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by

Ayoung Phang

August 2018

SECURE ATTACHMENT AND CAREER INDECISION: THE MEDIATING ROLE  
OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

**Background:** Many college students struggle with career indecision and its problematic outcomes. Thus, it is important to gain a better understanding of the antecedents of career indecision to facilitate career development in this population. Over the past few decades, researchers have been trying to understand the career decision-making process from interpersonal and affective perspectives. Previous findings suggest that the negative relation of secure attachment to career indecision may be mediated by emotional intelligence. **Purpose:** The primary goal of the present study was to examine a model which links secure attachment with career indecision through the mediating role of emotional intelligence. It was hypothesized that secure attachment will be positively associated to emotional intelligence, and, in turn, higher levels of emotional intelligence will be negatively related to career indecision. In short, the indirect negative relation of attachment security to career indecision through emotional intelligence will be statistically significant. **Methods:** Participants included 419 male and female undergraduate students from a large southern university. The following measures were used to assess the constructs of interest: The Inventory of Parent Attachment, The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire, and The Assessing Emotions Scale. To examine the proposed mediational model, bootstrapped bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effect were calculated with the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). **Results:** The indirect effect of emotional intelligence on the relation between secure attachment and career indecision was statistically significant. **Conclusions:** Results suggest that the ability to manage emotions is one of the pathways that explain the association of secure attachment to lower levels of career indecision. The link among

these constructs offer suggestions for novel intervention ideas for career counseling with college students.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Career choice has significant long-lasting effects on individuals' life satisfaction and general well-being. Work is a critical source of need satisfaction in the financial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2002). At the same time, work is a mindful activity that generates challenge and meaning in life. Results of a recent meta-analysis identified quality of work-life as a salient predictor of life satisfaction (Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012), which suggests that in order to maximize life satisfaction, individuals ought to make satisfying career decisions.

Career indecision is defined as an individuals' difficulty or inability to identify and/or commit to a current or future occupational option (Osipow, 1999). While some people make career decisions with ease, others experience prolonged periods of career indecision (Amir & Gati, 2006; Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). Career indecision is problematic because it has been associated with negative outcomes. For example, in a study with college sophomores, students who reported uncertainty about their career choices had lower GPAs than their more certain peers (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Moreover, affective experiences connected to career indecision, such as anxiety and feelings of incompetence, tend to persist after a career-decision has been made (Cavenagh, Dewberry, & Jones, 2000). It may be that when career choice issues remain unresolved, individuals struggle more with academics, experience less life satisfaction, and generally are less committed to their career development.

Over the past few decades, researchers have examined the career development process from interpersonal (Whiston et al., 2004) and affective perspectives (Di Fabio &

Kenny, 2015; Gati, Gadassi, et al., 2010). Building and maintaining close interpersonal relationships and managing emotions are primary human needs (Josselson, 1992), which, in turn, are associated with mastering important developmental tasks (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) such as career decision-making. Individuals with positive and secure connections with others are less likely to experience career-choice difficulties than individuals who lack close interpersonal relationships (van Ecke, 2007). Similarly, emotional intelligence, which refers to the ability to recognize and manage emotions, has been positively associated to effective career decision making outcomes among college students (Brown, George-Curran, & Smith, 2003; Puffer, 2011). It is expected that the presence of felt security from interpersonal relationships and the ability to manage negative emotions facilitate making career choices by reducing anxiety and emotional stress elicited during the decision-making process (Braunstein-Bercovitz, Benjamin, Asor, & Lev, 2012).

In sum, current research findings with college students suggest that secure, satisfying interpersonal relations and higher levels of emotional intelligence facilitate the career development process. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the relation of attachment security and emotional intelligence to college students' level of career indecision. More specifically, the potential mediation effect of emotional intelligence in the relation of secure attachment to career indecision was examined.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter will examine the literature that is relevant to understanding the development of the present study. It will introduce a conceptual framework to support the theoretical argument being made. Each section will summarize major findings in attachment theory, emotional intelligence, career indecision, and the relationship among the constructs.

#### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment refers to the emotional bond developed in the early child-parent relationship (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby (1969), who first introduced attachment theory, proposed that optimal psychological development occurs when infants have access to responsive caregivers who provide a trustworthy secure environment. As they grow, children establish cognitive representations, or internal working models, of their relationships with others according to their attachment experiences. These internal representations provide working models of self and others that are further modified and developed in relationship with others throughout childhood and adulthood.

