

HOMETOWN SIZE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL  
ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

by

Jessica Melander

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Psychology

Middle Tennessee State University

August 2018

Thesis Committee:

Mary Ellen Fromuth, Ph.D. - Chair

David B. Kelly, Ph.D. – Committee Member

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore whether rural students experience more emotional (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress) and social (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) adjustment difficulties than nonrural students. This study consisted of a sample of 99 participants (i.e., 22% were rural and 78% were nonrural; 34% male and 66% female). Participants completed a demographic form, the DASS-21, the UCLA Loneliness Scale, and the University Attachment Scale. Rural participants were compared to nonrural participants on their depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and university attachment ratings, and no statistically significant differences were found. The study also found no significant relationship between community size and first-generation status. The results of this study were not consistent with previous research (e.g., Durkin et al., 2003; Meng et al., 2013). The timing of the study (i.e., end of spring semester) may have influenced the results.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	v
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Adjustment to College.....	1
Factor Related to Emotional Adjustment of College Students.....	3
Factors Related to Social Adjustment of College Students.....	11
Acculturative Stress.....	15
Summary and Purpose of Study.....	21
Hypotheses.....	23
CHAPTER II: METHOD.....	25
Participants.....	25
Measures.....	25
Demographic form.....	25
Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales (DASS-21).....	27
UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3).....	28
University Attachment Scale.....	29
Procedure.....	30
CHAPTER III: RESULTS.....	31
CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION.....	37
REFERENCES.....	42
APPENDICES.....	54

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Demographic Characteristics.....	26
2. Overall Descriptive Statistics of Adjustment Measures.....	32
3. Gender Differences in Emotional and Social Adjustment.....	33
4. Hometown Size Differences in Emotional and Social Adjustment.....	34
5. Generational Status Differences in Emotional and Social Adjustment.....	36

## LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
A. Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board Approval Letter.....	55
B. Demographic Form.....	57
C. Informed Consent Form.....	59
D. Debriefing Form.....	61

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Adjustment to College**

In the United States, there are approximately 20 million people enrolled in some type of post-secondary education (Hussar & Bailey, 2016; United States Census Bureau, 2015), and over 3 million of those students are incoming full-time freshmen (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The transition to college may be difficult for many students due to their unfamiliarity with the expectations and responsibilities. During this transition, many students have to learn to adjust emotionally and socially to the obligations and responsibilities of college. Time management is an important skill that college students need to learn to be able to efficiently manage the demands of their academics, social lives, and personal needs. When preparing for the demands of college, incoming college students may inaccurately judge their ability to adjust to college (i.e., academically, socially, emotionally; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). This, in part, could be due to new college students not being fully aware of the stress associated with adjusting to college and, therefore, not being prepared to handle stressors when they arise.

According to the American College Health Association (ACHA, 2016), the most frequently reported factors that negatively affect college students' academic performance were stress, anxiety, sleep difficulties, and depression. Research also has found the following to be common stressors amongst college students: academic performance

(Beiter et al., 2015; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Shaikh & Deschamps, 2006), pressure to succeed (Beiter et al., 2015; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014), financial issues (Beiter et al., 2015; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010), quality of sleep, overall health, post-graduation plans (Beiter et al., 2015; Shaikh & Deschamps, 2006), relationships with friends and family (Beiter et al., 2015; Johnson, Gans, Kerr, & LaValle, 2010; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008), body image, and self-esteem (Beiter et al., 2015). How students are able to cope with the stressors associated with college can influence their overall adjustment to college. College students who do not cope with the stress of college are more likely to have difficulties adjusting to college compared to students who do cope with the stress (Johnson et al., 2010).

Rural college students, in particular, may be at an increased risk for experiencing maladjustment to college due to additional factors that may negatively impact their ability to adjust to college. There are many ways rural has been defined. One example would be a community being considered rural when its population is less than 10,000 (Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 2010). Rural adults have lower rates of obtaining a college degree compared to urban adults (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2015). The USDA (2017) estimated that rural adults fall behind urban adults by 14% in attaining a bachelor's degree. There has been a recent increase, however, in rural adults attending college compared to previous generations (USDA, 2015). The USDA (2017) estimated that the population of rural adults who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher had grown from 15% in 2000 to 19% in 2015. This rise in rural adults attending college and obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher suggests that a significant

proportion of rural college students are first-generation students. When rural college students are compared to their urban peers, they are less likely to have parents who have completed college (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012). Further, the cost of college and the associated costs (e.g., housing, books, groceries) are often the responsibility for many rural (Schultz, 2004) and first-generation (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012) college students. This financial responsibility may generate additional stress for rural (Schultz, 2004) and first-generation (Aspelmeier et al., 2012) students. Rural college students also are more likely to leave home (Garasky, 2002) and live on campus (Ames, Wintre, Pancer, Pratt, & Birnie-Lefcovitch, 2014) than their urban peers. Finally, rural college students may have to adjust and adapt to being a part of a large university system, which may lead to the experience of acculturative stress. The purpose of the current study was to evaluate whether rural college students experienced more emotional and social adjustment difficulties than their nonrural peers.

### **Factors Related to Emotional Adjustment of College Students**

College students have a lot of responsibilities, both in the college setting and their personal lives. These responsibilities often are accompanied by pressure to succeed and to do the best work possible, which can create additional stress for college students (Beiter et al., 2015; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). Emotional adjustment is one's ability to manage his or her stress in healthy ways and not let the stress create emotional turmoil (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). College students who have difficulty managing the stress associated with college are at a higher risk for experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Mahmoud, Staten,



Hall, & Lennie, 2012). The ACHA (2016) found that approximately 86% of students reported feeling overwhelmed by everything they had to do. Additionally, the ACHA (2016) found that college students reported experiencing symptoms of many mental health disorders. For example, approximately 17% reported symptoms of anxiety, 8.7% reported symptoms of panic attacks, and 14% reported symptoms of depression (ACHA, 2016). Research has examined various factors that may be related to college students' emotional adjustment.

College students' ability to emotionally adjust to college has been found to be related to certain personality characteristics (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Beck, Taylor, & Robbins, 2003; Fernández-González, González-Hernández, & Trianes-Torres, 2015; Pritchard, Wilson, & Yamnitz, 2007). Beck et al. (2003) found that students who have highly independent (e.g., mostly self-reliant) or highly dependent (e.g., mostly reliant on others) personality characteristics were more likely to report the presence of depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that students who have a balance of independent and dependent personality characteristics were more likely to be emotionally well-adjusted to college. Additionally, studies have found a positive correlation between students with optimistic personalities and their emotional adjustment to college (Fernández-González et al., 2015; Pritchard et al., 2007). For example, students with an optimistic personality were less likely to report experiencing negative moods (Pritchard et al., 2007) and stress (Fernández-González et al., 2015) than students with a pessimistic personality. Lastly, Aspelmeier et al. (2012) found that emotional adjustment outcomes differed depending on internal and external motivations to attend and graduate from college among first-

generation students. When compared to students who were externally motivated (e.g., money), first-generation students who were internally motivated (e.g., self-accomplishment, self-achievement) were less likely to report emotional maladjustment (Aspelmeier et al., 2012).

Demographic factors also are related to emotional adjustment to college. For example, age (Chen et al., 2013; Mahmoud et al., 2012) and class level (Beiter et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2013; Mahmoud et al., 2012) also have been found to be related to students' emotional adjustment to college, but the research is mixed. In a sample of college students in China, Chen et al. (2013) found that students over the age of 25 years and underclassmen (i.e., freshman and sophomore college students) were at a greater risk of experiencing symptoms of depression than upperclassmen and students under the age of 26 years old. In contrast, in a university sample from the southeastern region of the United States, Mahmoud et al. (2012) found that rates of reported depressive symptoms were higher for sophomores and 18 to 19 year olds compared to other college-year levels and older students. Conversely, Beiter et al. (2015) found, in a sample of university students from the midwest region of the United States, that upperclassmen (i.e., juniors and seniors) reported higher levels of stress than lowerclassmen. These mixed results may be explained by what aspect of emotional adjustment the study measured. Chen et al. (2013) and Mahmoud et al. (2012) both examined reported depressive symptoms, whereas Beiter et al. (2015) examined reported stress levels. The location of the study also may have impacted the study's results. Chen et al. (2013) had a sample from China,

and Mahmoud et al. (2012) had a sample from the United States. The different cultural expectations for education may influence the results of a study.

