

Managing the Transition to College: the Role of Family Cohesion and Adolescents' Emotional Coping Strategies

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In the present study we examine family based explanations for variability in adolescents' academic, social, and personal/emotional adjustment to college. Using a sample of 56 first-year college students, we test the hypothesis that adolescents' emotional coping strategies will moderate the relationship between their pre-college family environment and their college adjustment assessed during both their first and second college semesters. Results support this hypothesis, indicating that by the end of their first college year, participants from cohesive families who are emotion managers report particularly strong adjustment to the academic and personal/emotional challenges of the transition to college.

Early developmental theorists thought it necessary for adolescents to reject parental ties and family bonds to avoid maladjustment in adulthood (e.g., Erikson, 1956). More recent research, however, suggests that a close, cohesive relationship with family members facilitates healthy adolescent and adult adjustment (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In the present study we examine family based explanations for variability in adolescents' adjustment during the college transition.

Many adolescents struggle to overcome the array of social, emotional, and academic challenges they face as they negotiate the transition to college. High levels of perceived stress and psychological adjustment problems are not uncommon among first-year college students as they adjust to university life (see Leong, Bonz, & Zachar, 1997; Ostrow, Paul, Dark, & Behrman, 1986). Suicide rates and mental health utilization rates among young college-age students have dramatically increased in the last two decades (Millstein, 1989; Nafziger, Couillard, Smith, & Wiswell, 1998; Sax, 1997). For adolescents, starting college represents a major life transition, one with a significant developmental impact. From a developmental perspective, this stage is known as the "second individuation process," the goal of which is the acquisition of an identity fully separate from one's parents. As McClanahan and Holmbeck (1992) describe it, a "...[P]sychic restructuring takes place which results in the formation of an adult sense of self" (p. 469). This period of transition culminates in the psychological separation from

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parents that begins in earnest during early adolescence. For many, the college years represent the final stage in the transition from late adolescence into emerging adulthood.

With few exceptions, previous research examining the transition to college is limited in several important ways. First, most college adjustment research relies on data collected after students have already begun college, thereby missing participants' actual college transition. Second, few studies take a longitudinal and prospective approach to examining college adjustment. Most research in the area of adolescent adjustment to college focuses exclusively on students' initial adjustment to their first semester, foreclosing the opportunity to investigate correlates to changes in student adjustment over time. In this study we assessed students' level of functioning throughout their first year of college. Data collection began in the summer prior to participants moving to campus for the start of the fall semester, allowing us to obtain a snapshot of students' functioning before they began the actual transition to college. Further, we took a longitudinal approach to data collection by assessing participants during both the fall and spring semesters of their first college year. The present study, therefore, is unique in its prospective, longitudinal approach to examining predictors of college adjustment prior to student's arrival on campus and throughout the first college year.

Family Factors in the Transition to College

Family factors in general have been largely overlooked when investigating the correlates of adolescents' adjustment to college (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Researchers have only recently examined the potential relevance of relationships with parents in terms of the transition to university, typically focusing on the role of attachment and perceived parental support. The results of these studies generally indicate that securely attached students demonstrate a better adjustment profile (Kenny, 1990; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; 1992; Lapsley, Rice, & Fitzgerald, 1990; Lopez, Campbell, & Watkins, 1989). Parents' expressed belief in their child's competence and abilities (parental social support) is a significant predictor of college grade point average (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994).

Although most family research has been guided by clinical family systems theories which argue the importance of the whole family environment in children's development (Minuchin, 1974), few studies have investigated the role of family level functioning (mother-father-child interaction) in children's academic, social, and emotional development (see Wagner & Reiss, 1995). Instead, most studies linking family functioning to child or adolescent adjustment assess family dyads, mother-child, or father-child functioning in isolation from the rest of the family. Among the few studies examining the relationship between family level functioning and adolescent adjustment, most focus exclusively on adolescent depression. Depressed adolescents report having less cohesive (Cumsille & Epstein, 1994) and less adaptive (Brage & Meredith, 1994) families than non-depressed adolescents. In one of the few studies to examine whole family functioning among a non-clinical sample of adolescents, Rice, Cole, and Lapsley (1990) report that

college students who characterize their family as cohesive also report feeling less independent from their parents.

