



“Comparing the romantic attachments of young adults whose mothers were employed full time, part time or were stay-at-home mothers.”

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university

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## Abstract

Bowlby (1979, p. 129) posited that “attachment behaviour characterises the human being from the cradle to the grave.” These intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person’s life revolves, not only in childhood but throughout adolescence, the years of maturity and into old age (Bowlby, 1980). Much of Bowlby’s work focused on the early years of childhood and the attachment formed with caregivers at this time. With the development of the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure, researchers were able to empirically test Bowlby’s theory and have since been able to produce studies that looked at how the quality of attachment behaviours changed or remained stable over time (McConnell & Moss, 2011). A substantial amount of this research has been conducted on the effect of maternal employment and mother-child attachment. However, the research that has been conducted has only looked at the effect of maternal employment in the early years of the child’s life. No research could be found that measured the influence of early maternal employment status beyond second grade and into early adulthood. Furthermore, this research has not explored whether there are any reported differences between the employment status of mothers and the romantic attachments in young adults, internationally or in the South African context. A substantial focus has also been placed on exploring the possibility that the attachment styles identified in infancy continue into adulthood and play a role in romantic relationships, with Hazan & Shaver (1987) proposing romantic love as an attachment process. Research has shown that the quality of attachment relationships experienced in early childhood are related to the nature of later adult romantic relationships (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). This study aimed to ascertain whether any associations existed between the romantic attachment styles of young adults, aged between 18-24 years old, and their mothers’ employment status during their childhood (i.e.: between ages 0 and 5). A sample of 446 participants completed an online questionnaire containing two sections: the first section ascertained demographic information while the second contained the Attachment Style Questionnaire (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994). A series of Pearson chi-square were used to measure associations between a) the participants’ romantic attachment styles and their mothers’ early employment status, b) the participants’ age at which their mother returned to work and their romantic attachment style and c) maternal employment status and participants’ preference for their mothers to work or stay-at-home. Results for the overall romantic attachment style showed that regardless of early maternal employment status, the majority of the sample was avoidant

in their romantic attachment style. Only 18.83% of the sample was securely attached and 1.79% was ambivalent in their romantic attachment. Results for the chi-squareds were all significant, indicating that an association does exist between the various constructs. Thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse data gathered on participants' feelings toward their mothers' employment status. Findings showed that participants with working mothers felt that their mothers were less available to them and provided less emotional and physical nurturance than they would have liked. Those with stay-at-home mothers indicated that they often experienced financial difficulty due to reliance on one income and that their mothers were sometimes perceived as too controlling; not allowing them enough space to explore the world for themselves.

**Key Words:** Attachment styles, romantic relationships, maternal employment

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## Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of tables.....	ix
Introduction and Rationale.....	1
Aims.....	3
Literature Review.....	3
John Bowlby.....	3
Mary Ainsworth.....	6
Cross-cultural measures of attachment.....	8
The continuity of attachment.....	9
Attachment across infancy.....	9
Attachment across early childhood.....	11
Attachment across middle childhood.....	13
Attachment across adolescence.....	14
Attachment across adulthood.....	15
Longitudinal studies from infancy through adolescence and adulthood.....	16
Maternal employment and motherhood.....	17
Attachment and maternal employment.....	20
Children's perceptions of their mothers' employment status.....	24
Attachment as a romantic process.....	26
Romantic attachment in young adults.....	28
Methods.....	30
Research design.....	30
Sample.....	30
Instruments.....	32

Procedure .....	33
Data analysis .....	33
Ethical considerations .....	34
Research Questions.....	35
Results.....	36
Descriptive Statistics.....	36
Nature of sample .....	36
Overall romantic attachment style .....	37
Early maternal employment status and romantic attachment style.....	37
Participants age at which their mothers returned to work and romantic attachment style .....	38
Early maternal employment status and participants’ preferred employment status for their mothers .....	39
Participants’ perceptions of their mothers’ employment status .....	40
1. Participants’ reasons for wanting their mothers to be stay-at-home mothers. ....	40
2. What was difficult about having a working or a stay-at-home mother? .....	40
1. <i>Mothers’ limited emotional and physical availability.</i> .....	41
1. <i>Financial difficulty.</i> .....	42
2. <i>Stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling.</i> .....	43
Discussion .....	45
Descriptive Statistics.....	45
Nature of sample. ....	45
Overall romantic attachment style. ....	46
Early maternal employment status and romantic attachment style.....	48
Participants’ ages at which their mothers returned to work and romantic attachment style .....	53
Early maternal employment status and participants’ preferred employment status for their mothers .....	55
Participants’ perceptions of their mothers’ employment status .....	56
1. <i>Mothers’ limited emotional and physical availability.</i> .....	57

1. <i>Financial difficulty</i> .....	57
2. <i>Stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling</i> .....	58
Conclusion .....	59
Limitations of the study .....	61
Suggestions for future research.....	63
Reference List .....	64
Appendix A.....	77
Participant Information Sheet .....	77
Appendix B .....	78
Demographic Information.....	78
Attachment Style Questionnaire .....	80
Appendix C .....	82
Ethics Clearance Certificate.....	82

### **List of tables**

Table 1: Age range for full sample .....	31
Table 2: Gender split for sample.....	32
Table 3: Race descriptives .....	37
Table 4: Attachment style descriptives .....	37
Table 5: Pearson chi-square results: Maternal employment and romantic attachment style ...	38
Table 6: Pearson chi-square results: Age and romantic attachment style.....	39
Table 7: Pearson chi-square results: Maternal employment status and participants' preference .....	40

## **Introduction and Rationale**

*“Attachment behaviour is conceived as any form of behaviour that results in a person attempting or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, who is usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser. Although it is most frequently and intensely displayed by infants and young children, it continues to be manifested throughout life, especially when distressed, ill, or afraid. Attachment behaviour is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave.”*

Bowlby (1977) (as cited in Ainsworth, 1984, p. 792)

Much of Bowlby’s work on attachment was focused on the early years of life. His primary focus was to describe and explain how infants became emotionally attached to their primary caregiver(s) and emotionally distressed upon separation from them. However, he contended that “attachment behaviour characterises human beings from the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129) and believed that these intimate attachments formed with other human beings are the hub around which a person’s life revolves; not only in childhood but throughout adolescence, the years of maturity and into old age (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby’s theory distinguished four main phases of attachment during the development of a child: 1) Orientation and signals with limited discrimination of figure, 2) Orientation and signals directed towards one (or more) discriminated figure(s), 3) Maintenance of proximity to a discriminated figure by means of locomotion as well as signals, and 4) Formation of a goal-corrected partnership. Prior to the development of Ainsworth’s ‘Strange Situation’ procedure, there was no way of empirically testing Bowlby’s theory. The ‘Strange Situation’ procedure also allowed for Bowlby’s theory to be opened and expanded into new directions.

Based on infants’ reactions to separations and reunions in the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure, three attachment styles were identified; secure, anxious/avoidant and anxious/ambivalent. In later research, Main & Solomon (1986) added a fourth attachment style, disorganised/disoriented. By using the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure researchers were able to replicate Ainsworth’s study and results, and, were able to produce many other studies that looked at how the quality of attachment behaviours changed or remained stable over time (McConnell & Moss, 2011). There have been various studies that measured the continuity of attachment throughout various stages of life; infancy (Waters, 1978; Main & Weston, 1981; Frodi, Grolnick & Bridges, 1985; Belsky, Campbell, Cohn & Moore, 1996), early childhood

(Main & Cassidy, 1988; Wartner, Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik & Suess, 1994; Bar-Haim, Sutton & Fox, 2000), adolescence (Ammaniti, van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli, 2000; Allen, Boykin McElhaney, Kuperminc, & Jodi, 2004) and adulthood (Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004; Consedine & Magai, 2006). While a few studies showed instability in attachment styles, most studies showed relative stability in attachment styles over the life span of the individual. The instability in attachment styles were attributed to environmental influences such as divorce, family stress, illness or the loss of a parent due to death (Lewis, Feiring, & Rosenthal, 2000; Sroufe, 2005; Weinfield, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2000).

The rapid increase of women entering into the paid workforce over the last four decades has resulted in substantial research interest around maternal employment and its effects on various variables. Of note and interest to this study is the research conducted on the perceptions associated with employed mothers versus those associated with stay-at-home mothers, the child's subjective view of his/her mother's employment status and the effects of maternal employment on the mother-child attachment bond. Within the media, employed mothers and stay-at-home mothers are depicted as opposing forces who occupy competing, binary identities (Crowley, 2014). Culturally and within society the stay-at-home mother is seen as the 'traditional' mother, an image that has become the ideal version of what a good mother is and should be (Paré & Dilliway, 2005). The employed/working mother is often negatively depicted as being more concerned with her personal and material success rather than being concerned with the success of her children (Johnston & Swanson, 2004). Research has shown that regardless of the way in which the media and society depicts employed mothers and stay-at-home mothers, both experience a substantial amount of ambivalence in their roles.

Studies on maternal employment have focused on whether maternal employment weakens the child's attachment to his/her mother. These studies have primarily focused on the early years up to about seven years of age. No studies were found that looked at this construct further than early childhood. Attachment in adulthood is generally measured in relation to romantic relationships. Research conducted shows that the quality of attachment relationships experienced in early childhood are related to the nature of later adult romantic relationships (Simpson et al., 2007). While a vast body of research and literature exists on attachment as a romantic process, very few studies exist which have examined this relationship in young

adulthood. Furthermore, no research could be found that looked at the possible effects of early maternal employment on young adults' romantic relationships.

### **Aims**

The aim of this research project is to compare the romantic attachment styles of young adults, between 18 and 24 years old, whose mothers were employed full time, part time or who were stay-at-home mothers during their childhood (between 0-5 years old). The research examines whether any associations exist between early childhood relationships and later romantic relationships. The research will also try to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants' feelings toward their mothers' employment status. Understanding the subjective experiences of children allows us to gain deeper, qualitative insight into the experience of a primary relationship that would ultimately cement their attachment style.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review will begin by looking at the origins of attachment theory as developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, briefly outlining their contributions to the field. It will then look at both the short term and longitudinal studies that have been conducted on the continuity of attachment across infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The review will then look at the literature and research available on attachment and maternal employment and will finally focus on attachment as a romantic process and look at the studies available on romantic attachment in young adulthood.