Children develop an inner sense of secure attachment if the trust in the presence of an accessible and responsive caregiver is greater than the fear of the caregiver's unavailability. The absence, unresponsiveness, and unpredictability of caregivers produces an inner sense of insecure attachment, which elicits anger, anxiety, and sadness in the child. Based on Bowlby's (1982) theory, children who have experienced secure attachment with primary caregivers, unconsciously know that they have trustworthy others to turn to, and consider themselves worthy of love and caring. Securely attached

children typically mature with a balanced sense of dependence and autonomy and the capability to self-regulate distressing emotions that extends to adulthood. In contrast, children who lack consistent external support and comfort, often develop an insecure attachment orientation characterized by lack of trust that others will meet their needs and inability to effectively self-regulate distressing emotions. In sum, research findings have provided support for the positive association of a secure attachment orientation to the ability to regulate emotions in children and adults (Borelli et al., 2010; Kafetsios, 2004; Kim, 2005).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence refers to the “the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). During the past few decades, emotional intelligence has become a topic of great interest within the field of psychology as well as the general public (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional abilities may be arranged in four hierarchical domains that start with basic abilities and move toward more complex abilities: (a) accurately *perceiving* emotions in oneself and others, (b) using emotions to *facilitate* thinking, (c) *understanding* emotion, emotional language, and emotional signals, and (d) *managing* emotions to reach specific goals (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008).

The first foundational level involves the ability to perceive emotions in one and others accurately. Findings have shown that individuals’ ability to perceive and express feelings competently is positively linked to more empathy toward others (Mayer,

DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990). In turn, accurate perception of emotions in oneself and others, promotes the ability to use emotions to facilitate cognitive thinking and problem-solving (Mayer et al., 2008). At the next level, individuals with high level understanding of emotional expressions are able to capture subtle emotional subtexts, understand how emotions relate to each other, and accept that emotional states shift with time, which increases self-understanding (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). At the highest level of the emotional intelligence hierarchy, individuals typically respond appropriately to theirs as well as others' emotions. Effective emotional management includes both the ability to be open to emotions and to exercise emotional restraint, depending on the demands of the situation.

### **Attachment and Emotional Intelligence**

A central position of attachment theory is that adults' attachment patterns are a reflection of their childhood attachment orientation (Fraley, 2002). For example, adults who reported being secure in their romantic relationships were more likely to describe their childhood relationships with parents as accepting and affectionate (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Moreover, early patterns of managing emotions typically persist throughout childhood and adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Clark, 1994). Secure individuals tend to utilize emotional management strategies that lower distress and enhance positive emotions (Mikulincer & Florian, 2001). In contrast, insecure individuals are more likely to use emotional management strategies that perpetuate negative emotions and increase distress.

Given that managing emotions is a key component of emotional intelligence, we can infer that secure individuals will likely demonstrate greater emotional intelligence

abilities than insecure individuals. There is limited research that has examined the relation of attachment security to global measures of emotional intelligence. However, several studies guide our understanding about the association of secure attachment to *perception, facilitation, understanding, and management* of emotions dimension of emotional intelligence (Feeney, 1995; Kafetsios, 2004; Magai, Distel, & Liker, 1995; Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995).

Research evidence supports the positive relation of secure attachment to emotional *perception*. Compared to their less secure counterparts, securely attached individuals are more accurate in the perception and decoding of facial expressions of negative emotions (Magai et al., 1995) and the perception of non-verbal messages from their partners (Feeney, Noller, & Callan, 1994; Kafetsios, 2004). Secure individuals also have demonstrated the capacity to access negative emotional memories without being overwhelmed, which is a central skill related to *facilitating* and *understanding* emotions (Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995). Finally, secure individuals report higher levels of *managing* emotions than their less secure peers, including the ability to regulate negative feelings (Feeney, 1995) and avoid negative emotion bias (Magai et al., 1995). Taken together, these findings suggest that securely attached college students are likely to demonstrate higher levels of emotional intelligence capacities than their less securely attached peers. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that among college students, secure attachment will be positively related to emotional intelligence. Although several studies have investigated the link between attachment style and different emotion regulation-related components, there is limited research that directly examines the



relationship between secure attachment and global measures of emotional intelligence (Kim, 2005).

### **Attachment and Career Indecision**

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) highlights the significant value of secure relationships with parents in mastering developmental tasks throughout the life span, particularly in times of stress and transition. During the career decision-making process, individuals may experience fear of commitment (Blustein, Prezioso, & Schultheiss, 1995), uncertainty about the future, or perfectionism about making a choice (Gati, Amir, & Landman, 2010). However, an internalized sense of security from supportive parental relationships is likely to increase the ability to manage the anxiety and stress related to career choice and promote decision-making (Wright, Perrone-McGovern, Boo, & White, 2014).

Individuals who report secure attachment patterns are less likely than insecurely attached individuals to report career decision-making difficulties. For example, secure attachment was negatively related to career indecision among both U.S. college students and French adolescents (Emmanuelle, 2009; Tokar, Withrow, Hall, & Moradi, 2003). In an investigation with Iranian college students, secure attachment to mother also was negatively associated with career indecision (Mojgan, Abdul Kadir, Noah, & Hassan, 2013). These studies provide support for the provision that felt security to parents should promote career decision-making.

Although previous research has been conducted to examine the relation between parental attachment and career indecision among adolescents and college students, precisely how secure attachment and career indecision are related remains unclear. Thus,

the purpose of this study was to examine a theory-driven model that proposes emotional intelligence as a mediator of the relation of secure attachment to career indecision among college students.