The transition to college is a particularly opportune time to study family level functioning in a normative adolescent population. Family systems theories argue that functional and dysfunctional family processes are best differentiated during times of stress, such as family transitions (Minuchin, 1974). Investigations of similar transitions at earlier developmental stages suggest a significant link between family cohesion and children's social and emotional well-being among preschoolers (Johnson, 2005; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), elementary school children (Johnson, Cowan, & Cowan, 1999; Johnson, 2001, Johnson, 2003), and school-age children (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Johnson, 2003; Lindahl, 1998; Lindahl & Malki, 1999). Building on this research with younger children, the present study focuses on adolescents' perspectives of their whole family environment.

Emotional Coping and the Transition to College

We argue, however, that family cohesion alone may not be enough to sustain optimal adjustment during adolescence. One must also have the ability to skillfully manage the stressors of everyday life, stressors that may be particularly salient during transitions such as entry into a college or university. Knowledge about emotion is thought to be central to one's ability to soothe oneself and to manage stress and conflict (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996). People differ, however, in their philosophies of emotion. Some adults believe that one should be attentive to one's own emotional state in order to recognize and cope with difficult feelings, while others either disavow or dismiss the importance of emotions in themselves and others (Gottman et al., 1996). Whereas these differences in what Gottman and colleagues (1996) refer to as meta-emotion philosophy have been identified in adult parents of young children, few studies have examined the meta-emotion philosophies of adolescents.

Gottman and colleagues (1996) propose that an individual's feelings and beliefs about emotions play a key role in his or her style of interacting with others. Elementary school teachers see children who are encouraged by their parents to be aware of their sad and angry feelings as more socially, emotionally, and academically competent than their peers whose parents encouraged them to dismiss or ignore their negative emotions (Gottman et al., 1996). It is not known, however, whether these same emotion coping (i.e., meta-emotion) strategies of recognizing and thinking about one's own emotional state are linked to whole family functioning or to academic, social, and emotional competence later in life (e.g., adolescence).

The aim of this project was to examine the associations among students' perceptions of family functioning, their strategies for coping with the difficulties they experience when making the transition to college (i.e., meta-emotion philosophy), and their academic, social, and emotional adjustment to their first college year. More specifically, we hypothesized that one's meta-emotion

philosophy will moderate the relationship between family functioning and college adjustment. Adolescents who are more accepting of their strong negative feelings and who perceive their families to be more cohesive will have fewer academic, social, and emotional difficulties when making the transition to college.

Method

Two cohorts of a total of 56 first-year undergraduate students at a state university in suburban Philadelphia participated in the Coping with the Transition to College (CTC) project. The project ran for two consecutive years. After having accepted admission to the university, we sent incoming first-year students a letter requesting their participation in a research project studying new students' adjustment to the first year of college. The first 30 students in each cohort responding to this solicitation who were between the ages of 17 and 19 (Mean age = 17.91 years), and who were attending college for the first time, were selected for study participation. Scheduling difficulties resulted in only 26 student participants in the first cohort. No significant differences in student demographics were found between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 participants.

Participants were 87% Caucasian (13% African-American and Latino), and 75% female (14 male, and 42 female). All but two of the study participants anticipated attending college full-time during their first semester and 98% lived on campus during their first college year. Eighty-eight percent of the sample graduated from high school in Pennsylvania. The study sample was representative of the overall first-year class at this university, where 87% of first-year students are Caucasian and 63% are women.

Procedure

Student participants were asked to come to the Psychology Department for three assessment appointments over the course of their first year in college: (1) PreCollege Assessment (during the summer prior to beginning college), (2) Fall Semester Assessment, (3) Spring Semester Assessment. Each assessment was approximately 90 minutes long and consisted of an audio-taped interview conducted by a graduate student (M.A. candidate), and self-report questionnaires. Student participants were reimbursed \$10 at each assessment.

Measures

Family Organization. During the PreCollege Assessment, participants completed the Family Circles Index (Kerig, 1995) to measure their perceptions of family organization. Participants were presented four pictures representing prototypes of family systems and one blank family picture. The instructions explained that the larger circles in the family pictures represent the parents and that the smaller circle represents the adolescent participant. Adjacent circles were described as

representing close relationships, while spaces between circles indicated family members who were distant or who did not get along well with one another. Each participant was asked to choose which prototype best fit their family (or to draw in their own if note of the prototypes was accurate) and to add additional small circles if there were other children in their family. Participants were also asked to identify the names of individuals represented by each circle (i.e., mother, father, self).