### **John Bowlby**

Bowlby formulated his attachment theory based on the theories of ethology and evolution and theorised that humans, like other primates, possess innate behavioural systems. Amongst these systems there are some, "for example, the primitive neonatal crying, sucking, clinging, and orientation" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 265), that provide the building blocks for the later development of attachment (Bowlby, 1969). Added to these initial systems, a few weeks later, are babbling and smiling followed by crawling and walking a few months later. The goal of the attachment behavioural system is to "regulate infant proximity seeking and contact maintaining behaviours" (Berman & Sperling, 1994, p. 5) with their mother (or mother substitute).

The attachment system works according to the principles of cybernetics or control systems theory. The attachment system is not something that is turned on and off but instead it is a system that continually monitors and appraises relevant events in the environment in order for it to function adequately (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment behaviours are activated when the child realises that he is no longer in close proximity to his mother and cannot easily reach her or in instances when he feels afraid or threatened. The child will then engage in behaviours designed to re-establish proximity (e.g. calling, crying, gazing). Once achieved, the child alters his behaviour to those designed to maintain proximity e.g. hugging, clinging, and cooing. (Berman & Sperling, 1994).

Bowlby distinguished between four main phases of attachment during the development of a child. These phases can be described as 1) Orientation and signals with limited discrimination of figure, 2) Orientation and signals directed towards one (or more) discriminated figure(s), 3) Maintenance of proximity to a discriminated figure by means of locomotion as well as signals, and 4) Formation of a goal-corrected partnership. Phase one starts at birth and lasts up to about 12 weeks. During this phase the child behaves in distinctive ways towards people. His ability to tell one person from another is limited to smell and sound stimuli with differential responses based on auditory or visual stimuli only likely to occur after four and ten weeks respectively (Bowlby, 1969). Behaviours during this phase are not directed to any specific person but are used in order to maintain and increase proximity to his caregiver. The infant engages in signalling as well as active but reactive behaviours such as crying, grasping, reaching and tracking movements of the eyes (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1969).

Phase two lasts until about six months of age. The child continues to behave in the same friendly way towards people, but as he is now able to discriminate between one person and another, his behaviour towards his mother is more marked (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1969). “However, neither discriminations, differential behaviour nor seeming preference are necessarily taken as indications that an attachment has yet been formed” (Ainsworth, 1985, p. 772).

Phase three begins at about six or seven months of age but may be delayed until after the child’s first birthday and continues through the second year into the third year of the child’s life (Bowlby, 1969). During this phase a number of changes occur; the child gains mobility as

well as directed reaching and grasping allowing proximity- seeking behaviour to become more active and more effective (Ainsworth, 1985), “His attachment to his mother figure becomes evident for all to see” (Bowlby, 1969, p. 267) and he selects certain other figures to whom he becomes attached. His mother is no longer seen as an extension of himself but is now perceived as an independent object: “persistent in time and space and moving more or less predictably in a space-time continuum” (Bowlby, 1969, p. 267). It is also during this phase that the child begins to gradually build up expectations of regularities in what happens to him. These expectations begin to be internally organised into what Bowlby termed “‘working models’ – of the child’s physical environment, his attachment figures and eventually of himself” (Ainsworth, 1985, p. 773). Working models are the mechanism through which continuity in the organisation of attachment is achieved (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

Bowlby (1969) further stated that even though the child attains the concept of his mother as an independent object we still cannot assume that he understands what influences his mother’s movements to or away from him, or what he can do to change her behaviour. Through the constant and continual observation of the mother’s behaviour and its influences, the child is able to figure out some of his mother’s set goals and her plans to achieve these (Bowlby, 1969). Once that is so, the groundwork for the development of a more complex relationship, a partnership, is laid. This is the point where a new phase (phase 4) begins. There are only a small number of children who are capable of this at their third birthday. By their fifth birthday most children would have achieved this: “The period during which this transformation is most likely to occur is the fourth and fifth years of life” (Bowlby, 1969, p. 368).

Prior to Mary Ainsworth’s ‘Strange Situation’ methodology there was no way that Bowlby’s theory could be empirically tested. Ainsworth’s innovative methodology not only allowed for Bowlby’s theory to be tested empirically but also allowed for it to be expanded into new directions (Bretherton, 1992). It will therefore be helpful to look at Mary Ainsworth’s contribution in the field of attachment theory.

## **Mary Ainsworth**

The 'Strange Situation' was designed by Ainsworth in order to supplement the longitudinal study carried out in Uganda to measure the infant-mother attachment in the first year of life (Ainsworth, 1979). Infants' behaviours were observed in a series of eight episodes lasting about three minutes each. With the development of the 'Strange Situation' procedure, researchers have been able to produce many studies that looked at how the quality of attachment behaviours changed or remained stable over time (McConnell & Moss, 2011). Based on the infant's reaction to the separations and reunions, three attachment styles, one secure and two insecure, anxious/avoidant and anxious/ambivalent, were identified.

Children classified with a secure attachment style have built up an internal working model of their caregiver as responsive and accessible. Ainsworth (1985) emphasized the relationship between the infant's attachment security and the mother's facilitation of their exploration. She explained that a caregiver is not truly sensitive to an infant if behavioural cues; such as those indicating his enjoyment in the adventures of exploring, his dislike at being interrupted during an independent activity and his gratification when a new skill or problem is mastered, are ignored (Jones, Cassidy, & Shaver, 2015). In the 'Strange Situation' procedure, securely attached infants readily separated from their caregiver and became absorbed in exploration. On separation they were distressed but once their caregiver returned they sought proximity to the caregiver, were easily comforted and then returned to play. Securely attached children develop confidence that their caregiver will be available, responsive and helpful should they require their caregiver's help or encounter adverse or frightening situations. This allows the infant to use their caregiver as a secure base from which to explore, even in unfamiliar situations (Ainsworth, 1979, 1985; Bowlby, 1988; Senior, 2009). In adulthood, a secure adult is one who is coherent, collaborative in discourse and valuing of attachment. They remain objective regarding particular events or relationships and their descriptions and evaluations of attachment-related experiences tend to remain consistent regardless of whether the experiences were favourable or unfavourable (Main, 2007).

Children classified as anxious/ambivalent and anxious/avoidant formed part of the insecure attachment styles. According to Ainsworth (1985) these children are attached to their mothers but the attachment is anxious. The anxious/avoidant infant has built up an internal working model of their caregiver as rejecting and likely to refuse any attempt they make for close

bodily contact. These infants were undisturbed by the separation from their caregiver during the 'Strange Situation.' Rather than seeking contact and proximity they tended to avoid her upon reunion, avoiding eye contact or using toys to distract their attention away from their caregiver. They showed no preference for their caregiver over a stranger (Ainsworth, 1985; Berman & Sperling, 1994; Senior, 2009). The anxious/avoidant child has no confidence that their caregiver will provide a helpful response when seeking care and often anticipate a rejecting one (Senior, 2009). In adulthood, avoidantly attached adults are generally dismissing of attachment-related experiences and relationships. They tend to normalise these experiences with generalised representations of history that are actively contradicted or unsupported by their recounts (Main, 2007).

The anxious/ambivalent infant has built up an internal working model of a caregiver who is inconsistently available and responsive. In the 'Strange Situation,' these infants experienced high levels of distress during separation from their caregivers and were preoccupied with their caregiver's availability which inhibited their exploration of the environment. They are anxious about their caregiver's availability, fearing that their caregiver will be unresponsive or ineffectively responsive when needed (Ainsworth, 1979, 1985; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994; Senior, 2009). "Upon her return they are ambivalent, both wanting contact and being angry at her, so that they are difficult to soothe" (Ainsworth, 1985, p. 778). The caregivers of these infants are less available and less sensitive than the caregivers of securely attached infants. However, when compared to the caregivers of the avoidantly attached infants they showed no aversion to close bodily contact, although they did so inconsistently (Jones et al., 2015). Caregivers were also found to be less involved during periods when the infant wanted attention and more involved at times when they preferred to explore and did not necessarily require or want attention (Jones et al., 2015). As adults those classified as anxious/ambivalent appear angry, passive or fearful and seem preoccupied with past attachment experiences or relationships (Main, 2007).

In later research, Main & Solomon (1986) added a third insecure attachment style: disorganised/disorientated. These infants had no strategy to deal with separation episodes and showed signs of disorganised and contradictory behaviour. Behaviours included crying for the caregiver during separation but then moving away from her during reunion towards the wall, approaching the caregiver while turning their head away, rocking on hands and knees as

well as approaching the caregiver and then falling to the floor or suddenly freezing in mid-approach (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994; Senior, 2009).

Following Ainsworth's pioneering work there were many other researchers who replicated her results using the 'Strange Situation' methodology. The 'Strange Situation' was thus seen as a reliable method for assessing individual differences in attachment. It became the standard for measuring attachment across various cultures and allowed for comparisons to be made between western findings and findings from non-western cultures.

### **Cross-cultural measures of attachment**

The 'Strange Situation' has generally been used successfully across a number of different cultures to measure attachment. In 1978 Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall (1978) conducted a meta-analysis on 106 "Strange Situation" studies on middle class children. Their results showed that the highest attachment type was secure (70%) followed by avoidant (20%) and lastly, resistant (10%) (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In a cross-cultural comparison, Marinus Van IJzendoorn and Pieter Kroonenberg (1988) published a cross-cultural meta-analysis of 32 "Strange Situation" studies. They compared 8 different nations which included research from both western (e.g. USA, UK, and Germany) and non-western (e.g. China, Israel, Japan) societies. The results of their meta-analysis showed noticeable consistencies in the attachment types across cultures. Their results were consistent with the results found in the Ainsworth et al. (1978) study and showed that the secure attachment style was the most common attachment classification across all eight nations. However, they found significant differences in the distribution of the insecure patterns of attachment: within the non-western cultures the dominant insecure attachment type was resistant while in the western cultures it was avoidant (Rice, 2016; Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988).

There have been various other cross-cultural studies that have found significant variations from the percentages found by Ainsworth et al. (1978). Studies conducted on German infants have shown higher rates of avoidant attachment than secure attachment. A study by Grossmann, Grossmann, Huber & Wartner (1981) (as cited in Rice, 2016) found that 49% of German infants were avoidantly attached, 33% securely attached and 18% were resistant in their attachment style. In 1991, Sagi, Van IJzendoorn, & Koren-Karie found similar results among German infants; 49% avoidant, 40% secure and 11% resistant in their attachment

styles. Studies conducted on Japanese infants showed an absence of the avoidant category. Findings from a 1985 study by Miyake, Chen & Campos showed 68% secure attachment and 32% resistant attachment, with no infant classified as avoidant. A study conducted in Mali by True, Pisani & Oumar (2001) showed notably high levels of secure attachment (69%) in infants and also found the avoidant attachment category to be entirely absent.