The transition from living in their hometown to living in a new city can be difficult for many college students. Among high school students who took the SAT in 2010, Niu (2015) found that nearly a quarter of the students attended out-of-state schools. The research has been consistent about the negative correlation between the distance the college was from the students' hometown and their emotional adjustment (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Williams & Luo, 2010). Students who attend out-of-state universities tend to experience more emotional adjustment difficulties, such as homesickness, depression, anxiety, and higher levels of stress, compared to students who attend in-state universities (Kazantzis & Flett, 1998; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Williams & Luo, 2010). Due to the differences between their rural hometown and the urban setting they are residing in (e.g., small population versus large population), rural students may experience similar increased emotional adjustment difficulties as students who attend out-of-state universities.

Leaving home and living on one's own also have been associated with additional stressors that could impact a student's emotional adjustment. The stressors associated with living on one's own are influenced by whether the student lives on (e.g., noise levels, sharing a room) or off campus (e.g., commuting, financial responsibility). The research is mixed about whether emotional maladjustment is associated with living on or off campus. For example, in a qualitative study, Shaikh and Deschamps (2006) found stress to be a theme among college students living on campus. Characteristics that were

associated with the stress of living on campus were perceived unsatisfactory living conditions and high noise levels (Shaikh & Deschamps, 2006). They also found that students living on campus reported experiencing feelings of sadness and loneliness. Beiter et al. (2015) found results that contradict these findings, such that living on campus is associated with better emotional adjustment compared to living off campus.

Despite the research examining various factors related to emotional adjustment, there is limited research specifically focused on rural college students. The available research has suggested that rural students report higher stress levels (Durkin, Bascomb, Turnbull, & Marley, 2003) and report more depressive symptoms (Meng, Li, Loerbroks, Wu, & Chen, 2013) compared to their urban counterparts. Rural students also were more likely to live on their own, whereas their urban counterparts were more likely to live with their families (Durkin et al., 2003). Rural students having higher levels of stress (Durkin et al., 2003) and more depressive symptoms (Meng et al., 2013) than their urban peers, could be related to rural students having to worry about how to afford living on their own and having less direct support from family (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010).

Rural, especially first-generation rural students, may have additional difficulties due to feeling guilty about going to college (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli, 2015; Gabriel, 2006). Family achievement guilt is more likely to be experienced by first-generation students than students who had family members who attended college (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Family achievement guilt is the experience of guilty feelings for having greater achievements than the members of one's family (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Family achievement guilt has been found to be

positively correlated with reported depressive symptoms among first-generation students (Covarrubias et al., 2015). Rural students, especially those who also are first-generation students, may experience similar feelings of family achievement guilt. In a qualitative study, Gabriel (2006) found that students who left their rural hometowns for an urban setting reported feelings of guilt and shame because their family perceived them as believing that they are better than the people from their rural community and as trying to distance themselves from the rural lifestyle. These guilty feelings rural students may experience could impact their relationship with their parents.

Students who have a positive relationship with their parents may be able to emotionally adjust better than students who do not have a positive relationship (Chen et al., 2013; Melendez & Melendez, 2010). Students who have a positive relationship with their parents and perceive their parents as supportive tend to be able to effectively manage their emotions when adjusting to college (Melendez & Melendez, 2010). In contrast, students who have a poor relationship with their parents are more likely to experience depressive symptoms (Chen et al., 2013). The majority of rural, first-generation college students have reported that their parents provided them with emotional support, but were not able to provide knowledge about the college process (Means, Clayton, Conzelmann, Baynes, & Umbach, 2016; Tieken, 2016). First-generation college students may not perceive their families as supportive due to their family's lack of understanding about the process of getting into college (Means et al., 2016; Tieken, 2016; Wilkins, 2014), about their college aspirations (Gabriel, 2006; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010), and about how much of a time commitment college is (Gabriel, 2006). Chen et al. (2013)

found that there was a negative correlation between parental education and reported depressive symptoms. Consequently, not being able to go to their families for advice about the college process may create additional stress for first-generation students (Schultz, 2004; Tieken, 2016; Wilkins, 2014), which may lead many of these students to find alternative sources for support. For example, the results of a study of first-generation and financially disadvantaged students suggested that relationships with faculty and peers had a greater impact on positive college adjustment (i.e., academic and social) than the support provided by their families (Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, & Pohlert, 2003).

Other people in students' lives, such as high school teachers or coaches (referred to as natural mentors), have been found to help students adjust emotionally (Hurd, Tan, & Loeb, 2016; Means et al., 2016). Hurd et al. (2016) examined how having a natural mentor may help decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety between the first-year students' first and second semesters of college. The study found that students who had a natural mentor before starting college were more likely to have a decrease in depressive and anxiety symptoms in the second semester compared to their baseline levels during their first semester and compared to students who did not have a natural mentor (Hurd et al., 2016). In a qualitative study, Means et al. (2016) found that students reported that they talked to teachers and coaches for advice about college instead of their parents. For rural college students, natural mentors may provide the support their parents are unable to provide, such as information about the college process (Means et al., 2016).

In addition to natural mentors, peers may provide emotional support during the transition to college and for the stressors associated with college (Azmitia, Syed, &

Radmacher, 2013; Li, Albert, & Dwelle, 2014; Swenson et al., 2008). Emotional adjustment difficulties are common among college students who report feeling socially isolated from their peers (Li et al., 2014; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Swenson et al., 2008). Symptoms of emotional maladjustment, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, have been negatively related to having a roommate or being involved with campus organizations, regardless of living on or off campus (Mahmoud et al., 2012). For example, a college student who lives alone and does not participate in any campus activities is more likely to experience emotional maladjustment (Mahmoud et al., 2012). Having a roommate or friends within an organization can provide additional emotional support because these peers have either gone through or currently are going through the transition into college and can share their experiences (Azmitia et al., 2013).

How students are able to cope with the stress and the negative affect (i.e., depressive and anxiety symptoms) associated with college may be related to how they socially adjust to college. College students who can effectively identify their emotions, especially during stressful periods, tend to find it easier to adjust socially to college (Johnson et al., 2010). Chung and Gale (2006) also found that college students who reported fewer depressive symptoms often reported having better social adjustment to college. Rural college students often reported that they were unaware of the importance of making new friends and connections in college and how these new relationships could help them to adjust to college (Schultz, 2004). Being unaware of the importance of a social support network may lead to difficulties adjusting socially to college.

### **Factors Related to Social Adjustment of College Students**

Moving to college is a transition marked by creating a new social network with peers and faculty (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Many students overestimate their ability to adjust socially to college, often as a result of not being aware of the social demands of college and the difficulties associated with creating a new social network (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Paul & Brier, 2001). Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) defined college social adjustment as “becoming integrated into the social life of college, forming a support network, and managing new social freedoms” (p. 281). A student’s ability to make new social connections with peers (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Swenson et al., 2008) and faculty (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994), while still maintaining connections with old friends (Swenson et al., 2008), can influence his or her social adjustment to college. Students who have experienced difficulties adjusting socially to college may experience feelings of loneliness (Wilkins, 2014; Williams & Luo, 2010), apprehension about interacting with peers and faculty (Zakahi, Jordan, Christophel, 1993), and friendsickness (i.e., longing for old friends after moving to a new place; Paul & Brier, 2001). The following factors have been found to be related to negative social adjustment in college: having limited interactions with peers and faculty, not being involved in campus-related activities, and mainly participating in solo activities (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014).

Loneliness is a common experience among college students, with approximately 61% of college students reporting feeling very lonely while attending college (ACHA, 2016). Among college students, feelings of loneliness have been found to be associated



with higher levels of stress (Shaikh & Deschamps, 2006) and difficulties with overall adjustment (Swenson et al., 2008). College students who experience loneliness tend to have a negative perception of their support system (Williams & Luo, 2010). Students who attend college far from home are more likely to perceive themselves as having less social support and as experiencing more loneliness when compared to peers who attend college close to home (Williams & Luo, 2010). Gabriel (2006) found in a qualitative study that students who attend college far from their hometowns, such as those from rural communities, may experience loneliness as a result of longing for familiar surroundings and faces. Students who left their rural hometowns for an urban setting were likely to feel isolated from their new peers because of differences in social class and culture (Gabriel, 2006).

Friendships can help students decrease feelings of loneliness (Oswald & Clark, 2003), as well as cope with stress associated with college (Swenson et al., 2008). College students who maintain friendships (i.e., new college friends and old high school friends) tend to have better social adjustment than students who do not (Oswald & Clark, 2003; Swenson et al., 2008). Old high school friends can provide a source of comfort and familiarity during the transition into college (Swenson et al., 2008), but it also is important for college students to make new college friends rather than be restricted to their old high school friends (Oswald & Clark, 2003). New college friends provide students with a larger, direct support system at college, thus leading to better social adjustment (Swenson et al., 2008).