The four family prototypes represent different family typologies reflecting Minuchin's (1974) descriptions of structural family relationships. Cohesive families were depicted with family members all close to one another, separate families were represented with the adolescent and parents all distant from one another, detouring families were depicted with the adolescent excluded from a cohesive parental subsystem, and triangulated families were represented by a distant mother-father relationship with the adolescent situated in between his/her parents (see Kerig, 1995). Although depicted in their pictures, sibling relationships were not assessed in the present study. Trained raters coded each family picture to determine which type of family was represented. Interrater agreement, assessed on a random subset of twenty percent of the completed instruments, was 100 percent.

Coping Strategies. The Meta-Emotion Interview (Gottman et al., 1996) was adapted for use in the present study and administered by graduate students during the Pre-College Assessment. The original interview asked parents to identify and describe times when they themselves have felt sad and angry, as well as times when their child has felt sad and angry. In the present study we continued to use the semi-structured interview format developed by Gottman and colleagues, asking students to identify times when they themselves felt angry.

Interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Verbatim transcripts were coded by undergraduate research assistants trained to use an adaptation of Gottman, Katz, and Hooven's (1997) coding manual for use with the Meta-Emotion Interview. Raters assessed whether they agreed (1) or disagreed (0) with 26 items aimed at assessing participants' awareness, acceptance, and remediation of their anger. Interrater reliability was assessed on a random subset of 10% of the interviews (average kappa = .76 for the items assessing awareness, average kappa = .83 for the items assessing acceptance, and average kappa = .73 for the items assessing remediation).

College Adjustment. Participants completed the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1984) during the Fall and Spring Semester Assessments. The SACQ is a 67-item self-report measure yielding four scales assessing college students' academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, and goal commitment-institutional attachment when making the transition to college. Only the scales assessing academic adjustment, social adjustment, and personal/emotional adjustment were used for the present paper. Academic adjustment measures how well the adolescent manages the educational demands of the college experience without indicating objective performance. Social Adjustment assesses how well the adolescent deals with interpersonal experiences at the university (e.g., meeting people or joining groups).

Personal/emotional adjustment measures whether the student experiences general psychological distress or the somatic consequences of distress.

Participants rate how well each experience applies to them at the present time using a nine-point Likert scale ranging from “applies very closely” to “doesn’t apply closely at all.” Raw scores are converted to *t*-scores and normative data are provided by sex and semester. First semester norms are for students who have had no previous college experience while second semester norms are for those students who have completed one or more semesters of college at the time of the test administration. We used first semester norms for the fall semester administration of the SACQ and second semester norms for the spring semester administration of the SACQ.

Baker and Siryk (1984) reported Cronbach’s alphas for full scale college adjustment obtained on two separate samples as .91 and .92. Subscale reliability coefficients were also good. Values for Academic Adjustment range from .81 to .90, for Social Adjustment from .83 to .91, and for Personal-Emotional Adjustment from .77 to .86.

Results

Independent *t*-tests were used to examine cohort effects among participants’ reports of college adjustment during their first (fall) and second (spring) semesters at college. As indicated in Table 1, no significant mean differences in academic, social, or personal/emotional adjustment between participants in the two cohorts were found.

TABLE 1

Means and standard deviations for SACQ academic adjustment, social adjustment, and personal/emotional adjustment by cohort

	Fall Semester		Spring Semester	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Academic Adjustment				
Cohort 1	50.54	11.03	51.52	12.95
Cohort 2	53.18	10.25	50.76	11.06
Social Adjustment				
Cohort 1	53.83	12.20	57.10	10.17
Cohort 2	51.82	12.32	50.76	11.06
Personal/Emotional Adjustment				
Cohort 1	45.75	11.64	49.90	10.89
Cohort 2	48.27	11.39	48.81	11.33

Using the Family Circles Index, 24 first-year college students identified their families as cohesive, eight participants identified their families as separate, 11 participants identified their families as detouring, and 13 adolescents identified their families as triangulating. To conserve power, we recoded participants' ratings of family organization as either cohesive or not cohesive (24 cohesive; 32 non-cohesive families).

To attempt to identify distinct styles of coping with angry emotions (i.e., meta-emotion philosophy), K-means cluster analyses were run using the 26 items assessing one's awareness, acceptance, and remediation of angry feelings. Based on Gottman and colleagues' (1996) earlier findings suggesting two distinct meta-emotion philosophies, one that is accepting of negative emotions, and one that is dismissive of negative emotions we hypothesized that two clusters would emerge. Means across the 26 variables are shown in Table 2.