Even though cross cultural differences in attachment have been noted, the 'Strange Situation' procedure continues to be used as a reliable method in measuring individual differences in attachment. Both short-and long-term studies have been conducted to measure the stability of attachment across infancy, early childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

### **The continuity of attachment**

#### **Attachment across infancy.**

Studies measuring the stability of attachment across infancy have used both low-and high-risk family samples. Their results have shown mixed findings with regards to overall stability across infancy (McConnell & Moss, 2011). Short-term studies using low risk samples that have measured stability across infancy include studies by Waters (1978), Main and Weston (1981), Frodi, Grolnick and Bridges (1985) and Belsky, Campbell, Cohn and Moore (1996). Waters (1978) reported substantial correspondence, 96%, between attachment classifications at two points in time (12 and 18 months of age), the highest reported stability rate yet published. Similarly, Main and Weston (1981) also found stability between infant-mother (73%) and infant-father (81%) attachment over a period of several months. Frodi et al. (1985) measured the stability of attachment at 12 and 20 months of age and looked at factors that may have contributed to the stability of attachment. They found a 66% rate of stability of attachment across time. Factors such as non-punitive child rearing attitudes, sensitivity and mothers who are supportive of their infants' striving towards autonomy, were found to contribute to the stability of secure attachments (Frodi et al., 1985). Belsky et al. (1996) investigated the stability of attachment in two low- risk samples. Both samples measured infant-mother attachment (at 12 and 18 months of age) and one included infant-father attachment (at 13 and 20 months of age). Results from the studies showed less stability than those reported above. The first study showed a 46% rate of stability for infant-mother-attachment and a 52% and 46% infant-mother and infant-father attachment respectively, in the second study (Belsky et al., 1996).

Studies by Vaughn, Egeland, Sroufe & Waters (1979), Egeland & Farber (1984), Vondra, Hommerding & Shaw (1999) and Vondra, Shaw, Swearingen, Cohen & Owens (2001) have all measured the stability of attachment using high-risk samples. In both the Vaughn et al. (1979) and Egeland & Farber (1984) studies, attachment classifications were significantly stable, 62% and 60% respectively, across the 12 to 18 month period. Vondra et al. (1999) looked at both stability and change at 12 and 18 months of age and found an overall 50% rate of stability. Vondra et al. (2001) looked at the stability of attachment at 12, 18 and 24 months of age. They used the 'Strange Situation' methodology to score attachment at 12 and 18 months of age and the pre-school classification system developed by Crittenden at 24 months of age. "The overall rates of stability were identical from 12 to 18 months (45% stability) and from 12/18 months to 24 months (45% stability)" (Vondra et al., 2001 as cited in McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 64).

Two studies were found that looked at the predictors of stability and change in attachment; Barnett, Ganiban & Cicchetti (1999) and Edwards, Eiden & Leonard (2004). Barnett et al. (1999) measured the stability of attachment at 12, 18 and 24 months in a group of maltreated and non-maltreated infants. When compared, stability was similar across the 12 to 18 months and 18 to 24 months periods. However, for the 12 to 24 months period they found a higher continuity of attachment for maltreated children (87%) as opposed to non-maltreated children (55%) (Barnett et al., 1999). "Results also indicated general stability of the disorganized and secure patterns with non-maltreated children more likely to be classified as secure and maltreated infants as disorganized" (Barnett et al., 1999 as cited in McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 63). Edwards et al. (2004) investigated short-term attachment stability and sought to identify predictors of stability and change at 12 and 18 months of age in a high-risk sample that was characterized by parental alcoholism. The results from their study showed moderate stability of attachment from 12 to 18 months: 60% for mothers and 53% for fathers (Edwards et al., 2004). Families with stable insecure mother-attachment were found to have higher levels of paternal and maternal alcohol symptoms, maternal depression, maternal antisocial behaviour and higher levels of negative maternal affect during play compared to those with stable secure mother-infant attachment (Edwards et al., 2004). "Father-infant stable insecurity was associated with lower levels of paternal positive expression and decreased sensitivity during play" (Edwards et al., 2004 as cited in McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 63). Children with stable secure relationships with their mothers had significantly higher levels of positive

affect and those with stable secure relationships with their father had lower levels of negative affect expression and negative emotionality and higher positive affect expression ( Edwards et al., 2004).

The findings of the studies conducted across infancy in both high-and low-risk samples are mixed with regards to overall stability of attachment. Although discrepancies do exist in the low-risk sample, there was greater instability of attachment found in high-risk samples. This is “consistent with the idea that attachment changes as a function of disruptive life events, which tend to occur more frequently for these families” (McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 65).

### **Attachment across early childhood.**

During early childhood or the pre-school years, the attachment relationship between infant and caregiver is transformed into a goal-corrected partnership (Bowlby, 1969). In assessing the quality of attachment to caregivers during these years, a wider range of behaviours are taken into account. Behaviours such as body position, visual attention, content and manner of speech, directed towards parents and verbal expression of affect, all form part of the assessment of quality of attachment (McConnell & Moss, 2011). When comparing the literature available, there are fewer studies that measure the stability of attachment in pre-school years, than there are in infancy. All studies were conducted using low risk-samples and most have included measurements on the predictors of continuity and change.

In 1988 Main & Cassidy measured the stability of attachment at 12 months and 6 years old. They used the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure with both mother and father at 12 months and a modified ‘Strange Situation’ procedure that they revised, at 6 years old. Results showed an overall stability of 84% for mother-infant attachment from infancy to age 6 and an overall stability of 61% for father attachment. Using the modified classification procedure, Grossman & Grossman (1991) studied a sample of 6 year olds. They obtained an 87% convergence on attachment ratings from this system and the ratings derived in infancy of the same children by using the “Strange Situation”. In 1994 Wartner, Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik & Suess conducted a cross-cultural equivalent of the Main and Cassidy (1988) study in Germany. Results from their study showed a 82% concordance rate between infancy and age 6 (McConnell & Moss, 2011). A study by Howes, Hamilton & Philippsen (1998) measuring attachment at 12 months using the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure and 4 years of age using the

Cassidy & Marvin's (1992) pre-school 'Strange Situation' procedure found substantial stability (76%) between the two time periods.

Three studies were found that looked at both the stability of attachment across the pre-school period as well as some of the predictors of continuity and change. Bar-Haim, Sutton & Fox (2000) measured stability at 14, 24 and 58 months of age. The 'Strange Situation' procedure was used at 14 months, a modified version at 24 months and at 58 months, Cassidy & Marvin's (1992) pre-school "Strange Situation" procedure was used. In order to measure children's mental representation of the attachment relationship and their emotional openness, they also administered the revised version of the Klagsbrun-Bowlby Separation-Anxiety Test (McConnell & Moss, 2011). "Results indicated that attachment classifications showed stability between 14 and 24 months (64%) and lack of stability was the case between either 14 or 24 months and 58 months (38%)" (Bar-Haim et al., 2000 as cited in McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 67). Twenty nine percent of the sample had the same classification across all three time periods (Bar-Haim et al., 2000). In the 14 to 58 months comparison and the 24 to 58 months comparison those who did not report stability of attachment reported more negative life events compared to the stable secure group (Bar-Haim et al., 2000).

The second study was conducted by the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network in 2001. They measured the quality of attachment at 15 and 26 months of age, using the 'Strange Situation' procedure at 15 months and Cassidy & Marvin's (1992) preschool Strange Situation procedure at 36 months. "Results indicated modest stability of attachment from 15 to 36 months" (McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 67). Changes from secure to insecure at 36 months were attributed to families having higher income-to-needs ratios and mothers with less education and lower sensitivity at 24 – 36 months. Those who changed to insecure were also more likely to have had at least 10 hours per week of external childcare between 15 and 36 months (McConnell & Moss, 2011). The study conducted by Moss, Cyr, Bureau, Tarabulsky, & Dubois-Comtois (2005) used a sample of French Canadian children at 3.5 and 5.5 years of age. Attachment was measured using the pre-school 'Strange Situation' procedure and a moderate (68%) overall stability was found.

Similar to the findings in the infancy period, the studies detailed above looking at attachment stability across the early childhood period, also show inconsistency in their findings. Some of

the studies looked at factors that predict continuity and change. Factors that predicted a change to security or stable security included “greater maternal sensitivity and experiencing positive life events. These results highlight the importance of not only the quality of caregiving as an important variable influencing the stability of attachment during this time, but the role of the environment as well” (McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 68). Factors that predicted a change to insecurity or stable insecurity included “experiencing negative life events, less maternal education, higher income-to-needs ratio, less maternal sensitivity, 10 hours a week or more in child care, lower level of dyadic interactive quality and marital dissatisfaction, and lower quality of communication with children” (McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 68; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994).

### **Attachment across middle childhood.**

Within the attachment research literature, middle childhood has been constituted as the least studied developmental period (Kerns, 2008). It is generally characterised by the 7 to 14 year old age range and can be distinguished from early childhood and adolescence in distinct ways. The study of attachment in middle childhood has proven more problematic than the studies conducted in infancy and adulthood. Measures designed to establish attachment in infancy and adulthood have been widely applied and are well established. Although a vast amount of instruments have been developed to elicit mental representations of attachment in middle childhood, they have all shown mixed results (Kerns, 2008; Target, Fonagy, & Shmueli-Goetz, 2003; Zachrisson, 2008). Instruments designed have had low test-retest reliability and concerns over their validity have been raised (Target et al., 2003).

Although relatively little attention has been paid to normative issues in middle childhood, there have been a few studies that looked at the stability of attachment across this period. In 1995 a study conducted by Wright, Binney and Smith measured the test-retest stability of attachment on a clinical sample of 21 participants. They administered the same measure of attachment on two occasions separated by one month and did not find evidence of test-retest stability over the one month period (Kerns, 2008). In a study conducted by Target et al. (2003), they administered the Child Attachment Interview to 46 children between the ages of 7 to 12 years old. These children were reassessed 3 months later and stability coefficients were found to be considerably high between the two periods,  $r = 0,63$ . They further tested 33 children after a one year period and found moderate stability ( $r = 0,40$ ) in scores over the one

year period (Target et al., 2003). In 2000, Ammaniti, van Ijzendoorn, Speranza, & Tambelli administered the AAI to a sample of Italian adolescents at ages 10 and 14. Across the four year period they found a 71% stability rate in attachment (Ammanit et al., 2000).

