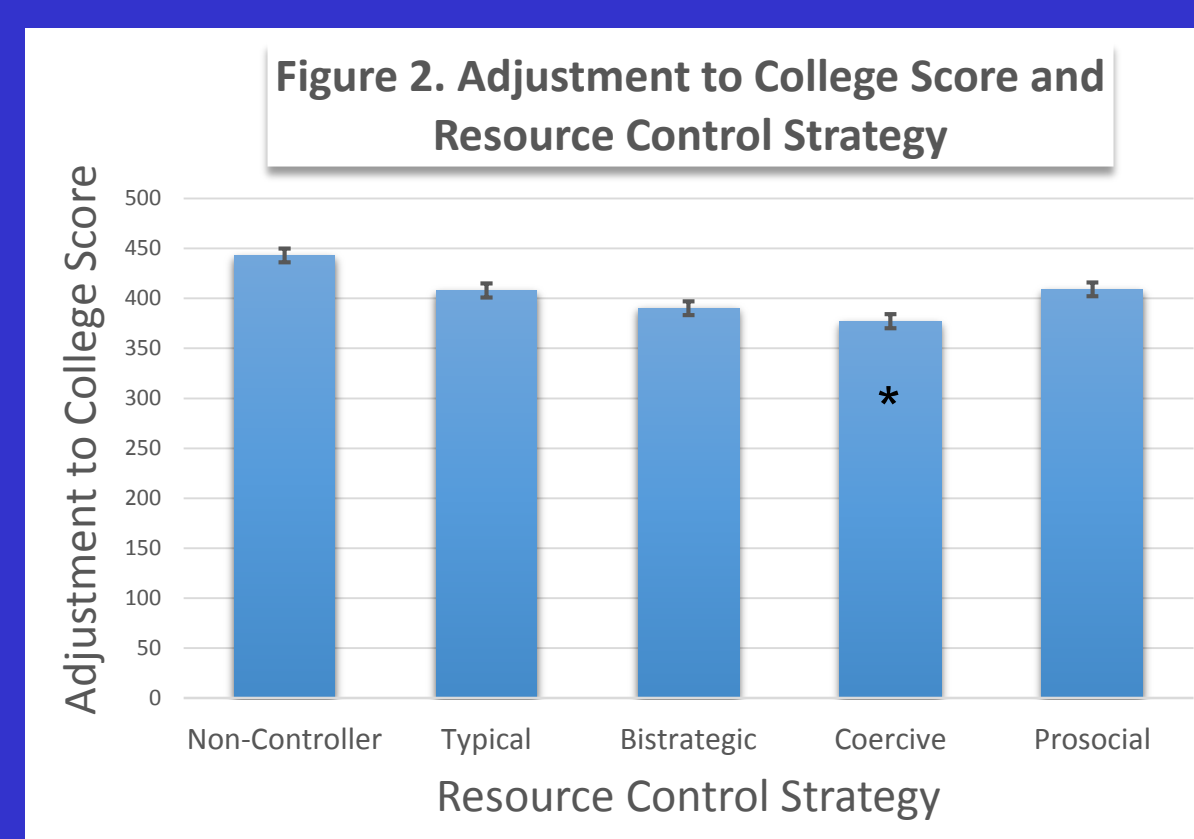
## RESULTS

### 1. Social Motives Predict Adjustment to College

Attachment Anxiety was significantly related to adjustment to college. Higher attachment anxiety predicted poor Total ( $r=-0.47, p<0.001$ ) (Figure 1); Academic ( $r=-0.34, p<0.001$ ); Social ( $r=-0.35, p<0.001$ ); Personal ( $r=-0.38, p<0.001$ ) and Institutional adjustment ( $r=-0.41, p<0.001$ ).



Coercive Dominance Strategies were significantly related to adjustment to college. Individuals who report coercive dominance strategies have poor adjustment to college (Total ( $F(4,104)= 3.17, p<0.017$ ) (Figure 2); Social ( $F(4,104)= 2.46, p<0.05$ ) (Figure 3).