One cluster appeared to depict adolescents who are emotion managers, or participants who are able to articulate the regulation strategies they use for coping with their anger. These individuals appear to be participants who are aware of their angry feelings, who share their angry feelings with others, and who have a remediation technique that works for managing their angry feelings.

A second cluster appears to depict adolescents who are emotion avoiders, or participants who are less likely to articulate the regulation strategies they use for coping with their anger. These individuals appear less aware of their angry feelings and their techniques for remediating these feelings, more hesitant to discuss times when they felt angry, more likely to keep their feelings to themselves, and more likely to choose strategies for avoiding feeling angry than strategies that reflect an acceptance of these feelings.

TABLE 2

Means for Meta-Emotion Variables by Cluster

	Emotion Managers	Emotion Avoiders	F	<u>eta</u> ²
# of Adolescents	31	25		
Awareness:				
Distinguishes emotion	.96	.79	3.01+	.07
Various experiences of emotion	.50	.00	12.53**	.23
Descriptive of physical sensations	.87	.68	2.35	.05
Descriptive of cognitive process	.42	.26	1.08	.03
Provides descriptive anecdote	.79	.63	1.33	.03
Know cause of emotion	.92	.84	.55	.01
Aware of remediation process	.87	.89	.04	.00
Answers questions easily	.92	.42	16.52***	.29

TABLE 2 (CONT.)

Means for Meta-Emotion Variables by Cluster

	Emotion Managers	Emotion Avoiders	F	η^2
Acceptance:				
Accepts emotion	.83	.68	1.30	.03
Expresses emotion	.92	.74	2.55	.06
Distinguishes times when not to express emotion	.87	.84	.09	.00
Others can tell when experiencing emotion	.96	.89	.64	.02
Expresses other emotion when feeling angry	.92	.89	.06	.00
Feels comfortable with expression of emotion	.88	.63	3.66+	.08
Importance of controlling emotion is emphasized	.67	.84	1.70	.04
Shares emotion with others	.88	.37	15.84***	.28
Prefers waiting until emotion is over to talk	.75	.68	.22	.01
Remediation technique suggests acceptance vs avoidance	.92	.47	12.99***	.24
Regulation:				
Difficulty regulating intensity	.88	.84	.09	.00
Emotion occurs often	.83	.95	1.32	.03
Emotion is difficult to get over	.92	.89	.06	.00
Emotion has been a problem/concern	.96	.89	.64	.02
Emotion blends with another emotion	.79	.84	.17	.00
Has remediation techniques for this emotion	1.00	.58	16.64***	.29
Has remediation techniques that work for this emotion	.87	.11	58.36***	.59
Thinks emotion can be dangerous	.88	.79	.55	.01
Tries to avoid emotion	.92	.84	.55	.01
+ $p < .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$				

We ran three separate mixed 2 X 2 X 2 Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) (within-college adjustment assessed during the fall and spring semesters X between-family organization X between-emotional coping strategy) to test the hypothesis that adolescents' meta-emotion philosophies, or emotion coping strategies, will moderate the relationship between participants' perceptions of their family environment and their adjustment to college. Significant interaction between family organization and emotional coping strategies would lend support to this hypothesis. The separate analyses examined the role of family organization and emotional coping strategies in predicting adolescents' academic, social, and personal/emotional college adjustment. Attrition and incomplete responses from participants across the three assessment points resulted in a reduced sample of 37 participants for these analyses. No significant differences in baseline measures were found between these 37 participants and the remaining study sample.

Academic Adjustment. Results indicated no significant main effects of time for academic adjustment. Similarly, no significant mean differences in first-year students' academic adjustment to college were found for adolescents' perceptions of family organization (cohesive vs. non-cohesive) or for adolescents' emotional coping strategies (emotion managers vs. emotion avoiders). A significant interaction among assessment time, family organization, and emotional coping strategy was indicated ($F(1,33) = 8.42; p \leq .01$). As the means in Table 3 indicate, the pattern of academic adjustment over the first college year appears to differ for participants from cohesive and non-cohesive families who are emotion managers and those who are emotion avoiders (see Figure 1). Participants from non-cohesive families who were identified as emotion managers showed a relative decline in academic adjustment from the fall semester to the spring semester, whereas participants from non-cohesive families who we identified as emotion avoiders showed relative improvement in academic adjustment for the fall semester to the spring semester. This pattern is reversed for adolescents who view their families as cohesive. First-year college students from cohesive families identified as emotion managers show a relative increase in academic adjustment from the fall semester to the spring semester. Emotion Avoiders from cohesive families, however, showed a relative decline in academic adjustment across their first year in college.