Students may experience a phenomenon referred to as friendsickness, which is a longing for old friends after moving to a new place (Paul & Brier, 2001). Paul and Brier (2001) found that students who experienced friendsickness were more likely to have difficulty adjusting socially to college. They also found that students who experienced friendsickness were more likely to report having more precollege friends than new college friends, perceived themselves as not being accepted by peers, and as being socially isolated (Paul & Brier, 2001).

Students at greater risk for social adjustment difficulties are the students who are nervous about making new friends or networking with peers and faculty (Zakahi et al., 1993). Students who enter college concerned about making new social connections with peers and faculty may continue to have these feelings throughout the first year of attending college (Zakahi et al., 1993). Difficulties adjusting socially can negatively impact their ability to make new friends and to network with peers and faculty (Zakahi et al., 1993). Moving away from one's social network, which is the case for many rural students (Garasky, 2002), may increase the individual's risk for social maladjustment due to feeling anxious about having to create a new social network (Zakahi et al., 1993).

Although research has examined the importance of having friends and a social network in college, there is a lack of research specifically focused on rural college students. As previously mentioned, because many rural students are first-generation students (USDA, 2015), it is beneficial to review the research regarding first-generation students. Grant-Vallone et al. (2003) found that among first-generation and financially disadvantaged students, peer support was positively related to social adjustment.

Additionally, in a qualitative study of first-generation, male college students, Wilkins (2014) found that the students frequently reported the benefits of forming new friendships in college. These new friendships created broader social networks, led to additional resources, and provided information related to college and future career aspirations (Wilkins, 2014). The benefits of creating new friendships in college may be helpful for rural college students, as well.

As mentioned earlier, feeling socially isolated from peers has been associated with emotional maladjustment (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Swenson et al., 2008), and involvement in campus activities and roommates can help alleviate these feelings (Mahmoud et al., 2012). Students who have a social network may find it easier to become involved in activities and organizations because they already have peers and role models who were involved in similar activities (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). Consequently, students who do not have an established social network or are unfamiliar with the campus may find it difficult to get involved in activities and organizations (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014).

For rural students it may be advantageous to live on campus because of the proximity to campus activities and other students who also may be unfamiliar with the college. For example, in a study with a sample of first-year students attending Canadian universities, Ames et al. (2014) found students from a rural background were more likely to live on campus and that rural students who lived on campus had better social adjustment than the students who commuted to campus (Ames et al., 2014).

Developing new social networks and becoming involved in campus activities and organizations can be difficult for any student, but can be even more difficult for those

students who are not accustomed to the college culture. Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found the students at the highest risk for experiencing homesickness were the students who were unfamiliar with the language used on campus and were unfamiliar with the cultural norms of the college they were attending. Most rural college students have to leave the familiarity of their home to attend college in a large city and encounter an unfamiliar social setting (Yiquan & Yijie, 2015).

### **Acculturative Stress**

Part of the college adjustment process is the transition from life at home to life at college. The college culture is often different from many students' home culture, especially for students who live on campus. This process of transitioning to a different culture is referred to as acculturation (Berry, 2006; Landrine & Klonoff, 1994).

Acculturation includes learning to adjust and adapt to the values, beliefs, and practices of the new culture (Berry, 2006; Landrine & Klonoff, 1994), which for this study would be the urban, college culture.

As mentioned earlier, there has been a rise in rural adults attending college (USDA, 2015), and the majority of these students have left their rural communities to attend college (Garasky, 2002). It is important to understand why rural students left the familiarity of their rural communities to assimilate to the urban culture. The most common reasons for leaving their rural community were because of the lack of career choices, opportunities, and financial advancement (Freeman, 2017; Gabriel, 2006; Means et al., 2016; Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003; Walker & Raval, 2017). Other reasons for leaving included exploring new possibilities and pursuing dreams (Gabriel, 2006;

Walker & Raval, 2017). Many rural students who left their rural community perceived their community as lacking in diversity (e.g., beliefs, ethnicity, interests) (Walker & Raval, 2017) and believed that the way to achieve their life goals was to move to a more urban setting (Pretty et al., 2003).

Acculturative stress is experienced when the student has difficulty adjusting to the culture of his or her campus. The experience of acculturative stress has been found to be correlated with poor psychological adjustment, such as depression (Castillo et al., 2015; Crockett et al., 2007; Mejía & McCarthy, 2010; Wang, Schwartz, & Zamboanga 2010), anxiety (Crockett et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2010; Zvolensky, Jardin, Garey, Robles, & Sharp, 2016), and low self-esteem (Buddington, 2002; Wang et al., 2010). In a sample of Mexican-heritage migrant farmworkers, Mejía and McCarthy (2010) found that migrant-background college students reported more depressive symptoms than their nonmigrant peers.

Students from rural communities may experience acculturative stress when they attend a large university. In a qualitative study, Schultz (2004) found that many rural students reported that they underestimated the difference between the college environment and that of their hometowns. The study noted that rural college students lacked the experience and knowledge about large cities, college campuses, and the diversity of the population (Schultz, 2004). Despite the research by Schultz (2004), research on rural college students' experience of acculturative stress is very limited. In related research, first-generation college students, when compared to nonfirst-generation students, were more likely to report experiencing academic acculturative stress because

of their families' lack of understanding of the college experience and their families' inability to prepare them for the responsibilities and pressures associated with college (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Durón, 2013). Most of the literature regarding acculturation and acculturative stress in the college setting concerns minority and international students. Although the literature does not directly relate to rural college students' acculturative stress experiences, the intention of including the available research was to address the impact acculturative stress can have on college students' emotional and social adjustment to college.

One way in which students may experience acculturative stress is when they perceive themselves as being different from the majority of their peers. Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) compared the differences in perceived discrimination and experience of homesickness amongst international students and students from the United States. The findings suggested that international students were more likely to perceive themselves as being discriminated against compared to students from the United States. The study also found that English proficiency was negatively correlated with students' perception of discrimination from faculty and peers. Further, students from Europe perceived less discrimination than students from other nations (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). These findings suggest that students who have physical characteristics of belonging to a minority group and who speak English with a thick accent are more likely to perceive themselves as being discriminated against by peers and faculty (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Although many students from rural communities do not have physical characteristics that may distinguish them from their peers, they may still perceive themselves as being different

due to differences in experiences, customs, and slang used (Doran & Littrell, 2013; Gabriel, 2006; Schultz, 2004). For example, in a qualitative study, Dunstan and Jaeger (2016) found that rural, Appalachian college students reported they often perceived that their peers and faculty viewed them negatively because of their accent.

Rural students' adjustment to college may be associated with how they assimilate to the urban college environment. In a qualitative study, Xiulan (2015) interviewed rural college students from two large universities in China to examine how these students were able to assimilate to the urban culture and the challenges they encountered. The study found that rural college students were aware of and acknowledged that there were differences between themselves and their urban peers, but, at the same time, they were confident in their abilities (Xiulan, 2015). The study also found that rural students fell on a continuum of how they assimilated into the urban culture. For example, some students isolated themselves, some surrounded themselves with other rural students, and some tried to hide their rural background and conform to the urban culture (Xiulan, 2015). Dunstan and Jaeger (2016) found similar results with rural, Appalachian college students in the United States. They found that some students were drawn to other students who had similar sounding accents, whereas other students avoided students who had stronger accents than their own. They also found that students with strong accents often tried to speak similarly to their peers to fit in better. Rural students who have difficulty assimilating to the urban culture may perceive themselves as not belonging to their college and develop feelings of homesickness (Doran & Littrell, 2013).

Students may experience homesickness when they are adjusting to a new culture, which, in turn, can lead to emotional turmoil (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). Homesickness is the result of a yearning to return to one's familiar culture, language, and customs, as well as, to be with family and old friends (Akhtar & Kröner-Herwig, 2015; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Rural college students may experience homesickness because they are attending a college in an environment they are unfamiliar with and among people who do not understand their life experiences nor their values (Gabriel, 2006). Rural students also may not understand the slang used by their peers and vice versa (Schultz, 2004). Additionally, rural students were at an increased risk for experiencing homesickness when they had a close relationship with their family (Kazantzis & Flett, 1998).