### 2. Attachment Anxiety Predicts Coercive Dominance Strategies.

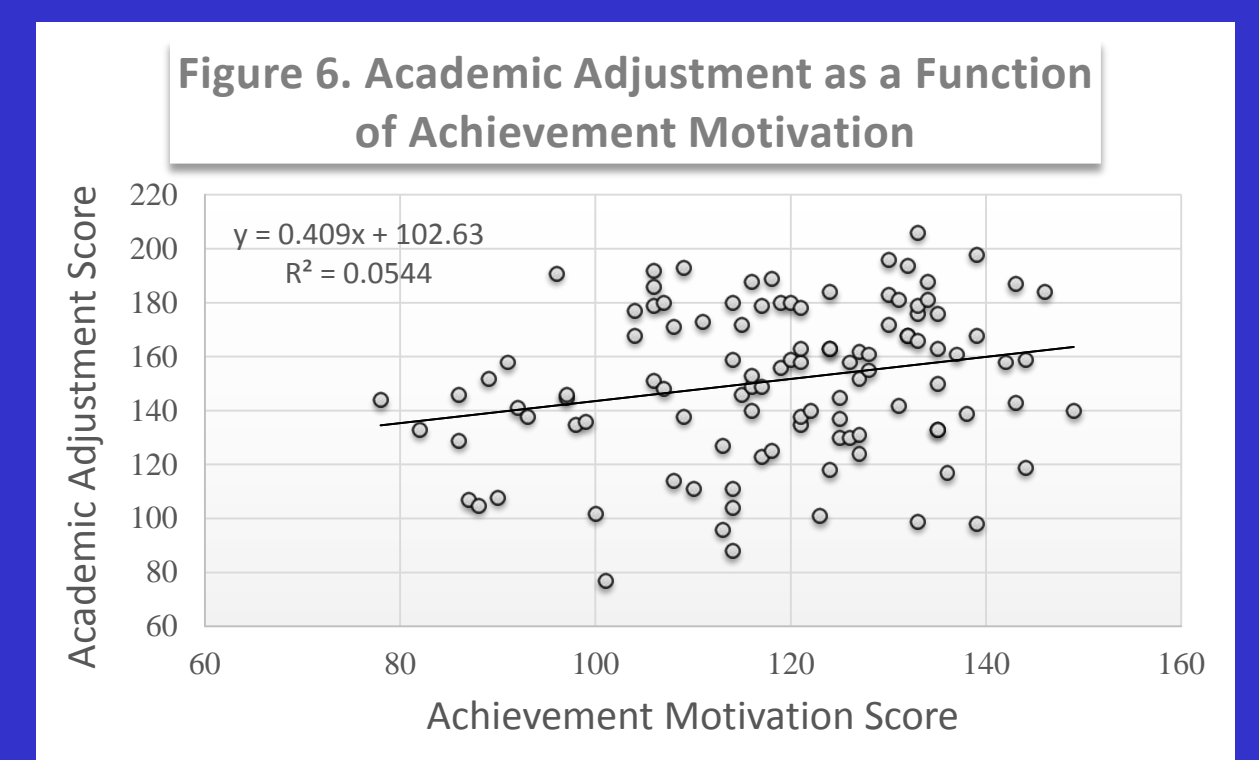
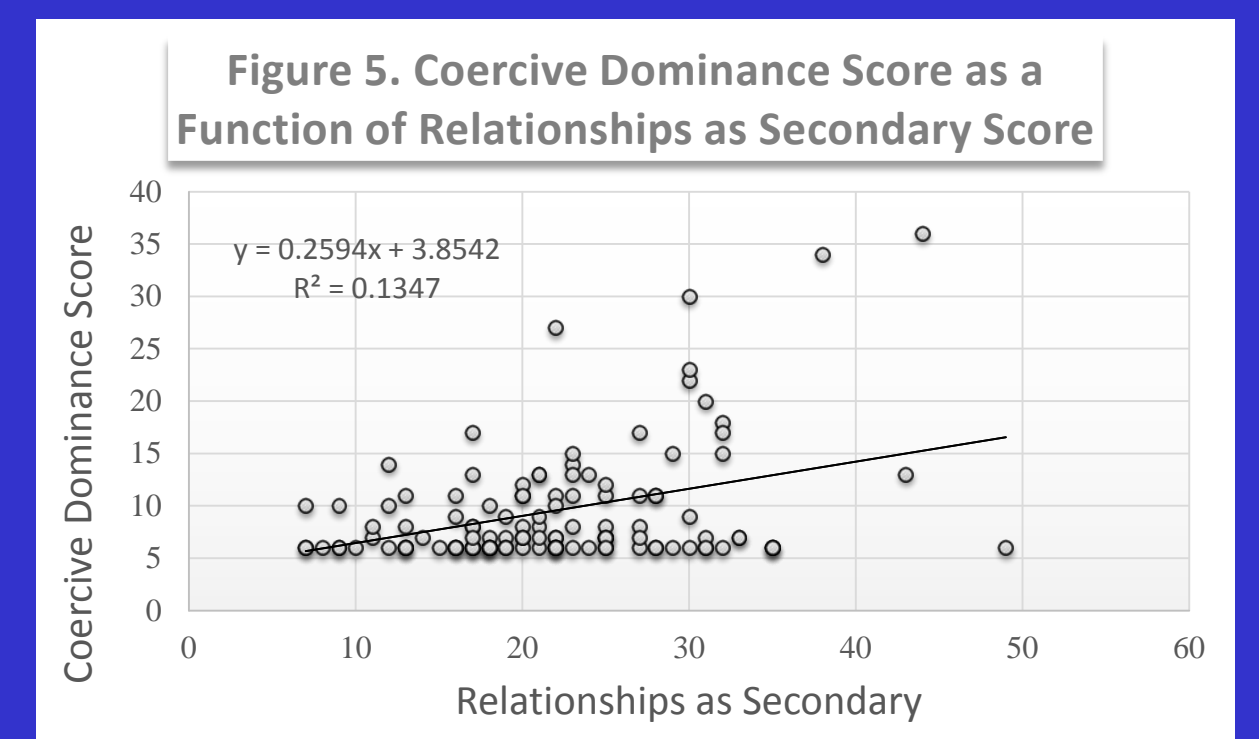
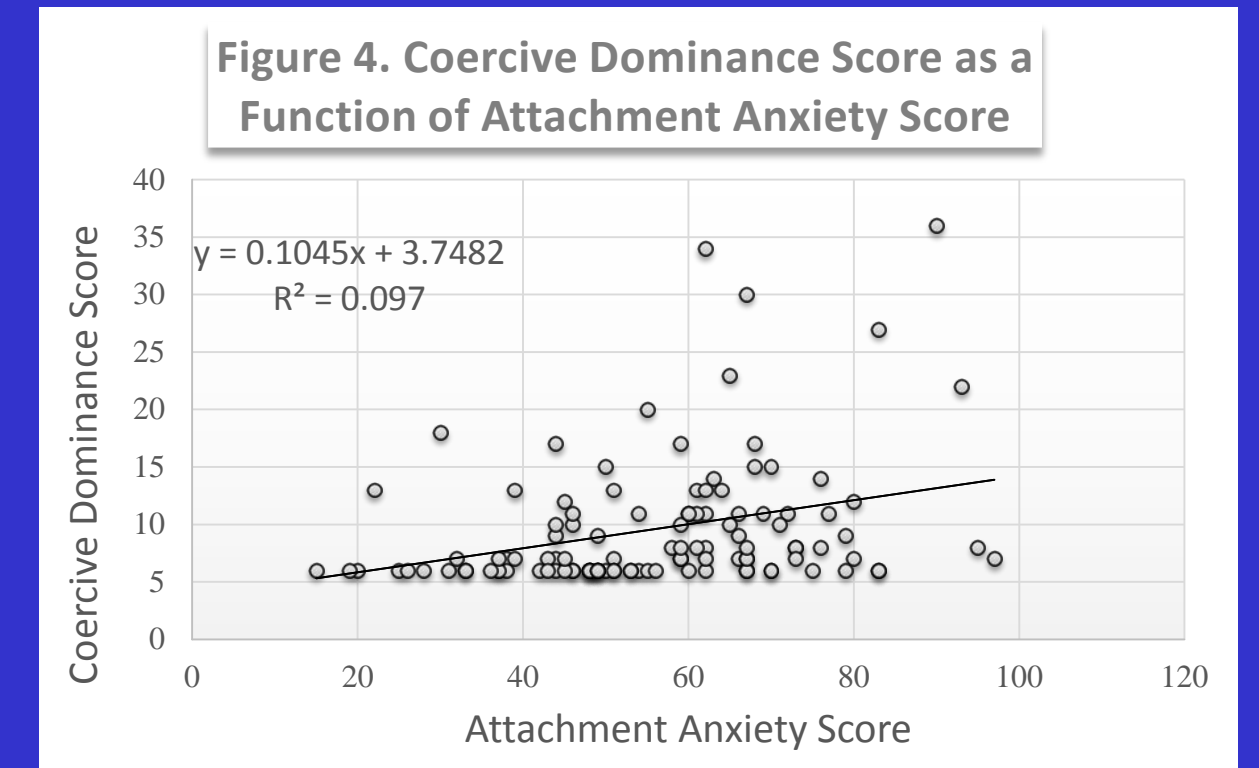
Attachment Anxiety Score was significantly related to Coercive Dominance ( $r=0.30, p<0.001$ ) (Figure 4).

Coercive dominance Score was also associated with a tendency to view relationships as secondary (a means) to other goals ( $r=0.25, p<0.01$ ) (Figure 5). Together, Attachment Anxiety and Relationships as Secondary explained 20% of the variance in Coercive Dominance ( $R^2=.20, F(2, 111)=13.66, p<0.001$ ).

### 3. Achievement Motivation Predicts Academic Adjustment to College.

Achievement Motivation was significantly associated with academic adjustment score ( $r=0.23, p<0.015$ ) (Figure 6). Achievement motivation was not related to social motives.

## RESULTS CONTINUED



## CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis that social motives play a role in adjustment to college was supported. Anxiety regarding attachment and coercive social dominance predicted poor adjustment to college. It is likely that coercive dominance strategies contribute to attachment anxiety as the individual's behavior may alienate others. In this study, social motives were more important to adjustment to college than was achievement motivation. This finding may have been due in part to the difficulty inherent in measuring achievement motivation.

Colleges and Universities may be able to improve student adjustment by offering workshops in social skills. Students might also benefit from learning about the importance of balancing social and achievement goals.

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