Post hoc comparisons using a Tukey HSD test indicate a significant difference in fall semester academic adjustment between participants from non-cohesive families who are emotion managers and participants from non-cohesive families who are emotion avoiders ($q(33) = 4.12; p \leq .05$). Emotion managers from non-cohesive families report better academic adjustment during their first college semester than emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families. Interestingly, by the spring semester, there is no significant difference in academic adjustment apparent for emotion managers and emotion avoiders from not cohesive families. By contrast, no significant difference in academic adjustment is indicated for emotion managers and emotion avoiders from cohesive families during the fall semester of their first college year. A significant difference in spring semester academic adjustment, however, was indicated between participants from cohesive

families who are emotion managers and participants from cohesive families who are emotion avoiders ($q(33) = 2.95; p \leq .05$). Emotion managers from cohesive families report better academic adjustment during their second college semester than emotion avoiders from cohesive families.

We found no significant differences in spring semester academic adjustment between emotion managers from cohesive families and participants from non-cohesive families who were either emotion managers or emotion avoiders. Similarly, no significant differences were indicated in participants' spring semester academic adjustment between emotion avoiders from cohesive families and emotion managers or emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families.

TABLE 3

Means and standard deviations for college adjustment among participants from cohesive and not cohesive families, rated as emotion managers and emotion avoiders

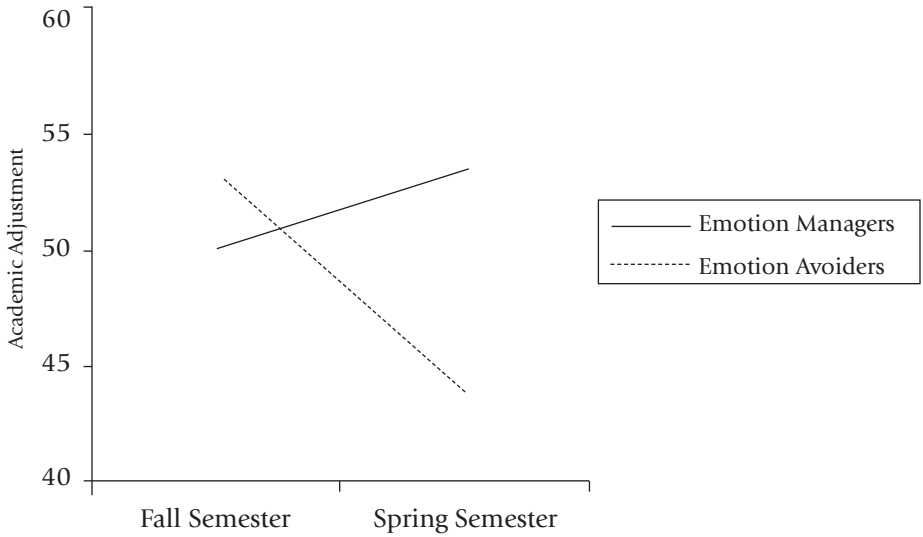
	Cohesive Families		Non-Cohesive Families	
	Emotion Managers	Emotion Avoiders	Emotion Managers	Emotion Avoiders
	<u>Mean (SD)</u>	<u>Mean (SD)</u>	<u>Mean (SD)</u>	<u>Mean (SD)</u>
Academic Adjustment				
Fall Semester	50.11 (5.26)	53.33 (10.41)	55.00 (12.97) ^a	46.64 (10.41) ^a
Spring Semester	53.56 (10.91) ^b	43.67 (5.69) ^b	51.07 (12.66)	52.36 (14.25)
Social Adjustment				
Fall Semester	50.00 (9.45)	45.00 (5.29)	56.00 (12.33)	50.55 (12.54)
Spring Semester	53.00 (13.42)	44.00 (11.36)	55.29 (9.73)	55.73 (10.98)
Personal/Emotional Adjustment				
Fall Semester	45.89 (8.21)	45.33 (8.51)	47.93 (13.59)	45.64 (12.71)
Spring Semester	53.44 (13.66) ^c	39.33 (8.33) ^{cd}	47.71 (11.35)	51.27 (8.14) ^d