### **Emotional Intelligence and Career Indecision**

Making a career decision often involves conflicting issues that generate anxiety such as selecting between ones' passions, considering the realities of the changing economy and managing the expectation of loved ones (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010). Anxiety is a debilitating negative emotion that often keeps students from seeking career counseling or researching career information (Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006), which in turn hinders students' ability to make career decisions (Fouad, 2007). Since intricate emotions and conflicts need to be dealt with in decision-making (Brown et al., 2003), it is reasonable to expect that individuals with higher emotional intelligence, will experience less career decision-making difficulties than their peers with lower levels of emotional intelligence.

In sum, during the career decision-making process, a higher level of emotional intelligence is likely to confer individuals the ability to manage their emotional dilemmas and address, rather than avoid career choice conflicts. Consistent with these views, among college students, greater emotional intelligence has been positively associated with students' awareness of their interests and values, their ability to communicate them during the career exploration process (Puffer, 2011). There is also evidence that emotional intelligence training may help reduce levels of career indecision. Following brief training, Italian college students showed increases in emotional intelligence and lower levels of career indecision (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011). These results suggest that

incorporating training in emotional intelligence, as part of career counseling interventions, may facilitate career decision-making among students experiencing persistent indecision

### **The Present Study**

Theoretical approaches and empirical evidence (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Florian, 2001) suggest that individuals with secure attachment orientations are generally skillful at using emotional management strategies that lower distress and increase positive mood. The ability to lower distress may facilitate career decision-making, as the process commonly causes an increase in anxious feelings. Empirical research has demonstrated that secure attachment is positively associated to emotional intelligence capacities (Mikulincer & Florian, 2001) and that higher levels of emotional intelligence are negatively associated to career indecision (Brown et al., 2003; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009). Considered collectively, attachment theory and empirical findings support the notion that the relation between secure attachment and career indecision may be mediated by emotional intelligence. Therefore, it was hypothesized that secure attachment to parents would be positively associated to emotional intelligence, and, in turn, higher levels of emotional intelligence would be negatively related to career indecision. In other words, the indirect negative relation of attachment security to career indecision through emotional intelligence would be statistically significant. To my knowledge, the current study is the first investigation of the indirect effect of emotional intelligence in the negative association between secure attachment and career indecision.

## Chapter III

### Research Design and Methodology

The present study utilized a correlational design to examine the interrelationships among secure attachment, emotional intelligence, and career indecision among college students. Information regarding the study's methodology is reported below, in the following order: (1) participants, (2) measures, (3) procedures, and (4) data analysis.

#### Participants

The participants in this study were 419 undergraduate students at a large southern university. Women comprised 86.4% ( $n = 362$ ) and men ( $n = 56$ ) comprised 13.4% of the sample; one individual did not report gender. Participants mean age was 21.73 years ( $SD = 4.92$ ). The ethnic distribution of participants was Hispanic ( $n = 132$ ; 31.5%), Asian ( $n = 112$ ; 26.7%), White ( $n = 101$ ; 24.1%), African American ( $n = 39$ ; 9.3%), mixed ( $n = 24$ ; 5.7%), and other ( $n = 11$ ; 2.6%). In terms of year in college, 19.6% of participants reported being a freshman, 23.6% a sophomore, 35.1% a junior, 21.2% a senior, and two individuals did not report their year in college. Participants' reported the following family of origin's SES distribution: poor/working ( $n = 155$ ; 37%), middle class ( $n = 175$ ; 41.8%), upper-middle class/wealthy ( $n = 88$ ; 21%).

#### Measures

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to provide information about age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

**Attachment.** The Inventory of Parent Attachment, a 28-item subscale of the Inventory of Parent and Parent Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), was used to assess the degree of parental attachment security that participants perceived.

Students were instructed to respond to the items as they related to the parent or parental figure who had “most influenced” them. Item responses occur on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“Never true”) to 5 (“Always true”). Participants’ scores were calculated by reverse-scoring the negatively worded items and then adding responses to the items to calculate a total attachment score. Higher scores on the IPPA scale indicate higher levels of perceived secure attachment to parents. The Inventory of Parent Attachment is comprised of three subscales labeled Trust, Communication and Alienation. Sample items from each subscale include, “My parents accept me as I am (Trust),” “I like to get my parents’ point of view on things I’m concerned about (Communication),” “My parents expect too much from me (Alienation).” Armsden and Greenberg (1987) reported an internal reliability coefficient of .86 to .91 for the subscales for the parent scale. The measure showed evidence of good validity, as scores were related in the expected direction to self-esteem and life satisfaction. The present study found a Cronbach’s alpha of .61 for the IPPA.