Adjusting to a new culture can be difficult and can become even more difficult when the student experiences opposing pressures to acculturate and not to acculturate. For example, rural college students may be pressured to adapt to the customs of the urban culture, while being pressured to maintain the customs and values of their rural background. Several studies have examined how pressure to acculturate and pressure to not acculturate to the new culture can be related to the student experiencing emotional maladjustment. Wang et al. (2010) examined how pressures for and against acculturating to the American culture impacted Cuban American college students' emotional well-being. The study found that Cuban American college students who were more likely to have emotional difficulties, such as depressive and anxiety symptoms and a low self-esteem, were those who were experiencing pressure against acculturating (Wang et al., 2010). The study also found that pressure to acculturate was related to internalizing



symptoms (i.e., depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms). In a similar study with a sample of Latino college students, Castillo et al. (2015) found that students who felt pressured to be proficient in speaking English or Spanish, as well as pressured not to acculturate to the American culture, had a higher risk of experiencing symptoms of depression compared to those students who did not experience this pressure. Both these studies provide evidence about how experiencing both the pressure to and the pressure against acculturation can have a negative impact on a college student's emotional adjustment (Castillo et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2010).

How students perceive their social support and peer acceptance may be related to how acculturative stress impacts rural students' adjustment to college. For example, Crockett et al. (2007) found that when experiencing acculturative stress, Mexican American college students who perceived themselves as having little social support had a greater risk for developing symptoms of anxiety or depression. Similarly, in a study of Latino undergraduates, Llamas and Ramos-Sánchez (2013) found that students who do not feel accepted by peers of their own cultural heritage were more likely to experience difficulties adjusting to college. The result of that study suggested that peer support can be beneficial to a college student's overall adjustment. Although these studies did not focus on rural college students in their samples, they demonstrated that acculturative stress may be related to students' negative perception about their social support, which, in turn, may be related to college adjustment difficulties (Crockett et al., 2007; Llamas & Ramos-Sánchez, 2013).

In summary, rural students may have difficulty making new social connections because their interests and experiences are different from their urban counterparts (Yiquan & Yijie, 2015). Rural students may experience acculturative stress because they may lack the emotional support that social networks provide (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003). Despite the lack of research focused on rural students, the available research is helpful in understanding the relationship between social support and acculturative stress among college students.

### **Summary and Purpose of Study**

A growing number of rural adults are attending and attaining college degrees (USDA, 2017), resulting in many being first-generation students. Rural students are at an increased risk for experiencing emotional (Durkin et al., 2003; Meng et al., 2013) and social (Gabriel, 2006; Williams & Luo, 2010) adjustment difficulties while attending college. For example, rural students often report experiencing more stress (Durkin et al., 2003) and depressive symptoms (Meng et al., 2013) than their urban peers.

Stress, anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, and loneliness are all commonly reported problems among college students and are negatively related to their overall adjustment to college (ACHA, 2016). Students who are not prepared for the stress (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Mahmoud et al., 2012) and the social freedoms (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994) of college are at an increased risk for emotional and social difficulties. College students who are not able to manage the stress of college in a healthy way are at an increased risk for experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Mahmoud et al., 2012), and students who lack a social

support network (i.e., family, friends, natural mentors) are at an increased risk for experiencing loneliness (Williams & Luo, 2010). Rural students, especially those who are first-generation, may not have a strong social support system to help prepare them for the stress of college (Means et al., 2016; Tieken, 2016). Rural students also are more likely to not have family and old friends nearby for emotional support because they have moved away from their hometowns (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Williams & Luo, 2010).

Students' emotional and social adjustment to college may be related to one another (Azmitia et al., 2013; Chung & Gale, 2006; Johnson et al., 2010; Li et al., 2014; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Shaikh & Deschamps, 2006; Swenson et al., 2008). For example, research has found that students who feel socially isolated from their peers are at an increased risk for experiencing emotional maladjustment (Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Swenson et al., 2008). Social support networks can be used as a resource for coping with stress, such that they provide emotional support when a student is feeling overwhelmed with the stress of college (Swenson et al., 2008).

Acculturative stress may be related to rural college students' emotional and social adjustment to college. Acculturative stress is experienced when rural students have difficulty adjusting to the urban and college culture. Students who experience acculturative stress, when compared to students who do not, are more likely to report symptoms of depression (Castillo et al., 2015; Crockett et al., 2007) and anxiety (Crockett et al., 2007; Zvolensky et al., 2016), as well as, feelings of homesickness (Akhtar & Kröner-Herwig, 2015; Gabriel, 2006).

Despite the fact that research has examined many different factors that can affect college adjustment, there is limited research examining rural college students' adjustment (Ames et al., 2014; Durkin et al., 2003; Meng et al., 2013; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Xiulan, 2015). Although more rural adults are attending and obtaining a college degree than in the past, they still fall behind urban adults (USDA, 2015, 2017). Understanding the areas of difficulties for rural students can help determine what resources would be the most beneficial for these students to help them adjust to large university settings.

The available research on rural students mostly has been qualitative studies (Gabriel, 2006; Schultz, 2004; Xiulan, 2015; Yiquan & Yijie, 2015). These studies have helped in understanding the barriers these students have encountered and what resources were helpful for them as they moved from their rural hometowns to urban universities. Another limitation in the available research is that most of the studies on rural students have not used samples from the United States (Ames et al., 2014; Durkin et al., 2003; Yiquan & Yijie, 2015). Both of these limitations make it difficult to generalize the results to rural students in the United States. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare the emotional adjustment (i.e., stress levels, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms) and social adjustment (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) of rural student to nonrural university students using a sample from a large university in the United States.

### **Hypotheses**

1. It was hypothesized that rural college students would report more emotional (i.e., stress, depression, anxiety) and social (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) adjustment difficulties than nonrural college students.

2. It also was hypothesized that rural college students would report more emotional (i.e., stress, depression, anxiety) and social (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) adjustment difficulties than nonrural college students when first-generation status was controlled.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

Participants were recruited through the psychology research pool at a large university (Middle Tennessee State University [MTSU]) in the southeast region in the United States. Participants had to be at least 18 years old to participate in this study, and they had to be a freshman or sophomore. Participants consisted of 109 undergraduate students. Due to not meeting the inclusion criteria, 10 participants were excluded from the study. The final sample consisted of 34 men and 65 women. The majority of the sample were 18 to 21 years old (96%) and were freshmen (67%). The sample mostly consisted of Caucasian/White (47%) and African American/Black (36%) participants. As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of the sample was from a nonrural community (78%). Further, the majority of the participants had at least one parent who attended college (73% were nonfirst-generation). This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. See Appendix A.

#### **Measures**

**Demographic form.** Participants were given a demographic form to complete. See Appendix B. The form asked the participant about age (i.e., 18-21, 22-25, 26-29, 30 and over), gender (i.e., male, female, other/choose not to answer), and class level (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). There also was a question about the participants' hometown size (i.e., rural, nonrural). On the demographic form, rural was described as

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age (in years)		
18 to 21	95	96
22 to 25	3	3
26 to 29	1	1
Gender		
Men	34	34
Women	65	66
Ethnicity		
Caucasian/White	47	47
African American/Black	36	36
Other	16	16
Class Level		
Freshman	66	67
Sophomore	33	33
Hometown Size		
Rural	22	22
Nonrural	77	78
First-Generation Status		
Father's level of education		
Less than high school/GED	15	15
High school degree	23	23
Some college education	16	16
College degree	45	45
Mother's level of education		
Less than high school/GED	11	11
High school degree	12	12
Some college education	20	20
College degree	56	57
Overall		
First-generation	27	27
Nonfirst-generation	72	73

*Note.*  $N = 99$ .

having a hometown size less than 5,000 and the closest big city being one or more hours away, or having a hometown size less than 10,000. In practice, however, rural was defined as having a hometown size less than 10,000 (OMB, 2010). There also were questions about parental educational level (i.e., less than high school/GED, high school degree, some college education, college degree) to determine first-generation status.

**Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales (DASS-21).** The Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, as cited in Beiter et al., 2015) is a self-report questionnaire used to measure emotional turmoil (i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress). The DASS-21 consists of three scales to measure symptoms of depression and anxiety, and stress levels. This version of the scale consists of 21 statements with 7 statements per scale. Statements on the Depression scale include: *I couldn't seem to experience any positive feelings at all*. Statements on the Anxiety scale include: *I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy*. Statements on the Stress scale include: *I tended to over-react to situations*. Participants used a 4-point Likert scale (0 = *Did not apply to me at all*, 1 = *Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time*, 2 = *Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time*, 3 = *Applied to me very much, or most of the time*) to determine how much a statement is relatable to them in the last week. High scores indicate higher depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and higher stress levels.