^{abcd} $p \leq .05$

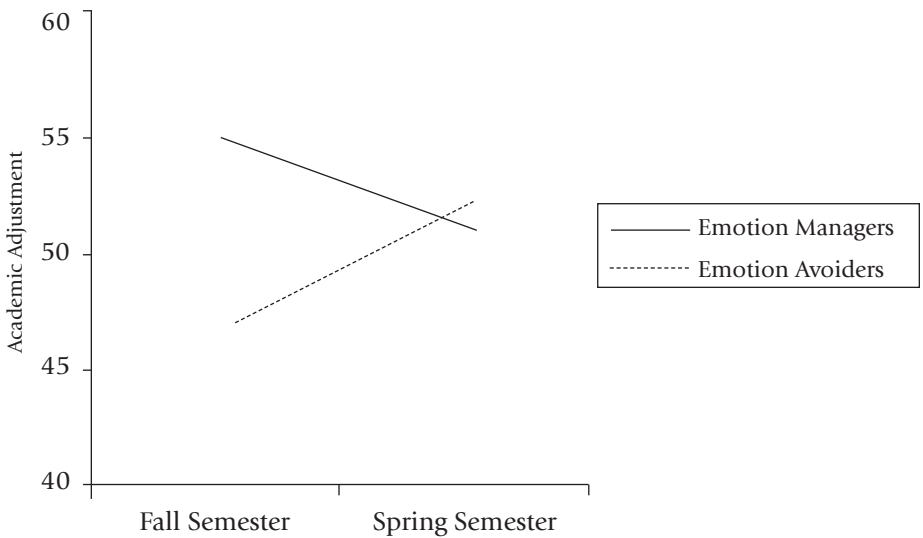
FIGURE 1

Relationship among family cohesion, emotional coping, and academic adjustment to college. A: Cohesive families; B: Non-cohesive families

A. Cohesive Families



B. Non-Cohesive Families



Social Adjustment. Results indicate no significant main effects of time for social adjustment. Similarly, no significant mean differences in first-year students' social adjustment to college were found for adolescents' perceptions of family organization (cohesive vs. non-cohesive) or for adolescents' emotional coping strategies (emotion managers vs. emotion avoiders). Contrary to our hypothesis that emotional coping would moderate the relationship between family organization and adolescents' social adjustment to college, results indicate no significant interaction effects of time, family organization, and emotional coping.

Personal/Emotional Adjustment. Results indicate no significant main effects of time for personal/emotion adjustment. Similarly, no significant mean differences in first-year students' personal/emotional adjustment to college were found for adolescents' perceptions of family organization (cohesive vs. non-cohesive) or for adolescents' emotional coping strategies (emotion managers vs. emotion avoiders). A significant interaction among assessment time, family organization, and emotional coping strategy was indicated ($F(1,33) = 4.09; p \leq .05$). As the means in Table 3 indicate, the pattern of personal/emotional adjustment over the first college year appears to differ for participants from cohesive and non-cohesive families who are emotion managers and those who are emotion avoiders (see Figure 2). On the one hand, participants from non-cohesive families who we identified as emotion avoiders show relative improvement in personal/emotional adjustment from the fall semester to the spring semester. On the other hand, participants from non-cohesive families who we identified as emotion managers show little change in personal/emotional adjustment across their first year in college. This pattern is somewhat different for adolescents who depict their families as cohesive. First-year college students from cohesive families who we identified as emotion managers show a relative increase in personal/emotional adjustment from the fall semester to the spring semester. Participants from cohesive families who we identified as emotion avoiders, however, showed a relative decline in personal/emotional adjustment across their first year in college.

Post hoc comparisons using a Tukey HSD test indicate that a significant difference in spring semester personal/emotional adjustment between participants from cohesive families who are emotion managers and participants from cohesive families who are emotion avoiders ($q(33) = 3.44; p \leq .05$). Emotion managers from cohesive families report better personal/emotional adjustment during their second college semester than emotion avoiders from cohesive families. Interestingly, there is no significant difference in personal/emotional adjustment apparent for emotion managers and emotion avoiders from cohesive families during the fall semester of their first college year. A significant difference in spring semester personal adjustment was also indicated between emotion avoidant participants from cohesive families and emotion avoidant participants from non-cohesive families ($q(33) = 2.98; p \leq .05$). Emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families report better personal/emotional adjustment during their second college semester than emotion avoiders from cohesive families.

