

Cognitive Fusion, Self- and Other-Blame, and College Adjustment Outcomes

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Introduction

- On average, college graduates' lifetime earnings surpass those of high school graduates who directly enter the workforce by the age of 33.¹²
 - College students from higher challenge neighborhoods had lower retention rates than students from lower challenge neighborhoods
- A higher degree of emotional dysregulation is predicted by lower family income as a child and higher exposure to stress.⁸
 - Cognitive fusion has been documented in association with poor psychological outcomes in the traditional college population.^{1,3,10}
 - College students with the lowest psychological flexibility/highest cognitive fusion have the poorest adjustment and functional outcomes.^{2,9}
 - Blame strategy usage associated with failure to pass high school exit exams, self-handicapping tendencies, and functional interference of psychiatric disorders^{13,15,16}.

Methods

Demographics	CERQ	CFQ	CAQ
Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Years Enrolled, Perceived Childhood SES ⁶	Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire ⁴	Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire ⁵	College Adjustment Questionnaire ¹⁴

N = 66

Age: M=19.74 years, SD=1.68 years, range 18-25

Gender: 56 female (84.8%), 8 male (12.1%), 1 transgender male (1.5%), 1 non-binary (1.5%)

Race: 56 white (84.8%), 6 Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish Origin (9.1%), 1 Middle Eastern/South Asian (1.5%), 1 Black/African American (1.5%), 1 East Asian, Hawaiian Native/other Pacific Islander (1.5%), 1 Prefer not to say (1.5%)

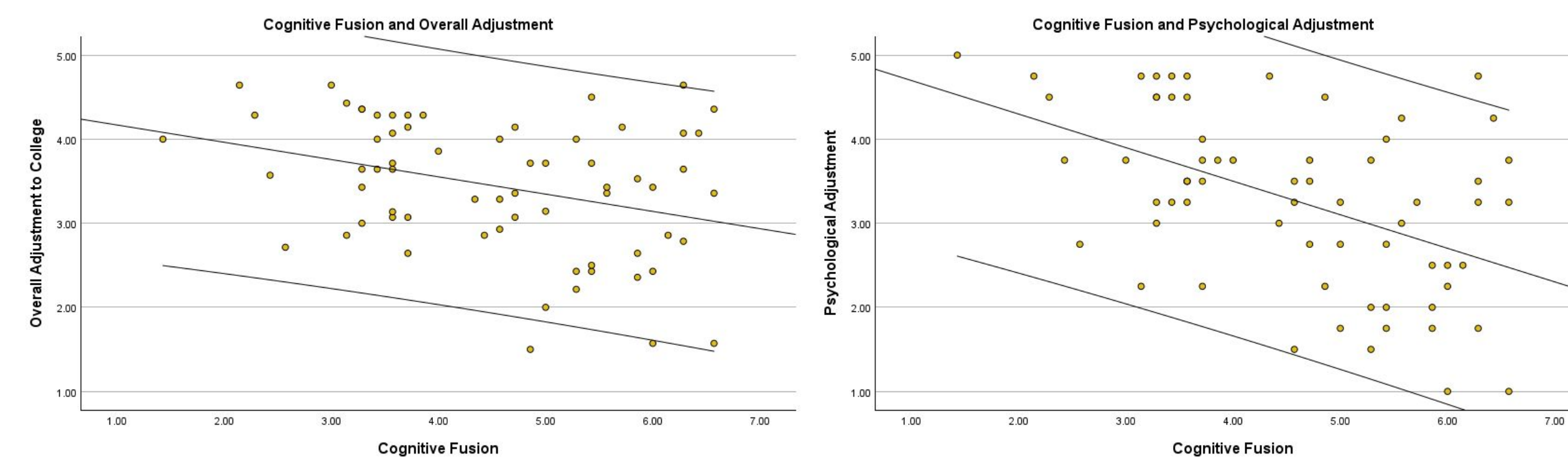
School Year: 26 Freshman/first year of enrollment (39.4%), 21 Sophomore/second year of enrollment (31.8%), 15 Junior/third year of enrollment (22.7%), 4 Senior/fourth year or more of enrollment (6.1%)

Hypotheses

- H1:** Higher use of self- and other-blame will be associated with lower adjustment outcomes in academic, social, and psychological domains.
- H2:** Higher levels of cognitive fusion will be associated with poorer academic, social, and psychological adjustment to college.
- H3:** High levels of cognitive fusion paired with high use of blame strategies will result in significantly lower reported adjustment in social, academic, and psychological adjustment to college.