Among undergraduate students, the DASS-21 appears to be reliable as evidenced by the high coefficient alphas for each of the scales (Osman et al., 2012). The depression scale had a coefficient alpha of .85, the anxiety scale had a coefficient alpha of .81, and the stress scale had a coefficient alpha of .88 (Osman et al., 2012). The DASS-21 also



appears to be valid among undergraduate students, as evidenced by being concurrently correlated with the Beck Depression Inventory-II ( $r = .80$ ), the Perceived Stress Scale ( $r = .73$ ), the Mood and Anxiety Symptom Questionnaire-90 ( $r = .73$ ), and the Beck Anxiety Inventory ( $r = .69$ ) (Osman et al., 2012).

**UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3).** The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996) is a 20-item self-report questionnaire used to measure subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Questions include: *How often do you feel that you lack companionship* and *How often do you feel outgoing and friendly*. Participants answered the questions using a 4-point frequency scale (1 = *Never*, 2 = *Rarely*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Often*) to rate how descriptive each statement is about them. Higher scores indicate greater symptoms of loneliness.

The psychometric properties of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) have been tested with a sample of college students (Russell, 1996). The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) has been shown to have a coefficient alpha of .92 among college students, indicating that the scale is very reliable among this population (Russell, 1996). There was a gender mean difference between male and female college students; female students scored lower than male students (Russell, 1996). The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) was highly, positively correlated with the NYU Loneliness Scale and the Differential Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996). The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) was found to be negatively correlated with social support scales (e.g., Social Support Questionnaire, Social Provisions Scale) (Russell, 1996).

**University Attachment Scale.** The University Attachment Scale (France, Finney, & Swerdzewski, 2010) is a 9-item self-report questionnaire used to measure the participants' subjective feelings of attachment and belongingness to their university. The University Attachment Scale (France et al., 2010) was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale (1994). The questionnaire was originally developed to assess college students' attachment and sense of belonging to a club or organization (Prentice et al., 1994). France et al. (2010) adapted the questionnaire to assess college students' attachment and sense of belonging to their university. To be relevant for the students participating in this study, the term James Madison University (JMU) was replaced with Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). Questions included: *How important is belonging to MTSU to you* and *How attached do you feel to MTSU*. Participants answered the questions using a 5-point Likert scale that was specific to each question to rate how descriptive each statement is about them. Lower scores indicate poor attachment and lack of feelings of belongingness to their university.

The University Attachment Scale was developed for use with college students (France et al., 2010). The University Attachment Scale has been shown to have coefficient alphas ranging from .87 to .71, indicating the scale is reliable among college students (France et al., 2010). The scale is positively correlated with the positive relationships with others (PRO) subscale on the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB) (France et al., 2010).

**Procedure**

Participants received informed consent forms and were allowed to ask the investigator any questions before signing. See Appendix C. After participants completed their informed consent forms, they were provided a packet with the demographic form, the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, as cited in Beiter et al., 2015), the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996), and the University Attachment Scale (France et al., 2010); all of these used a self-report format. After the participants completed the questionnaires, they returned them to the investigator and were given a debriefing form for their own personal records. See Appendix D. All the questionnaires were put in an envelope and the signed informed consent forms were placed in another envelope to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

### CHAPTER III

#### RESULTS

Descriptive statistics of the dependent variables (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, university attachment) included alpha coefficients, means, and standard deviations. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics. *T*-tests were computed for each of the dependent variables (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and university attachment) to determine if there were significant differences between genders. There were no significant differences between genders on the dependent variables (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and university attachment). See Table 3.

*T*-tests were computed to evaluate the first hypothesis that rural college students would report more emotional (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress) and social adjustment (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) difficulties than nonrural college students. There were no statistically significant differences on any of the dependent variables (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, university attachment). See Table 4.

A regression model would have been used to evaluate the second hypothesis, (i.e., rural college students would report more emotional and social adjustment difficulties than nonrural students when first-generation status is controlled). This analysis, however, was not computed because there were no statistically significant differences found between rural and nonrural students on any of the dependent variables (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, university attachment). A chi-square was computed to determine

Table 2

*Overall Descriptive Statistics of Adjustment Measures*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Emotional Adjustment			
Depression	4.94	4.91	.90
Anxiety	4.72	4.22	.81
Stress	7.03	3.75	.71
Social Adjustment			
Loneliness	42.75	13.35	.95
University Attachment	27.70	5.55	.79

*Note.*  $N = 99$ . Depression, anxiety, and stress were measured with the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, as cited in Beiter et al., 2015). Loneliness was measured with the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996). University attachment was measured with the University Attachment Scale (France et al., 2010).

Table 3

*Gender Differences in Emotional and Social Adjustment*

Variable	Men		Women		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Emotional Adjustment						
Depression	4.79	4.75	5.02	5.03	-0.22	70.47
Anxiety	5.21	4.53	4.46	4.07	0.80	61.07
Stress	6.82	3.53	7.14	3.89	-0.41	73.04
Social Adjustment						
Loneliness	42.29	14.09	42.98	13.05	-0.24	62.72
University Attachment	26.82	5.43	28.15	5.60	-1.15	68.93

Note.  $N = 99$ . Depression, Anxiety, and Stress were measured with the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, as cited in Beiter et al., 2015). Loneliness was measured with UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996). University attachment was measured with the University Attachment Scale (France et al., 2010). Satterthwaite method was used for all *t*-tests.

\* $p < .05$ .

Table 4

*Hometown Size Differences in Emotional and Social Adjustment*

Variable	Rural		Nonrural		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Emotional Adjustment						
Depression	5.23	5.26	4.86	4.84	0.30	31.85
Anxiety	4.91	3.39	4.66	4.45	0.28	43.79
Stress	8.00	3.89	6.75	3.69	1.34	32.60
Social Adjustment						
Loneliness	41.77	12.20	43.03	13.72	-0.41	37.55
University Attachment	29.23	5.59	27.26	5.50	1.46	33.51

*Note.*  $N = 99$ . Depression, Anxiety, and Stress were measured with the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, as cited in Beiter et al., 2015). Loneliness was measured with UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996). University attachment was measured with the University Attachment Scale (France et al., 2010). Satterthwaite method was used for all *t*-tests.

\* $p < .05$ .

whether hometown size was related to first-generation status. The chi-square indicated that rural status and first-generation status were not significantly related to each other,  $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 2.65, p = .10$ . The rural sample was 41% first-generation and 59% nonfirst-generation, whereas the nonrural sample was 23% first-generation and 77% nonfirst-generation.

For further information, an exploratory analysis was done to determine whether there would be significant differences between first-generation and nonfirst-generation students on the dependent variables (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, university attachment). There were no statistically significant differences on any of the dependent variables. See Table 5.



Table 5

*Generational Status Differences in Emotional and Social Adjustment*

	First-Generation		NonFirst-Generation			
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Emotional Adjustment						
Depression	5.63	5.71	4.68	4.60	0.78	39.34
Anxiety	4.96	4.26	4.63	4.24	0.35	46.57
Stress	7.26	4.06	6.94	3.66	0.35	42.76
Social Adjustment						
Loneliness	45.30	11.72	41.79	13.87	1.26	54.91
University Attachment	27.15	5.97	27.90	5.42	-0.57	43.05

*Note.*  $N = 99$ . Depression, Anxiety, and Stress were measured with the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995, as cited in Beiter et al., 2015). Loneliness was measured with UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) (Russell, 1996). University attachment was measured with the University Attachment Scale (France et al., 2010). Satterthwaite method was used for all *t*-tests.

\* $p < .05$

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study explored rural students' emotional (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress) and social (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) adjustment to a large, urban university. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether rural college students would experience more emotional and social adjustment difficulties than their nonrural peers when attending a large, urban university. This study predicted that rural college students would report more emotional (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress) and social (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) adjustment difficulties than nonrural college students. It also was predicted that rural college students would continue to report more emotional and social adjustment difficulties than nonrural college students when first-generation status was controlled.

Contrary to what was predicted, the results of this study did not find any statistically significant differences between rural and nonrural students' emotional (i.e., depression, anxiety, stress) and social (i.e., loneliness, university attachment) adjustment to college. The results of this study were inconsistent with previous research (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016; Durkin et al., 2003; Gabriel, 2006; Meng et al., 2013; Xiulan, 2015). For example, previous studies have found that rural students reported higher levels of stress (Durkin et al., 2003) and more depressive symptoms (Meng et al., 2013) than their nonrural peers. Additionally, Gabriel (2006) found in a qualitative study that rural students reported feeling lonely and isolated in their new, urban environment. Qualitative

studies also have found themes of rural students perceiving themselves as not “fitting” in or belonging to their urban university (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2016; Xiulan, 2015).