### **Attachment across adolescence.**

Adolescence is characterised as a period of transformation in all systems surrounding the attachment relationship. The adolescent evolves from being a receiver of care to becoming an adult and potential caregiver to his/her peers, romantic partners and offspring (Allen, 2008). The attachment relationship between adolescent and caregiver is distinct from the relationship formed during infancy and early childhood. One of the most distinct characteristics is the potential for the relationship to become increasingly goal-corrected: “as the adolescent gains communication and perspective taking skills, it becomes possible for both parent and teen to modify (or correct) their attachment- related behaviour when necessary, to meet the teens’ evolving attachment needs while balancing their other needs as well” (Allen, 2008, p. 323). Part of this process includes a decreased reliance on parents and the transference of these dependencies to peer relationships (Allen, 2008). As much as adolescents may at times deny the importance of relationships with attachment figures, they still rely on the attachment figure to provide care and protection (Allen, 2008; McConnell & Moss, 2011). “The primary attachment relationships continue into adolescence, develop dramatically and provide important issues worthy of being studied” (Allen, 2008, p. 325). There have been a few studies that have measured the stability of attachment through the adolescent years.

The two studies that were found used the Adult Attachment Interview (Gerge, Kaplan & Main, 1985) or a modified version of it in order to measure the stability of attachment in the adolescent years. Zimmermann & Becker-Stoll (2002) looked at the stability of attachment at ages 16 and 18. Their results showed a 77% stability in the quality of attachment over the two-year period. Allen, McElhaney, Kuperminc, & Jodl (2004) used the AAI Q-set (Kobak, Cole, Ferenz-Gilles, Fleming, Gamble, 1993) to measure the stability of attachment in a moderately-at-risk adolescent population at ages 16 and 18. Their results indicated a substantial stability in attachment security ( $r=.61$ ).

### **Attachment across adulthood.**

Although attachment behaviour is especially evident in early childhood, it continues throughout life and characterises human beings from the cradle to the grave (Bowlby, 1969). In the 1980s two independent lines of research were initiated in order to explore the nature of attachment in adulthood. In 1985, George, Kaplan and Main developed the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) which sought to assess adults' current states of mind with respect to attachment. Adults' attachment is measured based on their language coherence in response to questions about early attachment experiences, recent losses and current relationships with their parents and own children. Three main attachment categories: secure, dismissing and preoccupied, that parallel those of the 'Strange Situation' are assigned to adults based on their responses (Jones et al., 2015). A meta-analysis conducted by Van Ijzendoorn (1995) showed that an adult's state of mind in the AAI relates to their childhood attachment classification in the 'Strange Situation.' Around the same time, Hazan & Shaver (1987) proposed looking at romantic love as an attachment process. They suggested that adolescent and adult attachment categories parallel Ainsworth's infant attachment categories and they believed that these adult categories influenced the course of a person's romantic relationship experience (Jones et al., 2015). Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a three-category self-report measure which mirrors the attachment styles in the 'Strange Situation'. Adults select from the three options, the description that best characterizes their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in close relationships (Zayas, Mischel, Shoda, & Aber, 2011).

Even though the adults' network for proximity seeking during these years extends to include friends, romantic partners, spouses and so forth, their attachment to their parental figure continues throughout these years (Mikulciner & Shaver, 2007). "While the initial patterns of infancy and childhood develop in direct response to the caregiver's actions (or failures to act), the attachment patterns of adults arise from the internal working models of the attachment figure, and of the self, that are built on childhood experiences and significantly affect the adult's ability to form new attachment relationships" (McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 70). Four studies were found that measured the continuity and discontinuity in attachment during this period. In 1994 a study by Scharfe & Bartholomew examined stability and change in adult attachment representations over an 8 month period in young adults. Participants' stability was measured twice over the 8 month period using a variety of attachment measures. Their results showed that the attachment representations, as assessed by multiple measures

(self report, partner report, interview measures, categorical and single-and multiple-item continuous measures) over the 8 months were moderately stable (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Stability rates for the same sample over a 2- year period indicated equally stable representations as were found over the initial 8- month period (Bartholomew, 1997). In 2004 Zhang & Labouvie-Vief measured the stability of attachment in a sample of adults ranging from 15 to 87 years of age. Using the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) they measured attachment styles three times over a six-year period. Over the six-year period results showed relatively stable attachment styles, with lower stability at the 6-year interval as opposed to the 2-year interval (Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004). A study conducted by Considine & Magai (2006) which also used the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) measured the stability of attachment at 72 and 78 years of age. Results showed an 81.4% stability rate overall.

#### **Longitudinal studies from infancy through adolescence and adulthood.**

There have been only a handful of studies that have measured the stability of attachment between infancy, adolescence and adulthood. These studies have looked at both low-and high-risk samples in their investigations. A study by Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, (2000) measured attachment using the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure at 12 months of age and the AAI at 20 to 22 years. They found significant continuity over time in the stability of attachments: 64% of their sample was assigned the corresponding classification. Factors that contributed to a change to insecure attachment included the loss of a parent, parental divorce, life-threatening illness of a parent or child, physical or sexual abuse by a family member or parental psychiatric disorder (Waters, Merrick, et al., 2000). Results from a study by Hamilton (2000) investigating at the stability of attachment from infancy to adolescence found that 77% of the adolescents retained the same classification over time.

Studies conducted by Lewis et al. (2000), Weinfield et al. (2000), and Aikins, Howes, & Hamilton, (2009) did not show continuity over time in attachment. Lewis et al. (2000) measured attachment on a low-risk sample at 12 months using the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure and the adolescent version of the AAI during adolescence. “The findings revealed a lack of continuity between attachment behaviours in infancy and attachment representations in adolescence” (Lewis et al., 2000 as cited in McConnell & Moss, 2011, p. 71). The

Weinfield et al. (2000) study measured attachment stability in a high-risk sample at 12 months and 19 years of age. Although no significant overall stability (38%) was found between early childhood and adulthood, upon closer examination it was found that there was consistency in the role of attachment-related life experiences in marking continuity and change (Waters, Weinfield, & Hamilton, 2000). Aikins et al. (2009) measured the stability of attachment in a low-risk sample at three different ages. At 12 months they used the 'Strange Situation' procedure, at 4 years old they used the modified 'Strange Situation' procedure and at 16 they used the Adult Attachment Projective (George, West, & Pettem, 1997). Results showed only 25% continuity in attachment.

Findings on the stability of attachment during the various stages of life have shown varied results. Those conducted during the infancy and early childhood periods have shown mixed results in the stability of attachment. Some studies have yielded significant stability rates (Waters, 1978; Main & Weston, 1981; Frodi et al., 1985; Main & Cassidy, 1988; Wartner et al., 1994) while others have shown substantial instability (Belsky et al., 1996; and Bar-Haim et al., 2000). Studies conducted during adolescence and adulthood have all shown substantial stability in attachment across these periods. Some fluctuation was seen in the studies conducted during adulthood, indicating that change is possible given certain personal and environmental factors (McConnell & Moss, 2011). The longitudinal studies that looked at the stability of attachment across infancy, adolescence and adulthood showed mixed results. During the infancy and early childhood periods, some studies looked at the factors that predict continuity and discontinuity with many researchers looking at maternal employment (amongst others) as one of these predictors.

### **Maternal employment and motherhood**

As motherhood approaches, every prospective working mother faces the decision of whether to continue participating in the paid workforce while mothering or to leave and become a stay-at-home mother. Prior to World War II, most mothers would not have had this decision to make as the paid work force was dominated by men and most women did not actively contribute to it. Historically, women occupied the homemaker and caretaker roles, staying at home and ensuring their households, husbands and children were well taken care of (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002). However, over the past four decades a number of factors have influenced the entry of mothers (women) into the workforce. The feminist movement of the 1960s and

1970s allowed mothers to see paid work as an avenue toward personal fulfilment that could also benefit their children by modelling strong self-reliant behaviour (Crowley, 2014). While this pull existed for mothers to make the move into the paid labour force, there was an equally important push. A decline in male wages, particularly within the lower-skilled jobs persuaded women to enter the paid labour force in order to maintain their families' standard of living (Crowley, 2014). American statistics show that in 2011 the percentage of mothers with children under 18 who were in the labour market had increased substantially to 71.3% from 47.4% in 1975 (BLS, 2012). During the same time period the percentage of mothers with children aged six and under also increased from 39% to 64.2% (BLS, 2012). Even though substantial increases can be seen there is still a significant percentage of mothers who choose to stay at home and be full-time mothers to their children.

Within the media, employed mothers and stay-at-home mothers are depicted as opposing forces who occupy competing, binary identities (Crowley, 2014). Culturally and within society the stay-at-home mother is seen as the 'traditional' mother, an image that has become the ideal version of what a good mother is and should be (Paré & Dilliway, 2005). The employed/working mother is often negatively depicted as being more concerned with her own personal and material success rather than being concerned with the success of her children (Johnston & Swanson, 2004). Regardless of the role that a mother chooses, one of the most powerful parenting ideologies that exists today is that of intensive mothering (Crowley, 2014; Johnston & Swanson, 2007). The idea behind this is that all mothers are required to put as much energy as possible into nurturing their children regardless of and at the expense of any other interests that they may have in their own personal lives. In many ways this ideology is cognitively consistent with how mothers who stay at home construct their everyday mothering practices as well as with the messages they receive about mothering (Crowley, 2014). However, mothers who work are not exempt from the principles of intensive mothering and are required to meet both their employment responsibilities as well as attending to their child's every need (Crowley, 2014). This thus creates extreme cognitive dissonance in fulfilling both their work responsibilities as well as those of the intensive mothering ideology.

While stay-at-home mothers may experience cognitive consistency in their role and the messages they receive from the media, research has shown that not all stay-at-home mothers

are completely happy with their mothering identities. Feelings of ambivalence can and do emerge. In a study conducted by Hertz (1997) she found that while society champions mothers who opt to stay at home, the mothers themselves felt a lack of emotional, social and political support in their decision to stay at home. Despite fulfilling their ideological societal role and being the good mother, stay-at-home mothers constantly felt like they are 'bad' because they do not work and felt constant pressure to return to work (Hertz, 1997). In a series of in-depth interviews, Johnston & Swanson (2006, 2007) found that stay-at-home mothers frequently reported impatience and stress in dealing with their children. Mothers also reported feeling lonely in their roles and missing adult interaction. In her book, Stone (2007) found that some mothers described bitterness over a work structure that they believed forced them out of their jobs rather than accommodating them and their family responsibilities. Rubin & Wooten (2007) interviewed 10 highly educated mothers with previously distinguished careers who chose to stay at home to care for their children. Mothers reported feelings of vulnerability, guilt, loss, shame and conflict over their new family arrangements (Rubin & Wooten, 2007). The difficulty experienced in child-rearing and the general lack of public acknowledgment may devalue the decision of some women to become stay-at-home mothers (Paré & Dilliway, 2005). While this may contribute to the view of the mothering role as being lesser than that of a paid worker (Paré & Dilliway, 2005), the intensive mothering ideology seems to provide some level of support to mothers who have chosen to be stay-at-home mothers (Crowley, 2014).