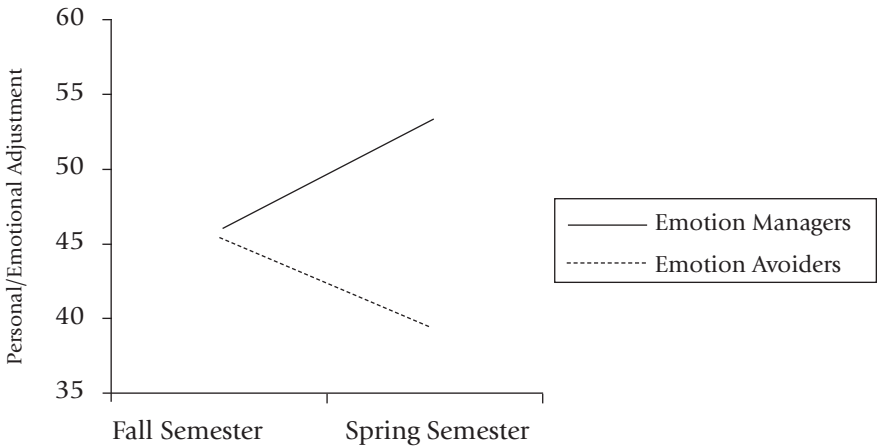
We found no significant differences in spring semester personal/emotional adjustment between emotion managers from cohesive families and participants

from non-cohesive families who were either emotion managers or emotion avoiders. Similarly, no significant differences were indicated in participants' spring semester personal/emotional adjustment between emotion avoiders from cohesive families and emotion managers or emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families.

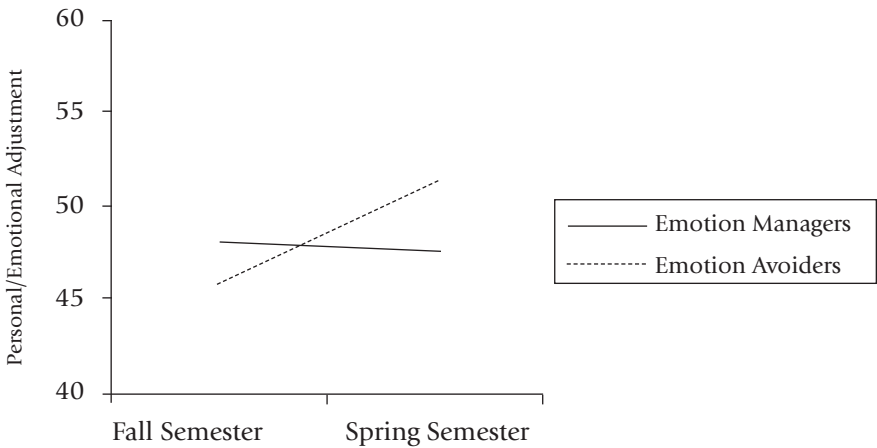
FIGURE 2

Relationship among cohesion, emotional coping, and personal/emotional adjustment to college. A: Cohesive families; B: Non-cohesive families.

A. Cohesive Families



B. Non-Cohesive Families



Discussion

Data from the present study provide support for the notion that family organization and an individual's emotional coping strategies (meta-emotion philosophy) are related to college adjustment. In particular, support was found for our hypothesis that emotional coping would moderate the relationship between family cohesion and first-year college students adjustment to college. When making the transition to college the relationship between family cohesion and adolescents' academic adjustment or personal/emotion adjustment depends on whether participants report managing their angry emotions or avoiding their anger. To some extent, these findings are contrary to the notion that a cohesive family may provide young college students with a secure base to facilitate the adolescent struggle of separation and individuation (Bowen, 1976; Minuchin, 1974). Family cohesion by itself may not be enough to sustain optimum adjustment across the entire first college year. One may also need an effective means of managing the strong negative emotions that one experiences when making the transition to college.

The present study borrowed from Gottman and colleagues (1996) notion of meta-emotion philosophy as instrumental in understanding how one regulates emotion, which in turn, is related to individual functioning. Two clusters of adolescents were identified, emotion managers and emotion avoiders. These clusters appear similar to Gottman's description of parents who are either aware and accepting of their sad and angry feelings, or parents who tend to disavow or dismiss their negative emotions.