Several factors may have influenced the results of this study. One factor that could have influenced the results was the timing of the study. Data were collected at the end of the spring semester. Many students who experienced adjustment issues may have transferred or dropped out at the end of the fall semester. For example, Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) had nearly a 2,000 student decrease in enrollment between the fall and spring semesters for the 2016-2017 academic year (MTSU, 2017).

In addition, the end of the semester is a period associated with more stress due to deadlines for final projects, papers, and exams approaching; thus, both rural and nonrural students may have been experiencing increased emotional and social adjustment difficulties. As previously mentioned, approximately 86% of students have reported that they feel overwhelmed by everything they have to complete (ACHA, 2016).

Additionally, Shaikh and Deschamps (2006) found that stress was a common problem that students reported, and it was reported to be increased during times of exams. Other commonly reported sources of stress have included academic performance, pressure to succeed, self-esteem, and relationships (Beiter et al., 2015).

The characteristics of this sample may have been another factor that influenced the results of the study. This study had a small sample of 99 participants, with 22 meeting the criteria for rural status. Small sample sizes make it more difficult to find statistically significant differences between comparison groups. The ethnicity of the sample was another sample characteristic that may have influenced the results of this study. The

ethnicity of the participants in the sample was not representative of MTSU's student population. For this study, 36% of the sample identified themselves as African American/Black and 47% identified themselves as Caucasian/White, whereas, approximately 20% of the MTSU student population is African American/Black and approximately 65% is White (MTSU, 2017).

Additionally, the first-generation status of the sample of this study may have influenced the results. There has been a rise in the number of rural adults enrolling in college when compared to past generations (USDA, 2015). Past research has found that rural college students are more likely than their urban peers to be first-generation students (Byun et al., 2012). This study, however, did not find a relationship between hometown size and first-generation status.

In addition to sample characteristics, how rural was defined also may have influenced the results. There is no clear definition of rural. Most of the definitions describe rural as not being part of an urban area (OMB, 2010; Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016), however, even those definitions vary. For example, Ratcliffe et al. (2016) states that the United States Census Bureau defines rural as "all population, housing, and territory not included within an urbanized area or urban cluster" (p. 3). Urbanized areas have been defined as having a densely populated area of at least 50,000 people (OMB, 2010; Ratcliffe et al., 2016). Urban clusters have varying definitions. Ratcliffe et al. (2016) defined urban clusters as having a population less than 50,000, but at least 2,500 people. OMB (2010) defined urban clusters as a densely populated area with more than

10,000 people. Therefore, having unclear and complex definitions of rural and urban make it difficult to clearly define rural for the participants.

Another limitation of this study is that it did not consider where the participants lived while attending college. Where students live, whether on or off campus, may have influenced their emotional and social adjustment to college. As mentioned early, the research is mixed in regards to whether living on or off campus is more beneficial for students' emotional and social adjustment to college. For example, Shaikh and Deschamps (2006) found that living on-campus was associated with higher levels of stress, whereas other researchers have found that living on campus is associated with better emotional adjustment than living off campus (Ames et al., 2014; Beiter et al., 2015). This study, however, did not examine whether living on or off campus would be related to students' emotional and social adjustment to college. Where students live while attending college may influence whether they continue with their education or drop-out. For example, researchers have found that when students live on campus, it increases the probability that they will continue their college education (Bozick, 2007). For future studies, it may be beneficial to have a question about living on or off campus to explore whether it is related to rural college students' emotional and social adjustment to college.

Future studies also should consider collecting data in the fall semester. Data collection in the fall semester may be more beneficial because it is the start of many incoming students' college career. Additionally, students who are having difficulty emotionally and socially adjusting to college may still be enrolled at the university and have not dropped or transferred out.

Despite the lack of statistically significant findings of this study, it is still important to continue to explore factors that may be related to rural college students' emotional and social adjustment. Rural college students are a population of students who have been overlooked in the literature on emotional and social adjustment. Further exploration about how this population adjusts emotionally and socially to college may help create the appropriate resources for these students to obtain a degree to improve their own personal life or to help their community.

## REFERENCES

- Akhtar, M., & Kröner-Herwig, B. (2015). Acculturative stress among international students in context of socio-demographic variables and coping styles. *Current Psychology, 34*, 803-815. doi: 10.1007/s12144-015-9303-4
- American College Health Association. (2016). *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Undergraduate student reference group executive summary spring 2016*. Hanover, MD: Author.
- Ames, M. E., Wintre, M. G., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Adams, G. R. (2014). Rural compared to urban home community settings as predictors of first-year students' adjustment to university. *Journal of College Student Development, 55*, 208-215. doi: 10.1353/csd.2014.0016
- Aspelmeier, J. E., Love, M. M., McGill, L. A., Elliott, A. N., & Pierce, T. W. (2012). Self-esteem, locus of control, college adjustment, and GPA among first- and continuing-generation students: A moderator model of generational status. *Research in Higher Education, 53*, 755-781. doi: 10.1007/s11162-011-9252-1
- Azmitia, M., Syed, M., & Radmacher, K. (2013). Finding your niche: Identity and emotional support in emerging adults' adjustment to the transition to college. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 23*, 744-761. doi: 10.1111/jora.12037
- Beck, R., Taylor, C., & Robbins, M. (2003). Missing home: Sociotropy and autonomy and their relationship to psychological distress and homesickness in college freshmen. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping, 16*, 155-166. doi: 10.1080/1061580021000056979

- Beiter, R., Nash, R., McCrady, M., Rhoades, D., Linscomb, M., Clarahan, M., & Sammut, S. (2015). The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 173*, 90-96. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2014.10.054
- Berry, J. W. (2006). Acculturative stress. In P. T. P. Wong & L. C. J. Wong (Eds.). *Handbook of multicultural perspectives on stress and coping* (pp. 287-298). New York, NY: Springer.
- Bozick, R. (2007). Making it through the first year of college: The role of students' economic resources, employment, and living arrangements. *Sociology of Education, 80*, 261-285. doi: 10.1177/003804070708000304
- Buddington, S. A. (2002). Acculturation, psychological adjustment (stress, depression, self-esteem) and the academic achievement of Jamaican immigrant college students. *International Social Work, 45*, 447-464. doi: 10.1177/00208728020450040401
- Byun, S., Irvin, M. J., & Meece, J. L. (2012). Predictors of bachelor's degree completion among rural students at four-year institutions. *The Review of Higher Education, 3*, 463-484. doi: 10.1353/rhe.2012.0023
- Castillo, L. G., Navarro, R. L., Walker, J. E. O. Y., Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Whitbourne, S. K., . . . Caraway, S. J. (2015). Gender matters: The influence of acculturation and acculturative stress on Latino college student depressive symptomatology. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology, 3*, 40-55. doi: 10.1037/lat0000030



- Chen, L., Wang, L., Qiu, X. H., Yang, X. X., Qiao, Z. X., Yang, Y. J., & Liang, Y. (2013). Depression among Chinese university students: Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates. *PLoS ONE*, 8, 1-6. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0058379
- Chung, H., & Gale, J. (2006). Comparing self-differentiation and psychological well-being between Korean and European American students. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 28, 367-381. doi: 10.1007/s10591-006-9013-z
- Covarrubias, R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2015). Movin' on up (to college): First-generation college students' experiences with family achievement guilt. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 21, 420-429. doi: 10.1037/a0037844
- Covarrubias, R., Romero, A., & Trivelli, M. (2015). Family achievement guilt and mental well-being of college students. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 24, 2031-2037. doi: 10.1007/s10826-014-0003-8
- Crockett, L. J., Iturbide, M. I., Stone, R. A. T., McGinley, M., Raffaelli, M., & Carlo, G. (2007). Acculturative stress, social support, and coping: Relations to psychological adjustment among Mexican American college students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 13, 347-355. doi: 10.1037/1099-9809.13.4.347
- Doran, C. J., & Littrell, R. F. (2013). Measuring mainstream US cultural values. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 117, 261-280. doi: 10.1007/s10551-012-1515-z
- Dunstan, S. B., & Jaeger, A. J. (2016). The role of language in interactions with others on campus for rural, Appalachian college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57, 47-64. doi: 10.1353/csd.2016.0009