Even though there has been an influx of mothers (women) into the paid labour force, research has shown that employed mothers (both part-time and full-time) experience a substantial amount of ambivalence in their roles (Crowley, 2014; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Part-time working mothers are often seen as the least conflicted of employed mothers. They are able to enjoy both paid employment that provides them with personal growth opportunities as well as time at home with their children (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Johnston & Swanson (2004) found that part-time employed mothers were significantly happier than their full-time employed and stay-at-home mother counterparts. However, research by Webber & Williams (2008) has shown that part-time employed mothers reported feeling disappointed over missing professional opportunities to advance their careers. Some mothers also reported experiencing emotional stress from spending extended periods with their children and often worried about losing their temper during these prolonged periods. While full-time employed mothers are

able to dedicate substantial attention to their career development and jobs, they too experience substantial ambivalence about their roles as employee and mother. For employed mothers, their paid work is characterised as an ancillary activity to motherhood and they are held accountable for the mothering practices that are carried out by stay at home mothers (Paré & Dilliway, 2005). In Johnston & Swanson's (2006) study, full-time employed mothers reported feeling tired and rushed and experiencing a constant overlap between their home lives, work obligations and vice versa. As a way to compensate for the energy and attention consumed by their full-time paid employment, many mothers reported engaging in a variety of activities such as hiring nannies or au-pairs or working the night shift in order to ensure they are able to be there for their children during the day (Crowley, 2014).

While both stay-at-home mothers and employed mothers each experience a level of ambivalence with regards to their current roles, it is often the employed mothers who are “suspect when it comes to the bond and level of attachment they have with their children” (Paré & Dilliway, 2005, p. 71). The literature review will now examine some of the research that measured the relationship between maternal employment and attachment stability. This will allow us to ascertain whether there is any empirical basis for this claim.

### **Attachment and maternal employment**

Studies measuring the relationship between maternal employment and attachment stability have primarily been conducted within the infancy to early childhood period. The studies that were embarked upon in this area have been found to relate specifically to issues of whether maternal employment, which involves mother-child separation and the presence of substitute caretakers, weakens the child's attachment to its mother.

Etaugh (1974) conducted a 10-year review looking at the research on the effects of maternal employment on children. Her review included research by Ainsworth (1963), Schaffer & Emerson, Maccoby & Feldman (1972) and Hersher, Lipton, Richmond, Stern, Eddy, Drachman, & Rothman (1963). Results from the various studies cited showed that “attachment behaviour in infants and pre-schoolers, while not focusing on maternal employment per se, indicate that strength of attachment to the mother is a function of the quality and intensity of mother-child interactions, rather than the sheer availability of the mother or the number of caretakers” (Etaugh, 1974, p. 90).

A study conducted by Caldwell, Wright, Honig, & Tannenbaum (1970) at the Children's Centre at Syracuse University compared the strength of attachment between 30-month old children who had been cared for in the centre to those who had been cared for at home. They found that the "strength of attachment to mothers in these children was not related to day care attendance (although attachment to mother was positively related to the amount of stimulation available in the home)" (Caldwell et al., 1970 as cited in Moore, 1978, p. 78).

In 1974 Ricciuti looked at the effect of multiple caregivers on infants. He found that children showed similar attachment patterns to both their mothers and to centre caregivers with whom they had been given ample opportunity to develop a relationship (Ricciuti, 1974 as cited in Moore, 1978). He further stated that their attachments to their mothers appeared to remain unchanged and secure: "children did not give up their primary attachment to their mother in the process of becoming attached to a centre caregiver" (Ricciuti, 1974 as cited Moore, 1978, p. 78).

In 1980 Hock undertook a study to compare working and non working mothers in a variety of dimensions. As part of the study, one of the dimensions measured was the infant's social behaviour towards his mother and towards a stranger. This dimension was measured using the "Strange Situation". Their results showed that infants did not differ in social behaviour towards their mother regardless of whether she worked or not (Hock, 1980). There were also no differences in the quality of attachment between the groups: "no differences existed in the amount and intensity of affiliative behaviours and no differences existed in the amount and intensity of negative reunion behaviours" (Hock, 1980, p. 98). The results of the study "support the belief that work status per se is not significantly related to maternal attitudes and care-giving behaviours, to infant developmental levels, or to the quality of the mother-infant relationship" (Hock, 1980, p. 100).

A review article by O'Connell (1983) on the research related to the effects of maternal employment found that eight out of ten studies showed no significant differences in the mother-infant bond between children reared at home and those reared outside of their home: "the similarities in behaviour between the groups far outweighed any observed differences. The mother/child bond was not found to be weakened or abnormal in the children attending day care" (O'Connell, 1983, p. 64). The two studies that reported negative findings were

studies conducted by Blehar (1974) and Vaughn, Gove & Egeland (1980). The study by Blehar (1974) was subsequently discredited by several other researchers who were unsuccessful in attempting to replicate her results (O'Connell, 1983). The results of the study by Vaughn et al., (1980) are an anomaly to the results in the bulk of research conducted in this field (O'Connell, 1983). O'Connell (1983) further found several studies that looked at the effects that a substitute caregiver had on a child's preference for its mother versus its caregiver. Results showed that "when children were placed in a conflict situation, they consistently showed an overwhelming preference for their mother. Although the children were placed daily in a secure environment with a substitute caregiver, the naturally occurring bond between mother and child was not disrupted nor relinquished to the caregiver" (O'Connell, 1983, p. 65). However, in 1983 a study by Schwartz using a middle class sample found that avoidance scores were significantly higher for infants who had been in full time day care than for a control group who had been reared at home for the first 18 months of their lives.

Attachments to mother and father under conditions of stable maternal employment and of second year changes in employment as well as the stability of attachment over time were investigated in 1984 by Owen, Easterbrooks, Chase-Lansdale & Goldberg. The stability of attachment among full-time, part-time and non-working mothers who had an unchanged employment status and a group of mothers who changed their employment status between 12 and 20 months was compared (Owen et al., 1984). Assessments of the child's attachment to both mother and father were taken at both 12 and 20 months separated by three to six weeks at each age. Results obtained from the study showed that there was no relation between maternal employment and the quality of infant-mother attachment, and that the overall quality of attachment to the father did not change when mothers were employed (part-time or full-time) or not employed (Owen et al., 1984). When looking at the stability of attachment over time, results showed that there was no indication of less stable attachments to either father or mother when mothers were employed than when they were not employed (Owen et al., 1984). "Maternal employment and the accompanying family lifestyle can be a stable situation that lends as much stability to family relationships as the condition of maternal non-employment" (Owen et al., 1984, p. 1900).

Research by Benn (1986) looked specifically at the factors that affect a secure attachment between employed mothers and their sons. Results from her study showed that the effects of maternal employment on mother-son attachments were mediated by the mother's underlying emotional state. Mothers who were highly integrated were more likely to have securely attached sons than those who were poorly integrated (Benn, 1986). In 1986 Ichilov & Shadmi looked at the consequences of employed mothers from first and second graders' perspectives in Tel Aviv. Results showed that children displayed similar levels of satisfaction with their existing situation in both the non-working and working mother groups (Ichilov & Shadmi, 1986).

In their study on the potential effects of early maternal employment on the quality of infant-mother attachments, Barglow et al. (1987) used a sample of 110 mother-infant pairs from middle-class, low-risk families. Based on various criteria, mothers who worked were assigned to the 'At work' group whilst those who were deemed as stay at home were assigned to the 'At home' group. At 12 months of age the mother-infant pair was assessed using the 'Strange Situation' procedure. The results of their study showed that early maternal employment increased the likelihood of an infant being classified as insecurely attached. Of the infants in the 'At work' group, 31.5% were classified as avoidant in their attachment as compared to 9% from the 'At home' group. The 'At home' group also showed higher rates of secure attachment (71%) as compared to the 'At work' group (54%) (Barglow et al., 1987).

Chase-Lansdale & Owen (1987) examined the effects of the resumption of full time employment by mothers of infants under 6 months of age and their subsequent infant-mother and infant-father attachments. The quality of attachment to both mother and father was measured using the 'Strange Situation' procedure. Data was collected from 57 non-employed mother families and 40 (full-time) employed mother families (Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987). The results from their study showed that no relation between the quality of infant-mother attachment and maternal work status existed, thus suggesting that "early resumption of employment may not impede the development of secure infant-mother attachment (Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987, p. 1505).

In 1988 Belsky & Rovine combined evidence from 2 longitudinal studies of infant and family development in order to determine whether the experience of extensive non-maternal care in

the first year of birth was associated with a heightened risk of insecure infant-mother attachment and in the case of sons, insecure infant-father attachment. Infants were divided into 4 groups based on the care required due to maternal working hours (full-time care, high part-time care, low part-time care and mother-care) and were measured using the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure at 12 months. Results from their study showed that infants who received full time care or 20 or more hours of care per week were more likely to be classified as insecurely attached than infants with less than 20 hours of care per week (Belsky & Rovine, 1988).

The effects of maternal employment and separation anxiety on maternal interactive behaviour and infant attachment were measured in a study by Stifter, Coulehan, & Fish (1993). Their study used 73 mother-infant dyads who were seen in several laboratory situations at 5 and 10 months of age. At 18 month of age the ‘Strange Situation’ procedure was used to assess attachment. Their results indicated that while employment was not directly related to attachment, infants of high-anxiety employed mothers tended to develop anxious-avoidant attachments (Stifter et al., 1993).

Based on the findings from the studies detailed above, it is evident that conflicting results exist on whether maternal employment has a negative impact on attachment. However, research has shown that attachment to mothers remains consistent and stable regardless of maternal employment status. The research that has been conducted has only looked at the effect of maternal employment in the early years of the child’s life. No research could be found that measured these constructs beyond the second grade or into early adulthood or whether there are any reported differences in contemporary relationships.