**Career Indecision.** The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ; Gati & Saka, 2001) is a 34-item measure of career indecision, based on Gati et al.’s (1996) taxonomy of career decision making difficulties. The questionnaire consists of three scales: (a) Lack of Readiness which includes items related to lack of motivation, indecisiveness, and beliefs regarding dysfunctional myths regarding careers, (b) Lack of Information about the career decision-making process, about the self, about occupations, and about the ways of obtaining information, (c) Inconsistent information which has items associated with unreliable information, internal conflicts, and external conflicts. Items responses occur on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“does not describe

me”) to 9 (“describes me well”). At the end of the measure, respondents rate the overall severity of their difficulties in making a career decision and report any additional difficulties that prevent them from making a career decision. A total career indecision score was computed by calculating the mean of the scale’s 34 items. Sample items include, “I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know what factors to take into consideration,” “It is usually difficult for me to make decisions,” and “I find it difficult to make a career decision because people who are important to me (such as parents or friends) do not agree with the career options I am considering.” Previous studies have shown internal consistency of 0.85 (Di Fabio et al., 2013) and test-retest reliability of 0.80 (Gati et al., 1996) for the scale’s total score. This measure shared concurrent validity with the Career Decision Self-Efficacy scale-Short Form (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010; Gati et al., 1996). The scale had a high level of internal consistency with the current sample, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95.

**Emotional Intelligence.** The Assessing Emotions Scale (AES; Schutte, Malouff, & Bhuller, 2009) is a 33-item measure of emotional intelligence, based on the three branch model of Salovey and Mayer (1990). A factor analysis suggests a one-factor solution of 33 items. This one-factor solution assesses an individual's self-reported abilities of a) appraisal, expression of emotion, b) regulation of emotion, and c) utilization of emotion in solving problems. Sample items include, "I can tell how other people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice," "I know why my emotions change," and "I help other people feel better when they are down." Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“*Strongly disagree*”) to 5 (“*Strongly agree*”). Scores were calculated by summing the items, producing a single total score for the

measure. Previous studies have shown internal consistencies between .87 and .91 and a test-retest reliability of .78, over a 2-week time period for the scale's total score. This measure shares convergent validity with measures of attention to feelings and clarity of feelings (Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & McKenney, 2004; Gignac, Palmer, Manocha, & Stough, 2005). The scale had a high level of internal consistency with the current sample, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

### **Procedures**

This study was approved by the University of Houston's institutional review board. Students were recruited through in-class visits as well as the SONA online research system. The study was described in SONA as an examination of career indecision, emotions, and parental relationships in college students. Upon registering for the study via SONA, participants were directed to complete an online questionnaire via, the surveying site, Qualtrics. They read an online informed consent document explaining the risks and benefits of participating, as well as the option to not participate or withdraw their participation. If the participant provided consent to participate, they could take the survey. After completing the survey, students received 1 credit hour of SONA which could be transferred to extra credit for a course of their choice.

### **Data Analysis**

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine bivariate correlations between sociodemographic variables (including age, gender, and year in college) and career indecision to identify potential covariates to control for. A correlational analysis was also used to examine the bivariate associations between each of the three primary variables of the study: attachment, emotional intelligence, and career indecision. It was expected that;

- (a) secure attachment would be positively associated to emotional intelligence and that
- (b) emotional intelligence would be negatively associated to career indecision.

To test the hypothesis that emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between secure attachment and career indecision, bootstrapped bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals of the indirect effect was calculated with the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). The estimations construct a 95% confidence interval for effect sizes of direct and indirect effects, and the results are considered significant if zero does not fall within the range of the confidence interval.



## Chapter IV

### Results

As can be seen in Table 1, preliminary analyses examined bivariate correlations between sociodemographic variables (including age, gender, and year in college) and career indecision. Results indicated that age was negatively related to career indecision; therefore, age was controlled for in the mediation model. As predicted, correlational analysis also revealed that attachment was positively associated to emotional intelligence. Furthermore, emotional intelligence was negatively related to career indecision.

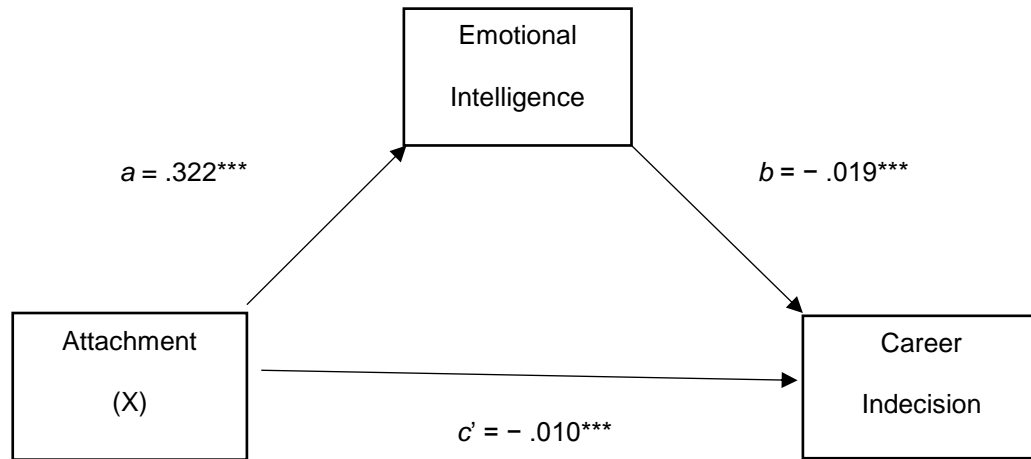
Table 1  
*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 336)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>M</i>	21.73	1.89	2.6	99.03	123.40	3.98
<i>SD</i>	4.92	0.32	1.04	21.14	17.23	1.55
1. Age	1	-.035	.474**	-.012	.062	-.181**
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>		1	.052	-.030	.032	.025
3. Year in college <sup>b</sup>			1	-.031	.060	.001
4. Attachment				1	.393**	-.225**
5. Emotional Intelligence					1	-.288**
6. Career Indecision						1