Results

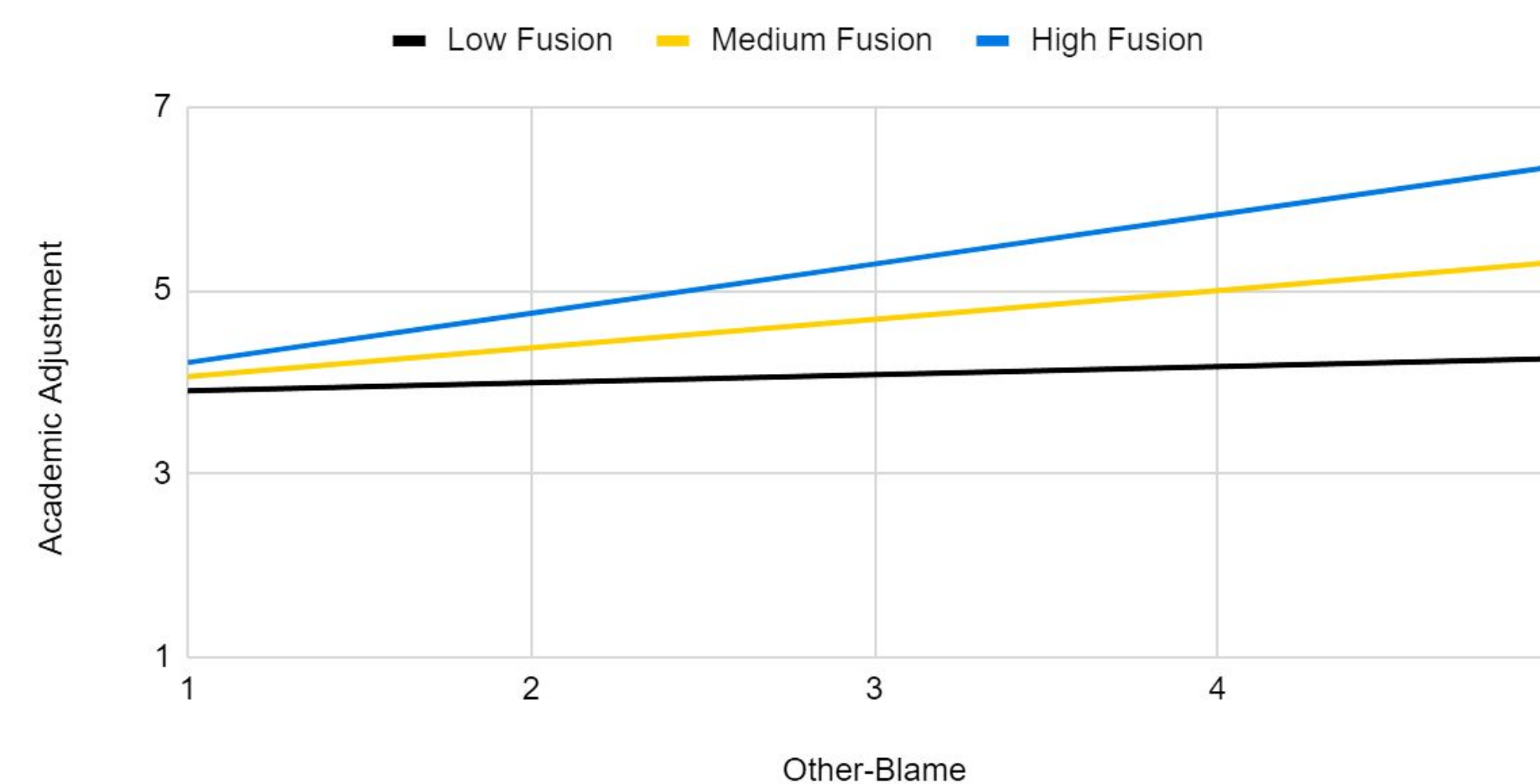
H1: Neither self-blame nor other-blame were significantly associated with any of the domains of college adjustment. Other-blame actually demonstrated a non-significant *positive* relationship with academic adjustment.



H2: $r(64) = -.33, p < .01$

$r(64) = -.49, p < .001$

H3: Other-Blame and Cognitive Fusion Predicting Academic Adjustment

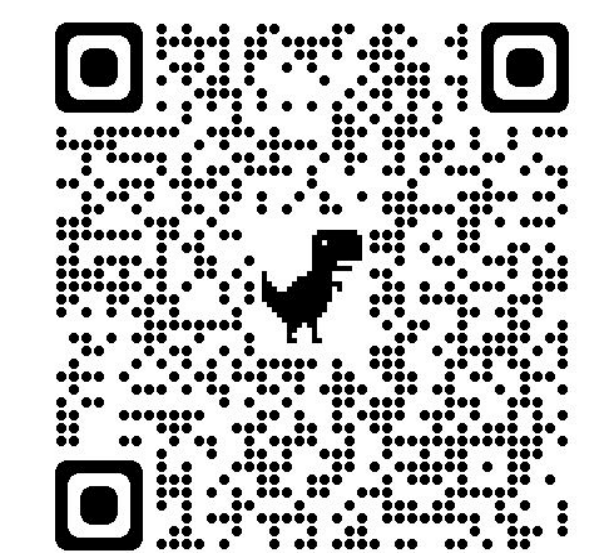


$F(3,62) = 2.37, p = .08; R = .32, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .06$
 at Moderate Fusion: $t(62) = 1.86, p = .07; \beta = .24$
 at High Fusion: $t(62) = 2.56, p = .01; \beta = .51$

Conclusions

- High endorsement of cognitive fusion in our sample: $M=4.54, SD=1.28$ on a 1-7 scale
- High endorsement of self-blame [$M=3.47, SD=0.71, 1-5$ scale] but not other-blame [$M=2.43, SD=0.73$]
- Other-blame did not behave how we predicted.
 - The other-blame we measured in this study might be a healthy degree of adaptive locus of control.
 - A healthy ability to assign blame/responsibility to others might be academically adaptive in a college setting, where students need to advocate for themselves to their professors. Professors make mistakes, and emergencies outside of students' control happen, both of which warrant acting in an assertive manner rather than an ashamed or self-blaming manner.
 - Alternatively, it could be that participants who are highly fused to their thoughts and tend to blame others for things going wrong might be less likely to give an accurate assessment of their academic adjustment.
- Our results suggest that the negative effects of cognitive fusion are limited to psychological functioning, rather than significantly affecting social or academic functioning.

References



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