- Durkin, S. R., Bascomb, A., Turnbull, D., & Marley, J. (2003). Rural origin medical students: How do they cope with the medical school environment? *The Australian Journal of Rural Health, 11*, 89-95. doi: 10.1046/j.1440-1584.2003.00512.x
- Fernández-González, L., González-Hernández, A., & Trianes-Torres, M. V. (2015). Relationships between academic stress, social support, optimism-pessimism and self-esteem in college students. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology, 13*, 111-129. doi: 10.14204/ejrep.35.14053
- France, M. K., Finney, S. J., & Swerdzewski, P. (2010). Students' group and member attachment to their university: A construct validity study of the University Attachment Scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 70*, 440-458. doi: 10.1177/0013164409344510
- Freeman, E. (2017). Diversion of democratization: Do rural, Hispanic, community college students show signs of academic undermatch? *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 16*, 77-97. doi: 10.1177/1538192716628604
- Gabriel, M. (2006). Youth migration and social advancement: How young people manage emerging differences between themselves and their hometown. *Journal of Youth Studies, 9*, 33-46. doi: 10.1080/13676260500523622
- Garasky, S. (2002). Where are they going? A comparison of urban and rural youths' locational choices after leaving the parental home. *Social Science Research, 31*, 409-431. doi: 10.1016/S0049-089x(02)00007-8

- Gerdes, H., & Mallinckrodt, B. (1994). Emotional, social, and academic adjustment of college students: A longitudinal study of retention. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 72*, 281-288. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.1994.tb00935.x
- Grant-Vallone, E., Reid, K., Umali, C., & Pohlert, E. (2003). An analysis of the effects of self-esteem, social support, and participation in student support services on students' adjustment and commitment to college. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, & Practice, 5*, 255-274. doi: 10.2190/C0T7-YX50-F71V-00CW
- Hurd, N. M., Tan, J. S., & Loeb, E. L. (2016). Natural mentoring relationships and the adjustment to college among underrepresented students. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 57*, 330-341. doi: 10.1002/ajcp.12059
- Hussar, W. J., & Bailey, T. M. (2016). *Projections of education statistics to 2023* (NCES 2015-073). U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015073.pdf>
- Jenkins, S. R., Belanger, A., Connally, M. L., Boals, A., & Durón, K. M. (2013). First-generation undergraduate students' social support, depression, and life satisfaction. *Journal of College Counseling, 16*, 129-142. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2013.00032.x
- Johnson, V. K., Gans, S. E., Kerr, S., & LaValle, W. (2010). Managing the transition to college: Family functioning, emotion coping, and adjustment in emerging adulthood. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*, 607-621. doi: 10.1353/csd.2010.0022

- Kalpidou, M., Costin, D., & Morris, J. (2011). The relationship between Facebook and the well-being of undergraduate college students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14, 183-189. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2010.0061
- Kazantzis, N., & Flett, R. (1998). Family cohesion and age as determinants of homesickness in university students. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 26, 195-202. doi: 10.2224/sbp.1998.26.2.195
- Landrine, H., & Klonoff, E. A. (1994). The African American Acculturation Scale: Development, reliability, and validity. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 20, 104-127. doi: 10.1177/00957984940202002
- Li, S. T., Albert, A. B., & Dwelle, D. G. (2014). Parental and peer support as predictors of depression and self-esteem among college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55, 120-138. doi: 10.1353/csd.2014.0015
- Llamas, J., & Ramos-Sánchez, L. (2013). Role of peer support on intragroup marginalization for Latino undergraduates. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 41, 158-168. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1912.2013.00034.x
- Mahmoud, J. S. R., Staten, R. T., Hall, L. A., & Lennie, T. A. (2012). The relationship among young adult college students' depression, anxiety, stress, demographics, life satisfaction, and coping styles. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 33, 149-156. doi: 10.3109/01612840.2011.632708

- Means, D. R., Clayton, A. B., Conzelmann, J. G., Baynes, P., & Umbach, P. D. (2016). Bounded aspirations: Rural, African American high school students and college access. *The Review of Higher Education*, 39, 543-569. doi: 10.1353/rhe.2016.0035
- Mejía, O. L., & McCarthy, C. J. (2010). Acculturative stress, depression, and anxiety in migrant farmwork college students of Mexican heritage. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 17, 1-20. doi: 10.1037/a0018119
- Melendez, M. C., & Melendez, N. B. (2010). The influence of parental attachment on the college adjustment of White, Black, and Latina/Hispanic women: A cross-cultural investigation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51, 419-435. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0144
- Meng, H., Li, J., Loerbroks, A., Wu, J., & Chen, H. (2013). Rural/urban background, depression and suicidal ideation in Chinese college students: A cross-sectional study. *PLoS ONE*, 8, 1-6. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0071313
- Middle Tennessee State University, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Research. (2017). *2017 Fact book*. Retrieved from [http://w1.mtsu.edu/iepr/factbook/factbook\\_2017.pdf](http://w1.mtsu.edu/iepr/factbook/factbook_2017.pdf)
- Niu, S. X. (2015). Leaving home state for college: Differences by race/ethnicity and parental education. *Research in Higher Education*, 56, 325-359. doi: 10.1007/s11162-014-9350-y
- Office of Management and Budget 2010 Standards for Delineating Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas, 75 Fed. Reg. 37245 (June 28, 2010).

- Osman, A., Wong, J. L., Bagge, C. L., Freedenthal, S., Gutierrez, P. M., & Lozano, G. (2012). The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales—21 (DASS-21): Further examination of dimensions, scale reliability, and correlates. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 68*, 1322-1338. doi: 10.1002/jclp.21908
- Oswald, D. L., & Clark, E. M. (2003). Best friends forever?: High school best friendships and the transition to college. *Personal Relationships, 10*, 187-196. doi: 10.1111/1475-6811.00045
- Paul, E. L., & Brier, S. (2001). Friendsickness in the transition to college: Precollege predictors and college adjustment correlates. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 79*, 77-89. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.2001.tb01946.x
- Pillay, A. L., & Ngcobo, H. S. B. (2010). Sources of stress and support among rural-based first-year university students: An exploratory study. *Psychological Society of South Africa, 40*, 234-240. doi: 10.1177/008124631004000302
- Poyrazli, S., & Lopez, M. D. (2007). An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and homesickness: A comparison of international students and American students. *The Journal of Psychology, 141*, 263-280. doi: 10.3200/JRLP.141.3.263-280
- Prentice, D. A., Miller, D. T., & Lightdale, J. R. (1994). Asymmetries in attachments to groups and to their members: Distinguishing between common-identity and common-bond groups. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 484-493. doi: 10.1177/0146167294205005

- Pretty, G. H., Chipuer, H. M., & Bramston, P. (2003). Sense of place amongst adolescents and adults in two rural Australian towns: The discriminating features of place attachment, sense of community and place dependence in relation to place identity. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 23*, 273-287. doi: 10.1016/S0272-4944(02)00079-8
- Pritchard, M. E., Wilson, G. S., & Yamnitz, B. (2007). What predicts adjustment among college students? A longitudinal panel study. *Journal of American College Health, 56*, 15-21. doi: 10.3200/JACH.56.1.15-22
- Ratcliffe, M., Burd, C., Holder, K., & Fields, A. (2016). *Defining rural at the U.S. Census Bureau: American community survey and geography brief (ACSGEO-1)*. Retrieved from [https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/ua/Defining\\_Rural.pdf](https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/ua/Defining_Rural.pdf)
- Russell, D. W. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 66*, 20-40. doi: 10.1207/s15327752jpa6601\_2
- Schultz, P. F. (2004). Upon entering college: First semester experiences of first-generation rural students from agricultural families. *The Rural Educator, 26*, 48-51. Retrieved from <http://epubs.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraleducator/article/view/235>

- Sevinç, S., & Gizir, C. A. (2014). Factors negatively affecting university adjustment from the views of first-year university students: The case of Mersin University. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 14, 1301-1308. doi: 10.12738/estp.2014.4.2081
- Shaikh, B. T., & Deschamps, J.-P. (2006). Life in a university residence: Issues, concerns and responses. *Education for Health*, 19, 43-51. doi: 10.1080/13576280500534628
- Swenson, L. M., Nordstrom, A., & Hiester, M. (2008). The role of peer relationships in adjustment to college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49, 551-567. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0038
- Tieken, M. C. (2016). College talk and the rural economy: Shaping the educational aspirations of rural, first-generation students. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91, 203-223. doi: 10.1080/0161956X.2016.1151741
- United States Census Bureau. (2015). *Current population survey* [Excel data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2015/demo/school-enrollment/2015-cps.html>
- United States Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Rural America at a glance: 2015 edition* (Economic Information Bulletin 145). Retrieved from [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44015/55581\\_eib145.pdf?v=42397](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/44015/55581_eib145.pdf?v=42397)