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Gender: 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*. <sup>b</sup>Year in college: 1 = *freshman*, 2 = *sophomore*, 3 = *junior*, 4 = *senior*. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . Range of scores: Attachment = 80 - 140, EI = 33 - 165, Career Indecision = 0.97 - 4.83.

Results indicated that, controlling for age, the indirect effect of emotional intelligence in the influence of attachment to career indecision was statistically significant. As can be seen in Figure 1, participants who reported higher attachment showed higher emotional intelligence ( $a = 0.322$ ), and participants with higher emotional intelligence scores reported less career indecision ( $b = -0.019$ ). A bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect ( $ab = -0.006$ ) based on 5,000

bootstrap samples was entirely below zero (-0.102 to -0.0037). Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant.



*Figure 1.* Mediation Model

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent emotional intelligence mediated the relation of secure attachment to career indecision among college students. Previous research has suggested that secure attachment is positively related to emotional intelligence (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Florian, 2001) and that emotional intelligence is negatively associated to career indecision (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Di Fabio et al., 2015). Therefore, it was hypothesized that secure attachment to parents would be positively associated to emotional intelligence, and, in turn, higher levels of emotional intelligence would be negatively related to career indecision. In short, it was predicted that the indirect negative relation of secure attachment to career indecision through emotional intelligence would be statistically significant.

Preliminary analyses indicated that, consistent with previous literature, secure attachment was positively associated to emotional intelligence and negatively associated to career indecision. Emotional intelligence was also negatively related to career indecision. Furthermore, age was negatively correlated to career indecision, but gender and year in college showed no relation to career indecision.

Results from the mediation analysis supported the study's hypothesis: controlling for age, attachment was associated to career indecision through its effect on emotional intelligence. Specifically, attachment positively predicted emotional intelligence, and, in turn, emotional intelligence was negatively related to career indecision. These results align with previous research that suggest that secure attachment is positively associated to

emotional intelligence (Mikulincer & Florian, 2001), and, in turn, emotional intelligence is a protective factor against career indecision (Di Fabio et al., 2015).

The ability to acknowledge and manage emotions has recently received more attention in the career development literature (Di Fabio et al., 2015; Di Fabio & Blustein, 2010; Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003), which typically has emphasized the role of conative processes in decision making. However, researchers have found that there are many emotion laden factors to consider when deciding on a career. For instance, one must find a balance between one's interests, expectations of others, and the realities of the vocational world (Brown et al., 2003). Furthermore, in today's global economy, emotional awareness is key to successfully adapt and navigate through the ever-changing occupational landscape. Since complex emotions are involved in decision-making, individuals with high EI may be less likely to feel overwhelmed and crippled by indecision problems. In contrast, individuals with low EI may present with career decision-making difficulties related to internal conflicts, which stem from difficulty in compromising important factors that may be incompatible to each other.

The results of the study contribute to the recent literature that highlights the interpersonal (Whiston et al., 2004) and affective perspectives (Gati et al., 2010) of career development. Attachment and emotional intelligence are of interest because maintaining relationships and managing emotions are important human needs that are linked with mastering vital developmental tasks (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) such as career decision-making. Furthermore, the indirect influence of attachment on career indecision through its effect on emotional intelligence supports the theoretical relationship among the variables that has been inferred from previous studies.

The association among attachment, emotional intelligence, and career indecision suggests that intervention targeted at college students struggling with career indecision might want to address issues of parental attachment. Career counselors can use brief attachment style questionnaires to assess clients' attachment orientations. Since attachment styles usually transfer to how clients interact with people around them currently, having knowledge about their attachment styles can provide valuable information about how they are or are not seeking potentially helpful social support resources during the career decision-making process. For example, an insecurely attached client may be overly anxious about meeting a career counselor and hesitate to pursue career services on campus. In addition, insecure individuals tend to have difficulty interacting with peers and faculty, many of whom can be important interpersonal resources. Therefore, it would be important for the counselor to assist the client to establish new re-attachment experiences by providing psychoeducation on interpersonal skills and allowing the client to practice these skills in a safe environment.