### **Children’s perceptions of their mothers’ employment status**

As can be seen from the review above, the increase in entry of mothers into the paid workforce has resulted in substantial interest among researchers on the effects of maternal employment on a child’s development (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006; Trimberger & MacLean, 1982). Researchers have investigated the effects of many social and psychological variables thought to have an effect on a child’s development. While research has shown that children of various ages are affected in different ways by their mothers’ employment status (Trimberger & MacLean, 1982), no research could be found that directly looked at how children perceived

their mothers' employment status, presently or retrospectively. However, there has been some, albeit limited, research conducted into looking at children's perceptions of their mothers' parenting practices. Within this realm of research we are able to indirectly gain some insight into children's perceptions of their mothers' employment status and any differences that may exist between children with employed mothers and those with stay-at-home mothers. It is important to gain an understanding of children's subjective experiences with their parents as "the effects of parents' behaviours on children's well-being often depend on how children perceive or interpret their parents' behaviours" (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006, p. 574; Trimberger & MacLean, 1982). Through constant interactions with caregivers, individuals develop working models and associated attachment styles that reflect the nature of those experiences. These internal working models form the foundation of understanding how attachment processes operate throughout one's life course (Pietromonaco & Baret, 2000). Thus, by gaining an understanding of children's subjective experiences, we are able to gain insight into the formation of their attachment style.

In their study on children's perceptions of having a working mother, Trimberger & MacLean (1982) found that the majority of their sample reported feeling that their mothers would have been more interested in them if they did not work. However, almost half of their sample also felt that their mothers' employment gave them freedom or special privileges (Trimberger & MacLean, 1982). In a study conducted by Galinsky (1999 as cited in Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006), he found that children's ratings of how their parents treated them (e.g. making them feel loved, making them feel appreciated, controlling their temper) was not related to their employment status. Qualitative research conducted by Sugar (1994) looking at the perspective of daughters with employed or stay-at-home mothers, found that daughters with employed mothers reported feeling lonely and isolated as they felt that their mothers had devoted too much of their time to paid work. They also reported experiencing more anger and frustration within their own homes as compared to their counterparts who had stay-at-home mothers (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006; Sugar, 1994). In 2002, Gerson interviewed adults who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. He found that these adults generally regarded their mothers' employment as beneficial to their lives and that the majority of his sample (both males and females) felt that their mothers' income allowed their families to enjoy greater economic security. When compared to their friends with stay-at-home mothers, these adults reported feeling that they had substantially closer relationships with their fathers and that their fathers

were more involved in their daily lives. Their mothers were good role models of dedicated workers for them and her employment allowed their parents to provide them with greater opportunities (Gerson, 2002). In their study, Nomaguchi & Milkie (2006) found that adults whose mothers were employed during their childhood reported having less support and less discipline compared to adults with stay-at-home mothers. They also found that children whose mothers were employed were given more independence and autonomy at earlier stages of their lives than children who had stay-at-home mothers (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006).

### **Attachment as a romantic process**

According to Bowlby (1969) attachment behaviour plays a vital role throughout the life cycle: the bonds formed between children and their caregivers are of great importance for later relationships (Feeney, 2008). Although much of Bowlby's work focused on the bonds formed between infants and their caregivers, he believed that attachment was an important component of human experience and that it played a powerful part in the emotional lives of adults:

*“Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationships. The formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss gives rise to sorrow while each of these situations is likely to arouse anger. The unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy. Because such emotions are usually a reflection of the state of a person's affectional bonds, the psychology and psychopathology of emotion is found to be in large part the psychology and psychopathology of affectional bonds”.*

(Bowlby, 1980 as cited in Fraley & Shaver, 2000, p. 132)

Theoretical work from as far back as the 1980s has argued for the relevance of attachment principles to adults' close relationships (Doherty & Feeney, 2004; Feeney, 2008). Many researchers have been exploring the possibility that the attachment styles identified by Ainsworth in infancy continue into adulthood and play a role in romantic relationships (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994). However, the topic of attachment in romantic relationships only became active as research after Hazan & Shaver (1987) reported their seminal studies. They

proposed romantic love as an attachment process, a process of becoming emotionally attached to an adult romantic partner in a similar way to the attachment formed in infancy to the primary caregiver. A key idea of adult attachment theory is that the adult attachment bonds between romantic partners and peers are similar to the bonds between infants and their primary caregiver (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

In a similar manner to a child, adults desire to be with relationship partners (proximity seeking), become distressed on separation or when their partners are unavailable (separation anxiety), they seek comfort from them in times of distress and develop a sense of confidence and security from their relationships using them as a secure base (Doherty & Feeney, 2004). However, child-parent attachments differ in many ways from adult intimate relationships. During adolescence a child's attachment to his parents begins to change. This is so as other adults or peers come to assume an equal (sometimes greater) importance than that of the parents and attachments other than those with parents are formed. Adult intimate relationships are better described as between peers rather than as between caregiver and care receiver (Weiss, 1982). "In adult intimate relationships both partners are therefore sometimes anxious and security-seeking and at other times able providers of security and care" (Loubser, 2007, p. 12). In a child-parent relationship the child is more likely to be dependent on their parent for security and care. Adults are also not susceptible to being overwhelmed by other behavioural systems and life contexts as they have cognitive and behavioural strategies which help them to cope in distressful situations (Loubser, 2007). Due to these and other cognitive gains, adults have a more complex understanding of security and separation. These will have implications for their experiences (Loubser, 2007).

Through constant interactions with caregivers, individuals develop working models and associated attachment styles that reflect the nature of those experiences. However, recent findings have suggested that working models based on early relationship experiences do not necessarily predict subsequent relationship outcomes in a straightforward manner (Simpson et al., 2007). As cognitive abilities become more complex, as individuals enter and leave various types of attachment relationships and as life circumstances change, these representations continually evolve (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992; Simpson et al., 2007; Vaughn et al., 1979). Although the measures for attachment in adulthood differ from those

used in childhood, the attachment styles in romantic relationships mirror those found in parent-child relationships (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press).

### **Romantic attachment in young adults.**

Even though early attachment representations should influence those in romantic relationships, none of the studies examining attachment through young adulthood assessed attachment to romantic partners (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press). Studies examining romantic attachment in young adulthood focus on the current attachment style of the couple and its influences on the romantic relationship. Only three studies were found that looked at the influence of early attachment styles on romantic relationships in young adulthood. Drawing on data from a longitudinal cohort followed from birth to young adulthood, Roisman, Collins, Sroufe, & Egeland (2005) measured whether young adults' attachment histories were associated with how they talked about their current romantic partners and whether they provided information that could predict their current relationship security (as measured by the Current Relationship Interview (CRI) (Roisman et al., 2005). Results from the study showed that CRI security was associated with the observed quality of young adults' romantic relationships; that a secure relationship with a primary caregiver functions as an indication of a secure state of mind regarding one's current romantic partnership as well as a higher quality romantic relationship. The results also indicated that attachment experiences in childhood may be carried forward into adulthood through young adults' self-reported perceptions of their romantic relationship (Roisman et al., 2005).

A study by Simpson et al. (2007) taking a sample from the longitudinal Minnesota study of Sroufe (2005), tested whether and how attachment experiences and relationships encountered during critical stages of development were systematically related to the self-reported experience and the observer-rated expression of emotions with romantic partners in early adulthood. Results from their study showed that there were meaningful links between the experience and expression of emotions in adult romantic relationships and attachment relevant experiences in early social development (Simpson et al., 2007). These findings confirm that the quality of attachment relationships experienced in early childhood are related to the nature of later adult romantic relationships (Simpson et al., 2007).

A recent study conducted by Zayas et al. (2011), assessed whether maternal caregiving at 18 months predicts adult attachment across various relationships. They assessed maternal caregiving of 36 participants when they were approximately 18 months old and then assessed their adult attachment across various relationships when they were approximately 22 years old. Results from their study have shown that the type of maternal care received at 18 months of age predicts adult attachment at 22 years of age. This suggests that the influence of maternal care is not limited to early attachment relationships only but continues to influence all attachment relationships more generally (Zayas et al., 2011). Specifically, they found that when mothers were more sensitive in their caregiving, individuals experienced less anxiety and avoidance in their adult relationships with peers as well as their romantic relationships. Mothers who were more controlling in their caregiving resulted in individuals who were more anxious and avoidant with romantic partners and their peer adult relationships (Zayas et al., 2011).

The findings from the studies detailed above add to a growing body of evidence that suggests that early caregiving experiences influence and shape adult attachment patterns in romantic relationships and friendships (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press; Simpson et al., 2007). They further support “the idea that a stable, latent pattern of attachment endures from infancy through adulthood” (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press, p. 43).

As can be seen a vast amount of literature exists on attachment and the various constructs that may affect it. Research on maternal employment and its effect on attachment have only been examined until early childhood. Similarly, while a vast amount of research on attachment as a romantic process exists, very few studies have examined this relationship in young adulthood. Furthermore, no research could be found that marries these constructs and looks at the effects of early maternal employment on romantic attachment in young adulthood. Thus the particular focus of this study is to ascertain whether any associations exist between early maternal employment and romantic attachment styles in young adulthood.

## **Methods**

This section will discuss the methods employed in conducting this research project. It will begin by detailing the research design used for the study, followed by a description of the sample employed, the instrument used, the procedure followed to conduct the research and the methods of analysis. It will conclude with a section on ethical considerations.

### **Research design**

A mixed method design was used in order to conduct the research. The research contained a larger quantitative than qualitative portion. For the quantitative portion a non-experimental cross-sectional design was used. The variables within the study were not manipulated in any way, hence the design was non-experimental. Participants who met the age criteria completed the Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) (Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994) online (see Appendix B) . The questionnaires were completed at a single point in time, within a natural setting and were therefore representative of a cross-sectional design. The study had a ‘between-subjects’ design; attachment styles between the employment groups were measured.

“Qualitative research aims to give privilege to the perspectives of research participants and to illuminate the subjective meaning, actions and context of those being researched” (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002, p. 723). Part of the aims of this research was to explore the perceptions of young adults in relation to their mothers’ employment status. Adopting a qualitative approach in analysing the two open-ended questions in the research survey, allowed for participants’ perceptions of their mothers’ employment status to be fully explored and understood. Qualitative research allows us to develop meaning and to experience the various aspects of human lives and their social worlds (Fossey et al., 2002).

### **Sample**

The participants selected for the research were undergraduate university students from the University of the Witwatersrand. The sample consisted of both male and female participants who met the criteria of being raised by a mother and being between the ages of 18 and 24. Mothers who were employed (full-time or part-time) needed to have worked while their child was between the ages of 0-5 years old, while stay-at-home mothers needed to have been home during this time period. The child’s age of 5 years old was chosen as a cut off age as it

is at this age that the infant-mother relationship has developed into what Bowlby (1969) termed a “goal corrected partnership.” It is at this stage that the child begins to increasingly understand that his mother has motives and plans of her own. As no general consensus could be found in the literature for the categorisation of part-time employment based on hours worked, the hours set out by the International Labour Organisation were used as a guideline for defining part time hours. For the purpose of this research a mother employed part-time was defined as having worked between 15 and 30 hours per week. A full-time employed mother was defined as a mother who worked five days a week and only returned home after 16:00 (4pm) or who worked over 30 hours per week.