Differences in adolescents' initial adjustment to the academic challenges of college were found between emotion managers and emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families. Emotion managers from non-cohesive families report having little difficulty making the academic adjustment to college in the fall compared to emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families. By the spring semester, emotion managers and emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families are showing no difference in academic adjustment, with emotion managers showing a relative decline in adjustment and emotion avoiders showing relative improvement.

A similar pattern of results was found for adolescents' personal/emotional adjustment to college. In particular, emotion avoiders from non-cohesive families show relative improvement in their personal/emotional adjustment to college from the fall semester to the spring semester of their first college year. These data suggest that emotion avoiding adolescents from non-cohesive families may be slow starters compared to their peers. Perhaps the combination of lack of family cohesion and the tendency to avoid one's angry feelings puts these new college students at an initial disadvantage.

Being at college and away from their non-cohesive families, however, may allow for some readjustment in their coping strategies and account for the improvement we see in adjustment from the fall to the spring semester. In other words, it may be that by the spring semester of their first year in college our emotion avoiders do not all continue to avoid their negative emotions. Change in

emotional coping may occur while adapting to life away from their family. Future research should include multiple assessments of adolescents' emotion coping strategies to test whether changes in college adjustment over time are accompanied by changes in one's emotional coping strategies.

Differences in adolescents' spring semester adjustment to the academic challenges of college were found between emotion managers and emotion avoiders from cohesive families. By the second semester of their first year of college, emotion managers from cohesive families report better academic adjustment than emotion avoiders from cohesive families. Whereas emotion managers from cohesive families show relative improvement in academic adjustment across their first college year, emotion avoiders from cohesive families show relative decline in academic adjustment. Again, this pattern is repeated for adolescents' personal/emotional adjustment to college. Perhaps our emotion avoiders from cohesive families had found a way of coping with their negative emotions that was adaptive when surrounded by their cohesive families. When at college, these emotional coping strategies may prove less adaptive as they get more physical and psychological distance from their cohesive, and presumably supportive families.

Although Gottman and colleagues (1996) report correlation between one's meta-emotion philosophy and behavior that should be theoretically linked to this construct such as parenting behaviors, little data exists confirming that emotion managers actually manage their angry feelings in the way they describe in the interview. In this way, it may be incorrect to assume that our emotion managers have, in practice, a different method of coping with their anger than our emotion avoiders. Future study would benefit from the addition of observational assessment of one's emotion coping strategies. Establishing a link between one's meta-emotion philosophy and one's actual emotion coping behavior would assist investigators in understanding the interrelationship of family functioning, emotion coping, and college adjustment.

Surprisingly, none of the constructs included in the present study predict adolescents' social adjustment to their first year in college. These findings are contrary to those reported by Johnson, Cowan, and Cowan (1999) when studying young children's transition to elementary school. Johnson and colleagues found family functioning to be related to children's externalizing behavior but not to their academic adjustment to first grade. Perhaps one explanation for this inconsistency stems from the methodology used in the current study. Whereas previous studies reporting links between family cohesion and academic, social, and emotional well-being in younger children used observational assessments of family functioning (Johnson et al., 1999), the present study relied exclusively on adolescents' reports of their family environment.

Noller and Callan (1986) argued that significant differences exist between insider and outsider perceptions of family functioning. In other words, adolescents' insider perceptions of family cohesion may differ significantly from an outside observer's ratings of the same family. In particular, adolescent perceptions of family cohesion may be inextricably biased by their developmental struggle to separate

and individuate from the family. Some college students may need to represent their families as extremely cohesive, to help maintain some psychological and emotional connection to family members while making the transition to college. Others however, may have an equally compelling need to represent their families as less cohesive and more separate in order to facilitate their separation and the expression of their individuality.

Future study of family functioning and the college transition should include both self-report and observational assessments of family cohesion. Only with this type of multi-method measurement will we be able to ascertain the degree to which adolescent perceptions of their family environment differ from that of an outsider, and how both perspectives contribute to understanding variance in adolescents' academic, social, and emotional adjustment to college.

The limited sample size, and relatively homogenous sample used in the present study constrains our ability to generalize these findings beyond the sample studied. For example, because of our small sample we were unable to examine gender differences in college adjustment for men and women. Future study with a larger, more diverse student population is necessary. Although preliminary, data from the present study do suggest that intervention with adolescents making the transition to college aimed at encouraging an emotion managing meta-emotion philosophy may improve adolescents' academic and emotional well-being.

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