In addition, assessing a client's level of emotional intelligence might be instrumental, since emotional intelligence appears to be one of the pathways that explains the relationship between attachment and career indecision. Empirical findings suggest that emotional intelligence is a teachable skill (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011) that can be improved through training. Therefore, career interventions that incorporate emotional intelligence training may be effective in resolving career indecision difficulties. One of the first steps in strengthening emotional intelligence is to become aware of one's own feelings. For example, the use of "self-awareness" homework exercises, in which clients are asked to keep a log of their feelings may be a first step in helping clients

recognize and regulate their emotions. Once clients are better able to manage their anxiety related to making a major life decision, they will be more effective in focusing on the cognitive skills required in career decision-making. Furthermore, interventions such as bio-feedback and deep breathing exercises may increase emotional regulation and decrease stress and anxiety related to career indecision. In sum, knowing that attachment and emotional intelligence may play a role in career indecision may be particularly important for counselors working with college students, as career decisions made at this stage have long-lasting influence on life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2002; Erdogan et al., 2012).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are some methodological limitations of this study which need to be noted. First, all variables were assessed by self-report measures; therefore, obtained findings may have been affected by subjective responding. The data on attachment reflected participants' perceptions of parental support. Future studies that examine parents' perception of support-given could provide a more comprehensive view of attachment experience. Similarly, the data on emotional intelligence reflected participants' self-reported perception of their emotion-related abilities, which may not have accurately captured participants' levels of emotional intelligence. The inclusion in future studies of performance-based measures and information from other sources would provide a more valid assessment of emotional intelligence.

Second, because most participants were women, findings may not generalizable to male college students. Future research should include a more equal distribution of male and females that would allow to explore potential gender differences in the relation of

attachment, emotional intelligence and depression. Lastly, this study used college students from a large southern university, therefore results may not extend to other age ranges or locations. Future research should examine the proposed mediation model with samples from other geographical regions. Despite these limitations, the current study adds to our understanding of the experience of college students from diverse backgrounds as they make important career-related decisions.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Table**



Table A2  
*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 336)*

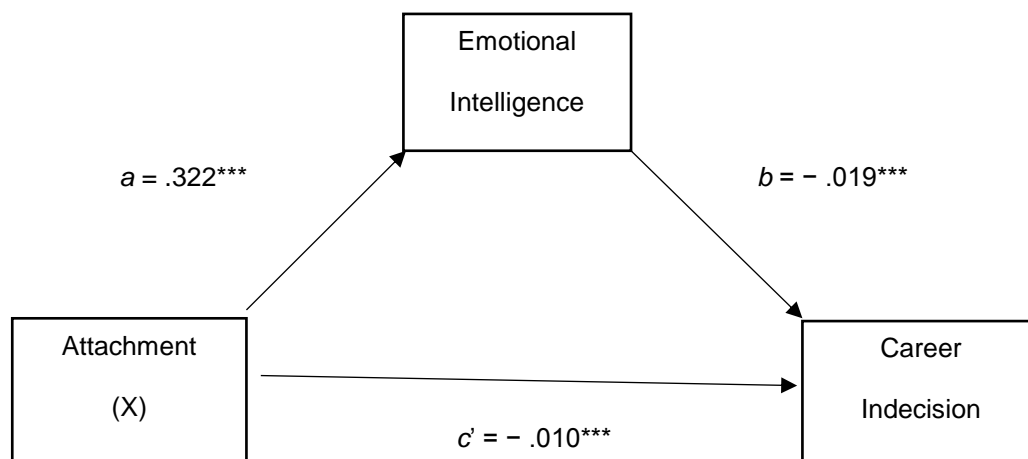
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>M</i>	21.73	1.89	2.6	99.03	123.40	3.98
<i>SD</i>	4.92	0.32	1.04	21.14	17.23	1.55
1. Age	1	-.035	.474**	-.012	.062	-.181**
2. Gender <sup>a</sup>		1	.052	-.030	.032	.025
3. Year in college <sup>b</sup>			1	-.031	.060	.001
4. Attachment				1	.393**	-.225**
5. Emotional Intelligence					1	-.288**
6. Career Indecision						1

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Gender: 1 = *male*, 2 = *female*. <sup>b</sup>Year in college: 1 = *freshman*, 2 = *sophomore*, 3 = *junior*, 4 = *senior*. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . Range of scores: Attachment = 80 - 140, EI = 33 - 165, Career Indecision = 0.97 - 4.83.