The study used a non-probability convenient sample, i.e.: the sample was non-random and readily available. As the research aimed to compare the romantic attachment styles of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, first and second year Psychology students were approached. These students were also readily available and were awarded 1% course credit toward their year mark for participation. Table 1 presents the age range details for the full sample of respondents. A total sample of (N=467) participated in the research, 21 of whom fell out of the required 18 – 24 age range and so their data was removed from the final analysis. Although the 17 year olds (n=5) who completed the survey also fell out of the stipulated age range it was decided to include their data in the final analysis as they were a month or two away from turning 18. The final sample used was 446 respondents of which 92 were male, 352 were female and 2 were unspecified (see Table 2).

Table 1:

*Age range for full sample*

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
17	5	1	5
18	92	19	97
19	171	35	268
20	111	23	379
21	43	9	422
22	12	3	434
23	7	1	441
24	5	1	446
25+	21	8	467
Total Sample	467	100	

Table 2:

*Gender split for sample*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Male	92	20.63	92
Female	352	78.92	444
Unspecified	2	0.45	446
Total Sample	446	100	

**Instruments**

An online questionnaire (see Appendix B) containing two sections was used to gather data for the study. The first section was used to ascertain demographic information from participants. It included items regarding participants' age, gender, race and details of their mothers' employment. It also included two open ended questions (see Appendix B) used to ascertain participants' feelings towards their mother's employment status. Although these questions were aimed at participants with working mothers, on analysing the data we found that those with stay-at-home mothers also answered them. Thus when the analysis on these questions was done, they were done on all three employment statuses and include the experiences and views of all participants regardless of their mothers employment status.

The second section contained the ASQ developed by Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan (1994) and was used to measure participants' romantic attachment styles. The ASQ (Feeney et al., 1994) is a 40 item self rated measure which describes five attachment styles: Confidence, Discomfort with Closeness, Need for Approval, Preoccupation with Relationships and Relationships as Secondary. It was also designed as a measure that is suitable for those with little or no romantic relationship experience (Feeney et al., 1994) which made it suitable for use with the selected age group, where romantic relationship experience may be limited. Feeney et al. (1994) found internal consistency reliability as measured by Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .76 to .84 and test- retest reliability coefficients ranging from .67 to .78. The ASQ (Feeney et al., 1994) equates its five attachment styles to Ainsworth's original three attachment styles (secure, anxious/resistant, anxious/avoidant). The measure does not accommodate for Main and Solomon's (1986) disorganised/disoriented attachment style.

Items were rated using a 6 point Likert type scale where 1 = totally disagree and 6 = totally agree. Of the 40 items, 8 items describe Confidence, 10 items describe Discomfort with Closeness, 7 items describe Need for Approval, 8 items describe Preoccupation with Relationships and 7 items describe Relationships as Secondary. Three items from the scale are reversed scored. Once scores are calculated, each participant is assigned to one of the five attachment styles from the ASQ. These five attachment styles are directly related to the original three attachment styles of Ainsworth (1963) in the following way: the Confidence scale is related to security, Ambivalence is related to Need for Approval and Preoccupation with Relationships. Avoidance is related to Discomfort with Closeness and Relationships as Secondary (Feeney et al., 1994).

### **Procedure**

Once ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand was obtained (See Appendix C), course coordinators for first and second year Psychology were approached for permission to invite their students to participate in the study. A notice containing details about the study as well as the link to the online questionnaire was uploaded on both the first and second year SAKAI web pages. In addition, first year Psychology students were approached during their lecture slot to further explain the nature of the research and invite them to participate.

Students who were interested in participating clicked the link on the invitation and followed on screen instructions for completion of the questionnaire. As per the universities standard procedure, all first year Psychology students who completed the questionnaire were awarded 1% course credit. They were able to capture their student number on the final screen of the survey. Once data collection was completed the list of student numbers for all first year Psychology participants was given to the course coordinator so that their 1% credit could be allocated toward their year mark.

### **Data analysis**

Data was analysed using IBM's statistical software program 'SPSS'. In order to provide a clear picture of the composition of the sample, descriptive statistics were run on variables such as age, gender, race, romantic attachment style and mothers employment status. Inferential statistics, specifically Chi Squares were run to see if any associations exist

between a) maternal employment status and romantic attachment style, b) the participants' ages at which their mothers returned to work and their romantic attachment style and c) maternal employment status and participants' preference for their mothers to work or to stay at home.

The qualitative data was analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through its theoretical freedom this method provides a flexible and useful research tool, which provides a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Boyatzis as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim of employing this method is to reduce the bulk of the data set and ensure that the limited information presented is a rich description of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method for analysis began by familiarising myself with the data; this required repeated reading of the data in an active way – searching for meanings and patterns. Initial codes were then produced based on selected aspects of interest from the data set. The coded data was then refined to fit into broader categories of themes. As Braun & Clarke (2006) advised against rigidity at this stage, a flexible approach was maintained in choosing which themes were appropriate, relevant and important. The coded themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure that they form a coherent pattern in relation to the data set and themes. Finally the themes were defined, further refined and a detailed written analysis provided for the research report.

### **Ethical considerations**

Before completing the questionnaire all participants were provided with a description of relevant information for participation in the research. They were invited to participate by completing the attached questionnaire. Consent to participate in the research was given by way of participating, thus no formal consent form was given.

First year Psychology students who participated in the study received a 1% course credit. In order to ensure that the credit was given to them student numbers were recorded. As student numbers were entered separately from the data; participant's identity could not be linked to their data. Thus confidentiality and anonymity was not breached.

Data captured electronically will be kept for an unspecified amount of time for possible use in further research or later publications. The results of the study will be reported in the form of a Masters Research report that will be submitted for degree purposes to the School of Human and Community Development, Psychology Department. After the completion of my Masters Degree, the research report will be stored in the Wartenweiler Library at the University of the Witwatersrand and will be made available online for public access. Results of the study may also be reported in a publication.

During the initial stages of the research, participants who required feedback on the results of the study were invited to contact the researcher six months after data collection was complete. Details regarding the process for this were outlined in the Participation Information Sheet. However, as the research had taken longer to complete, the e-mail addresses of participants who contacted the researcher for feedback prior to completion of the research were noted. Participants were advised that a summary of the findings would be e-mailed to them upon completion of the research.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the dominant attachment style across the three employment statuses (i.e.: full-time employment, part-time employment and stay-at-home)?
2. Is there an association between early maternal employment status (i.e.: between ages 0 and 5) and later romantic attachment style in young adults?
3. Is there an association between the participants' ages at which their mothers returned to work and their romantic attachment style?
4. Is there an association between early maternal employment status and participants' preferred employment status for their mothers?
5. How do young adults feel about their mothers' employment status?

## **Results**

This chapter outlines the statistical results and the thematic content analysis of the research. It begins by presenting descriptive statistics in relation to the nature of the sample studied as well as the dominant attachment style. Thereafter Pearson chi-square results measuring associations between a) early maternal employment status and romantic attachment style, b) the participants' age at which their mothers returned to work and their romantic attachment style and c) early maternal employment status and participants' preference for their mother to work or to stay at home, are presented. In conclusion, the themes from the questions relating to participants' perceptions of their mothers' employment status will be presented.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

#### **Nature of sample**

The majority of participants (64.1%) had mothers who were employed in some capacity: 53.6% had mothers who were employed full-time and 10.5% had mothers who were employed part-time. The remaining 35.9% of the sample had mothers who stayed at home. Of the mothers who were employed, 22.69% returned to work when participants were between 0-4 months old, followed by 19.89% of mothers who returned to work when participants were between 4-6 months old, 15.97% when participants were between either 6 months – 1 year old or 1 – 3 years old, 7.28 % when participants were between 3 -5 years old and 18.21% when participants were 5 years plus.

In terms of race, the majority of the sample was Black (51.1%) followed by White (30.3%) and Indian (11.9%). The rest of the sample was unevenly spread across Coloured, Other or 'No race stated. Exact figures have been depicted in Table 3 below.

Table 3:

*Race descriptives*

Race	Frequency	Percentage
Black	228	51.12
White	135	30.27
Indian	53	11.88
Coloured	21	4.71
No Race Stated	5	1.12
Other	4	0.90
Total Sample	446	100

**Overall romantic attachment style**

Results showed that of the total sample (n=446), 79.4% (n=354) were avoidantly attached, while 18.8% (n=84) were securely attached and 1.8% (n=8) were ambivalent in their attachment. Table 4 below displays the attachment styles of the sample.

Table 4:

*Attachment style descriptives*

Attachment Style	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Avoidant	354	79.40	354
Secure	84	18.83	438
Ambivalent	8	1.79	446
Total Sample	446	100	

**Early maternal employment status and romantic attachment style**

A Pearson chi-square test of independence was performed in order to measure whether an association existed between maternal employment status and romantic attachment style. Results showed that there is a significant association between maternal employment status and romantic attachment style,  $X^2(4) = 13.587$ ,  $p = 0.009$ . However, the Phi statistic of .175 indicates that the association is weak. Thus, although a weak association exists, results suggest that those who had stay-at-home mothers were more likely to be secure in their adult romantic attachment, while those with full-time employed mothers were more likely to be

avoidant in their romantic attachment style. Those with part-time employed mothers were most likely to be ambivalent in their romantic attachment style.

Of a total of 239 participants with full-time employed mothers 85.4% were avoidantly attached, 13.8% were secure and 0.8% were ambivalent in their attachment. From the participants whose mothers were employed part-time (n=47), 76.6% were avoidant in their attachment, 19.1% secure and 4.3% were ambivalent. Seventy one percent of participants whose mothers were stay-at-home mothers were avoidantly attached and 26.3% were secure in their attachment. Based on the results, we found that participants with stay-at-home mothers had the highest incidence of secure attachment in their romantic relationships and the lowest incidence of avoidance, while those with full-time employed mother had the highest incidence of avoidance and the lowest incidence of secure romantic attachment (see Table 5 below). However, it is noteworthy that 71% of participants with stay-at-home mothers were avoidantly attached.