- United States Department of Agriculture. (2017). *Rural America at a glance: 2017 edition* (Economic Information Bulletin 171). Retrieved from [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib171\\_forprinting.pdf?v=42830](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib171_forprinting.pdf?v=42830)
- Walker, B. L., & Raval, V. V. (2017). College students from rural hometowns report experiences of psychological sense of community and isolation. *Journal of Rural Mental Health, 41*, 66-79. doi: 10.1037/rmh0000059.supp
- Wang, S. C., Schwartz, S. J., & Zamboanga, B. L. (2010). Acculturative stress among Cuban American college students: Exploring the mediating pathways between acculturation and psychosocial functioning. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 40*, 2862-2887. doi: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2010.00684.x
- Wilkins, A. C. (2014). Race, age, and identity transformations in the transition from high school to college for Black and first-generation White men. *Sociology of Education, 87*, 171-187. doi: 10.1177/0038040714537901
- Williams, J. E., & Luo, M. (2010). Understanding first-year persistence at a micropolitan university: Do geographic characteristics of students' home city matter? *College Student Journal, 44*, 362-376. Retrieved from <http://www.projectinnovation.com/college-student-journal.html>
- Xiulan, Y. (2015). From passive assimilation to active integration: The adaptation of rural college students to cities. *Chinese Education & Society, 48*, 92-104. doi: 10.1080/10611932.2015.1014714

- Yiquan, Z., & Yijie, W. (2015). A qualitative study of the adaptation of rural college students to college life. *Chinese Education & Society*, 48, 105-113. doi: 10.1080/10611932.2015.1014715
- Zakahi, W. R., Jordan, F. F., & Christophel, D. (1993). Social adjustment to college: Communication apprehension and social network development among college students. *Communication Research Reports*, 10, 39-46. doi: 10.1080/08824099309359916
- Zvolensky, M. J., Jardin, C., Garey, L., Robles, Z., & Sharp, C. (2016). Acculturative stress and experiential avoidance: Relations to depression, suicide, and anxiety symptoms among minority students. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, 45, 501-517. doi: 10.1080/16506073.2016.1205658

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

#### IRB

#### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Office of Research Compliance,  
010A Sam Ingram Building,  
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd  
Murfreesboro, TN 37129



#### IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Thursday, March 15, 2018

Principal Investigator	<b>Jessica Melander</b> (Student)
Faculty Advisor	Mary Ellen Fromuth
Co-Investigators	NONE
Investigator Email(s)	<i>jbm6r@mtmail.mtsu.edu; maryellen.fromuth@mtsu.edu</i>
Department	Psychology
Protocol Title	<b><i>Hometown size and its relationship to emotional and social adjustment to college</i></b>
Protocol ID	<b>18-2164</b>

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification
Date of expiration	<b>3/31/2019</b>
Participant Size	200 (TWO HUNDRED)
Participant Pool	<b>General adults (18 years or older) - MTSU Psychology SONA</b>
Exceptions	Retention of identifiable information is permitted (refer below)
Restrictions	<b>1. Mandatory active informed consent; The participants must be clearly notified that enrollment is voluntary with ability to withdraw at anytime without retribution and provide a copy of the informed consent to each participating subject signed by the PI and FA.</b> <b>2. Mandatory implementation of SONA policy as approved by the IRB</b>
Comments	NONE

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (**3/31/2021**) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to **3/31/2019**. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study **MUST** be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

## Continuing Review Schedule:

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	2/28/2019	NOT COMPLETED
Second year report	2/28/2020	NOT COMPLETED
Final report	2/28/2021	NOT COMPLETED

## Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website.](#) Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board  
Middle Tennessee State University

## Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.  
More information on expedited procedures can be found [here](#).

**APPENDIX B****Demographic Form**

- 1. Age:** *Circle one*
  1. 18-21
  2. 22-25
  3. 26-29
  4. 30 and over
- 2. Gender:** *Circle one*
  1. Male
  2. Female
  3. Other/Choose not to answer
- 3. Ethnicity:** *Circle one*
  1. Caucasian/White
  2. African American/Black
  3. Other
- 4. Class Level:** *Circle one*
  1. Freshman
  2. Sophomore
  3. Junior
  4. Senior
- 5. Hometown:** *Circle the one that describes the town that you spent the most time in growing up.*
  1. Rural: Your hometown size is less than 5,000 and the closest city is 1 or more hours away **OR** your hometown size is less than 10,000
  2. Nonrural: does not fit into rural category
- 6. First-Generation Status:** *Circle one for each*
  - A. What is your ***father's*** highest level of education?
    1. Less than high school/GED
    2. High school degree
    3. Some college education
    4. College degree
  - B. What is your ***mother's*** highest level of education?
    1. Less than high school/ GED
    2. High school degree

3. Some college education
4. College degree

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form

**Principal Investigator:** Jessica Melander

**Study Title:** Hometown size and its relationship to emotional and social adjustment to college.

**Institution:** Middle Tennessee State University

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

**1. Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore whether students' hometown size is related to emotional and social adjustment in college. The study also aims to determine if having a parent who attended college is related to any emotional and social adjustment differences based on hometown size.

**2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:**

The study will request participants to complete an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire includes a demographic form; the demographic form includes questions about age (in categories), gender, ethnicity, class level (e.g., freshman), hometown size, and first-generation status. Additionally, the question includes an emotional adjustment scale (i.e., depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, stress levels), and a social adjustment scale (i.e., feelings of loneliness, attachment to university). The questionnaires should take less than 30 minutes to complete.

**3. Expected costs:**

There are no expected costs for participating in this study.

**4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:**

Lower than minimal risk is to be expected for participating in this study.

**5. Compensation in case of study-related injury:**

MTSU will not be responsible for any compensation in the event of any injury associated with participating in this study.



**6. Anticipated benefits from this study:**

- a) The potential benefit to science and humankind that may result from this study is additional information about the relationship between hometown size and college students' emotional and social adjustment.
- b) There is no known direct benefit for participating in this study.

**7. Alternative treatments available:**

N/A

**8. Compensation for participation:**

For participating in this study you will receive one research credit. To receive this research credit, you must complete the informed consent and turn in the questionnaires. You will not be penalized for skipping items.

**9. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:**

Participants who are under the age of 18-years-old will be withdrawn from the study. Participants who are either a junior or senior also will be withdrawn from the study.

**10. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:**

There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time.

**11. Contact Information.** If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Jessica Melander at [jbm6r@mtmail.mtsu.edu](mailto:jbm6r@mtmail.mtsu.edu) or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Mary Ellen Fromuth at [MaryEllen.Fromuth@mtsu.edu](mailto:MaryEllen.Fromuth@mtsu.edu) or (615) 898-2548.

**12. Confidentiality.** All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

**13. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

**I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Debriefing Form**

#### **Hometown size and its relationship to emotional and social adjustment to college**

Please keep for your own use.

The proportion of rural adults obtaining a college degree has increased compared to past generations (USDA, 2015, 2017), as a result, many rural adults are first-generation students (USDA, 2015). First-generation students are the students who have parents who never attended college and, therefore, are the first in their family to attend college. Despite the fact that there are more rural adults attending college, rural adults still fall behind their urban peers in obtaining college degrees (USDA, 2017). Rural college students are more likely to experience more stress (Durkin et al., 2003) and depressive symptoms (Meng et al., 2013) than their urban peers.

Acculturation is one's ability to adjust and adapt to the values, beliefs, and practices of a new culture (Berry, 2006; Landrine & Klonoff, 1994). Rural students experience acculturative stress when they have difficulty acculturating to the urban and college culture. Acculturative stress has been related to the experience of depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms (Wang et al., 2010), and feelings of homesickness (Gabriel, 2006; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014).

If you would like to have more information about your rights as a participant or about the results of the study, please contact Jessica Melander, B.A. (jbm6r@mtmail.mtsu.edu). Although it is important to note that the results may not be immediately available, if desired, the results will be provided when available.

Thank you for your time and cooperation for participating in this study.

Jessica Melander  
jbm6r@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Mary Ellen Fromuth, Ph.D.  
Supervisor  
mfromuth@mtsu.edu  
Office # JH 222  
(615) 898-2548