## **Appendix B**

### **Figure**

Figure A2. Mediation Model



## **Appendix C**

### **Survey**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
Institutional Review Boards  
APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

December 15, 2016 Alice

Phang aphanh@uh.edu

Dear Alice Phang:

On 12/15/2016, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Factors Associated with Career Decision-Making among College Students
Investigator:	Alice Phang
IRB ID:	4324
Funding/ Proposed Funding:	Name: 1. Unfunded
Award ID:	
Award Title:	
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SONA Recruitment Ad.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Research flyer.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Recruitment Script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Survey questionnaire, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• Citi training_Phang, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Recruitment email.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> <li>• Qualtrics survey link.pdf, Category: Study tools (ex: surveys, interview/focus group questions, data collection forms, etc.);</li> <li>• [new] Diss protocol_Phang 2.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Cover letter, Category: Consent Form;</li> </ul>
Review Category:	Exempt
Committee Name:	Not Applicable
IRB Coordinator:	<a href="#">Sandra Arntz</a>

DIVISION OF RESEARCH  
Institutional Review Boards

The IRB approved the study from 12/14/2016 to 12/13/2021 inclusive. Before 12/13/2021 or within 30 days of study closure, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a continuing review with required explanations. You can submit a continuing review by navigating to the active study and clicking Create Modification / CR.

If continuing review approval is not granted on or before 12/13/2021, approval of this study expires after that date. To document consent, use the consent documents that were approved and stamped by the IRB. Go to the Documents tab to download them.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Office of Research Policies, Compliance and Committees (ORPCC)

University of Houston, Division of Research

713 743 9204 [cphs@central.uh.edu](mailto:cphs@central.uh.edu)

<http://www.uh.edu/research/compliance/irb-cphs/>

## 1. Inventory of Parent Attachment

**Instructions:** These are questions about your relationship with your parents. Please respond to the items as they relate to the parent or parental figure who had “most influenced” you.

	<b>Almost never OR Never true</b>	<b>Seldo m true</b>	<b>Someti mes true</b>	<b>Often true</b>	<b>Almost always OR Always true</b>
1. My parents respect my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel my parents are successful parents.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I wish I had different parents.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My parents accept me as I am.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have to rely on myself when I have a problem to solve.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I like to get my parents' point of view on things I'm concerned about.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel it's no use letting my feelings show.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My parents sense when I'm upset about something.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Talking over my problems with my parents makes me feel ashamed or foolish.	1	2	3	4	5

10. My parents expect too much from me.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I get easily upset at home.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I get upset a lot more than my parents know about.	1	2	3	4	5
13. When we discuss things, my parents consider my point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My parents trust my judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My parents have their own problems, so I don't bother them with mine.	1	2	3	4	5
16. My parents help me to understand myself better.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I tell my parents about my problems and troubles.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I feel angry with my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I don't get much attention at home.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My parents encourage me to talk about my difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
21. My parents understand me.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I don't know whom I can depend on these days.	1	2	3	4	5



23. When I am angry about something, my parents try to be understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I trust my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
25. My parents don't understand what I'm going through these days.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I can count on my parents when I need to get something off my chest.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I feel that no one understands me.	1	2	3	4	5
28. If my parents know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.	1	2	3	4	5

## 2. The Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ)

This questionnaire's aim is to locate possible difficulties and problems related to making career decisions.

Have you considered what field you would like to major in or what occupation you would like to choose?

Yes / No

If so, to what extent are you confident of your choice?

Not confident at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very confident

Next, you will be presented with a list of statements concerning the career decision-making process. Please rate the degree to which each statement applies to you on the following scale:

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

Circle 1 if the statement does not describe you and 9 if it describes you well. Of course, you may also circle any of the intermediate levels. Please do not skip any question.

1. I know that I have to choose a career, but I don't have the motivation to make the decision now

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

2. Work is not the most important thing in one's life and therefore the issue of choosing a career doesn't worry me much.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

3. I believe that I do not have to choose a career now because time will lead me to the "right" career choice.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

4. It is usually difficult for me to make decisions.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

5. I usually feel that I need confirmation and support for my decisions from a professional person or somebody else I trust.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

6. I am usually afraid of failure.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

7. I like to do things my own way.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

8. I expect that entering the career I choose will also solve my personal problems.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

9. I believe there is only one career that suits me.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

10. I expect that through the career I choose I will fulfill all my aspirations.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

11. I believe that a career choice is a one-time choice and a life-long commitment.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

12. I always do what I am told to do, even if it goes against my own will.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

13. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know what steps I have to take.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

14. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know what factors to take into consideration.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

15. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I don't know how to combine the information I have about myself with the information I have about the different careers.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

16. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I still do not know which occupations interest me.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

17. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I am not sure about my career preferences yet (for example, what kind of a relationship I want with people, which working environment I prefer).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

18. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not have enough information about my competencies (for example, numerical ability, verbal skills) and/or about my personality traits (for example, persistence, initiative, patience).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

19. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know what my abilities and/or personality traits will be like in the future.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

20. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not have enough information about the variety of occupations or training programs that exist.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

21. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not have enough information about the characteristics of the occupations and/or training programs that interest me (for example, the market demand, typical income, possibilities of advancement, or a training program's prerequisites).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

22. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I don't know what careers will look like in the future.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

23. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know how to obtain additional information about myself (for example, about my abilities or my personality traits).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

24. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not know how to obtain accurate and updated information about the existing occupations and training programs, or about their characteristics.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

25. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I constantly change my career preferences (for example, sometimes I want to be self-employed and sometimes I want to be an employee).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

26. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I have contradictory data about my abilities and/or personality traits (for example, I believe I am patient with other people but others say I am impatient).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

27. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I have contradictory data about the existence or the characteristics of a particular occupation or training program.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

28. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I'm equally attracted by a number of careers and it is difficult for me to choose among them.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

29. I find it difficult to make a career decision because I do not like any of the occupation or training programs to which I can be admitted.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

30. I find it difficult to make a career decision because the occupation I am interested in involves a certain characteristic that bothers me (for example, I am interested in medicine, but I do not want to study for so many years).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

31. I find it difficult to make a career decision because my preferences cannot be combined in one career, and I do not want to give any of them up (e.g., I'd like to work as a freelancer, but I also wish to have a steady income).

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

32. I find it difficult to make a career decision because my skills and abilities do not match those required by the occupation I am interested in.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

33. I find it difficult to make a career decision because people who are important to me (such as parents or friends) do not agree with the career options I am considering and/or the career characteristics I desire.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

34. I find it difficult to make a career decision because there are contradictions between the recommendations made by different people who are important to me about the career that suits me or about what career characteristics should guide my decisions.

Does not describe me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Describes me well

Finally, how would you rate the degree of your difficulty in making a career decision?

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

### 3. The Assessing Emotions Scale (AES)

Instructions: Each of the following items asks you about your emotions or reactions associated with emotions. After deciding whether a statement is generally true for you, use the 5-point scale to respond to the statement.

There are no right or wrong answers. Please give the response that best describes you.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly agree
1. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others.	1	2	3	4	5
2. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Other people find it easy to confide in me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important.	1	2	3	4	5

7. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I expect good things to happen.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I like to share my emotions with others.	1	2	3	4	5
12. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I arrange events that make me happy.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I seek out activities that make me happy.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others.	1	2	3	4	5
17. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me.	1	2	3	4	5



18. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I know why my emotions change.	1	2	3	4	5
20. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I have control over my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I compliment others when they have done something well.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send.	1	2	3	4	5
26. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself.	1	2	3	4	5

27. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
28. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I help other people feel better when they are down.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I used good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice.	1	2	3	4	5
33. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do.	1	2	3	4	5

#### 4. Demographic Questions

Instructions: Indicate your information on the space provided or select the response that best applies to you.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender? Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your ethnicity?  
 American Indian or Alaska Native \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ African  
 American \_\_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino/a \_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or Other  
 Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_ Mixed/Biracial \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Were you an international student when you first enrolled at UH? Y/N
5. Did your parents immigrate to the United States? Y/N
6. What is your family's country of origin?
7. Currently your relationship status is:  
 Single (not dating) \_\_\_\_\_ Married (living together) \_\_\_\_\_ Married (separated)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Committed relationship (not married) \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is your major?
9. What is your classification?"?  
 Freshman \_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore \_\_\_\_\_ Junior \_\_\_\_\_ Senior \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is your cumulative GPA at UH? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How many credit hours are you currently enrolled in? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Which of the following best describes your social class when you were growing up?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ wealthy \_\_\_\_\_ upper or professional-middle class \_\_\_\_\_ middle-class  
 \_\_\_\_\_ working-class \_\_\_\_\_ low-income/poor
13. What is the highest level of education completed by your father (or father figure)?

Less than 8<sup>th</sup> grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Some high school \_\_\_\_\_  
 High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Special job training after high school \_\_\_\_\_  
 Some college \_\_\_\_\_  
 Community College graduate (Associates degree)  
 College/University graduate (4-year Bachelor's degree) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Graduate/professional school (e.g. masters, doctorate, law optometry medicine)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Don't know \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother (or your mother figure)?

Less than 8<sup>th</sup> grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Some high school \_\_\_\_\_  
 High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Special job training after high school \_\_\_\_\_  
 Some college \_\_\_\_\_  
 Community College graduate (Associates degree)  
 College/University graduate (4-year Bachelor's degree) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Graduate/professional school (e.g. masters, doctorate, law, optometry, medicine) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Don't know \_\_\_\_\_

15. Will you be the first in your family to graduate with a bachelor's degree from four year college or university?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you live on campus? Y/N

17. Whom do you live with off-campus?

By myself \_\_\_\_\_ With my parent(s)/guardian(s) \_\_\_\_\_ With a partner/spouse \_\_\_\_\_ With  
 relatives (other than parents or a spouse) \_\_\_\_\_ With  
 roommates \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

18. Please select the statement that best describes your career decision status from the following options:

- \_\_\_ I have made a career choice and feel satisfied with my choice.
- \_\_\_ I have made a career choice, but have doubts about my choice.
- \_\_\_ I have not made a career choice, I am undecided.