Table 5:

*Pearson chi-square results: Maternal employment and romantic attachment style*

Employment Status	<u>Secure</u>		<u>Avoidant</u>		<u>Ambivalent</u>		<u>Total</u>
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Employed full time	33	13.81	204	85.36	2	0.84	239
Employed part time	9	19.15	36	76.60	2	4.26	47
Stay-at-home	42	26.25	114	71.25	4	2.50	160
Total	84	18.83	354	79.37	8	1.79	446

### **Participants age at which their mothers returned to work and romantic attachment style**

In order to measure whether an association exists between the participants' age at which their mothers returned to work and their romantic attachment, a Pearson chi-square was run. Although a significant relationship exists,  $X^2(12) = 28.031$ ,  $p = 0.005$ , the relationship is weak,  $\Phi = .251$ . The highest rate of secure attachment style, 26.3% came from participants

whose mothers returned to work when they were between 6 months – 1 year old. Participants whose mothers returned to work when they were between 1 – 3 years old had the highest rate of avoidant attachment (94.7%) while those whose mothers returned to work when they were 5 years plus had the highest ambivalent attachment. Detailed results are presented in Table 6. Of note, is that the results yielded an overall high incidence of avoidant attachment within the sample, regardless of the age at which the primary caregiver returned to work.

Table 6:

*Pearson chi-square results: Age and romantic attachment style*

Age	<u>Secure</u>		<u>Avoidant</u>		<u>Ambivalent</u>		<u>Total</u>
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
0-4 months	9	11.11	69	85.19	3	3.70	81
4-6 months	13	18.31	58	81.69	0	0.00	71
6 months - 1 year	15	26.32	41	71.93	1	1.75	57
1-3 years	3	5.26	54	94.74	0	0.00	57
3-5 years	3	11.54	23	88.46	0	0.00	26
5 years +	15	23.08	47	72.31	3	4.62	65
Total	58	16.24	292	81.80	7	1.96	357

### **Early maternal employment status and participants’ preferred employment status for their mothers**

Participants were asked whether they would have preferred their working mothers to be stay-at-home mothers (indicated as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in table 7). A Pearson chi-square was run to test whether an association existed between early maternal employment status and participants’ preferred employment status for their mothers. A significant result was yielded,  $X^2(4) = 138.121$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . The Phi statistic of .556 indicates that the association was moderate. Of the 239 participants who had full-time working mothers, 19.2% said they would have preferred their mothers to be stay-at-home mothers and 79.1% said that they were happy with their mothers’ employment status. Twenty one percent of participants with part-time working mothers would have preferred their mother to stay at home while 74.5% were happy with their mothers’ employment status. Eighty seven participants with stay-at-home mothers answered this question. From this sample, 67.8% were happy that their mothers were stay-at-

home mothers, while 32.2% would have preferred that their mothers be employed. These results indicate that the majority of participants, regardless of their mothers' employment status, preferred the status quo.

Table 7:

*Pearson chi-square results: Maternal employment status and participants preference*

Maternal Employment Status	Participants' Preference		X <sup>2</sup>	φ
	Yes	No		
Full Time Employed	46	189		
Part Time Employed	10	35	138.121	0.556
Stay at Home Mother	28	59		

\*0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.33.

## **Participants' perceptions of their mothers' employment status**

### **1. Participants' reasons for wanting their mothers to be stay-at-home mothers.**

From the total sample of participants with working mothers (n=286), 78.3% of participants indicated that they would not have wanted their mothers to be stay-at-home mothers and preferred the status quo. The rest of the participants (19.6%) indicated that they would have preferred their mothers to be a stay-at-home mother. The responses of the 19.6% of participants were analysed using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the following theme: 'Mothers' limited emotional and physical availability' emerged.

### **2. What was difficult about having a working or a stay-at-home mother?**

Out of our total sample of 446 participants, 92 participants (20.6%) experienced some difficulty with having either a stay-at-home mother or a mother who worked (part-time or full-time). Of the 92 participants 55.43% had full-time working mothers, 10.87% had part time working mothers and 33.7% had stay-at-home mothers. Thus it was mostly participants with full-time working mothers who expressed the wish for a different experience. Participants' responses were analysed using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the theme 'Mothers' limited emotional and physical availability' also emerged among participants with working mothers. The themes of: 'Financial difficulty' and 'Stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling,' emerged amongst participants of stay-at-home mothers.

As the theme ‘Mothers’ limited emotional and physical availability’ emerged across both questions 1) and 2) for participants with working mothers, the results for this theme will be presented collectively.

***1. Mothers’ limited emotional and physical availability.***

Many of the participants indicated that one of the reasons they would have preferred their mothers to be stay-at-home mother was because this would have allowed their mothers to be more available to them. Having a mother who worked meant that she was less available to her children resulting in them experiencing a lack of nurturance both physically and emotionally.

*“She came back tired, didn’t really play with me. I grew up conditioned to that and all she wanted to hear was how well behaved I was and if I passed my grades. And I always had to understand that she was tired.”* (Participant 56)

*“It would have given her the opportunity to be part of every moment in my childhood and she would have been able to attend every event I took part in as a child. I think our relationship would have been stronger now if she was always with me as she would be the person I trust the most and tell everything to.”* (Participant 166)

*“To spend more time with me, so that we could have formed a closer bond with greater trust.”* (Participant 221)

*“She’d be able to attend to ALL my needs at a time that didn’t always inconvenience her or me. She’d be able to always make me lunch. She’d be at my sports functions that took place in the afternoon. She wouldn’t be too tired for other things that I would have wanted to take place like occasional walks in the park and so forth.”* (Participant 220)

*“She could spend more time with me and take me to places after school. We could chill together and she could have helped me with my homework. If she wasn’t working she could have come to my sports games.”* (Participant 325)

Two participants explained that they did not want to be cared for by a nanny and would have preferred having their mother care for them:

*“To rely on her comfortably and not a nanny.”* (Participant 31)

*“I did not like my nanny, and I needed more time with my mom.”* (Participant 183)

Many participants explained that they felt that they lacked emotional nurturance from their mothers. While many formed bonds with their mothers, they felt that these could have been more meaningful had they stayed home.

*“So that I would have had a more “hands on” upbringing and formed a deeper bond.”*  
(Participant 59)

*“Lack of relationship, feelings of loneliness/distance from her.”* (Participant 89)

*“As a young girl growing up I was bullied at school. I was unable to talk to anyone about it especially my mom as she was the parent I stayed with most of my childhood days. She was constantly working and busy and therefore failed to see that something was wrong with me and that there were certain things that were happening in my life. Although I understand why she was never around, I do however wish she was a stay-home-mum.”* (Participant 107)

*“Having her work full-time meant we didn't spend much time together and hence we took a really long time to bond and get to know each other. She was tired when she wasn't working or seeing friends to catch up. Yes she took me wherever I needed to go but only at around 14 did we start to form a bond.”* (Participant 390)

Results of the themes that emerged for participants with stay-at-home mothers:

### ***1. Financial difficulty.***

One of the reasons participants with stay-at-home mothers would have preferred their mothers to have been employed was due to their experience of life being financially difficult.

For some it meant that their basic necessities were not met while for others it meant that they could not have some of the luxury items their friends had.

*“Having a mother who was not working, kind of made me feel like I am not like other children. I could not say that my mom is going to buy me something when she gets paid, so I would prefer having a mother who was working.”* (Participant 120)

*“Not enough money to give all of us a proper a education my older siblings had to drop out of high school as a result of this.”* (Participant 198)

*“My mom stayed at home with no work. The difficulty that I personally faced was that it was never easy to get same benefits like my other friends got from their working moms. It took me more than a month to get sweets at home. My mom used to struggle to get to put food in the table for the both of us. It really hurt me very bad to see her crying sometimes when praying because I could see that my mother is not fine. This mostly made me to feel like I am the one who is hurting her, or I am a burden to her.”* (Participant 358)

## **2. Stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling.**

For many participants, having a stay-at-home mother meant that she was always around. At times, their mothers were experienced as too controlling.

*“Due to the fact that she has invested so much time and effort in her children she seems to be living vicariously through her children and is very controlling and over protective. The difficulty comes in as the children grow older and she battles to let go of her "babies" who she has cared for, for their whole lives. It takes away a sense of Independence.”* (Participant 62)

*“Mom and I have similar domineering perspectives, which leads to a lot of arguments since she is always around, she gets a bit too controlling on what I do and many of the decisions I make about life are determined by her as to which suit her liking.”* (Participant 332)

*“My mother was a stay-at-home mum. I feel that because I am an only child and was the primary or centre source of attention for her she became needy and clingy and annoying. She was never capable of giving me my own personal space and when I would ask for it it*

*resulted in a verbal/physical dispute. my mom not having a job and constantly lingering around my lifestyle and space never gave her time to build her shall I say own life which resulted in the two of us being different and I could never relate to her because she never had anything conversation worthy to speak about that would captivate me or grab my attention. Also I tend to undermine her, but through this it has made me want to not be like her "a stay-at-home mum" it has inspired me to move forward and grow and a person who strives for success." (Participant 346)*

## Discussion

This chapter will provide a discussion of the results from this study. Descriptive statistics for the sample and the dominant attachment style will first be discussed, followed by a discussion of the associations between a) early maternal employment status and later romantic attachment styles in young adults, b) the participants' age at which their mothers returned to work and their romantic attachment style and c) early maternal employment status and participants' preference for their mothers to work or stay at home. Thereafter the themes elicited from the questions relating to participants' feelings toward their mothers' employment status will be discussed. The chapter will conclude by looking at the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research of this nature.

### Descriptive Statistics

#### Nature of sample.

A total of 446 participants with a mean age of 19 years old was used in the study. The majority of the sample was made up of females who constituted 78.9% of the sample size. Based on recent statistics for the South African population (Statistics South Africa, 2015) females account for only 51.1% of the total population. The sample thus contains an over representation of females as opposed to males.

In terms of race, the sample was made up of 51.1% Black people, 30.3% White people, 11.9% Indians and 4.7% Coloured people. In order to make a comparison between our results and the race statistics for the overall South African population, a narrower definition of Black people than that provided by the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003) was used. According to the Act 'Black people' is a generic term which means Black Africans, Coloureds and Indians." However, for the purpose of this study Black people refers to Black Africans, Coloured refers to South Africans of mixed ethnic origin and Indian refers to South Africans of Indian descent (*Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003; Statistics South Africa, 2015*). Based on the statistics from Statistics South Africa (2015) the percentage of Black people within the sample is consistent with the makeup of the larger South African population as well as the young Black adult population (Statistics South Africa, 2015). However, the sample of Whites, Indians and Coloureds within the study was not consistent with the overall South African population. Within the larger South African population, Coloured people are the second largest race group followed by White people and

lastly Indian people (Statistics South Africa, 2015). A report by the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) stated that the participation rates of young Black adults (i.e.: those aged between 18 and 24 years old) in higher education is only 11%, while 60% of White young adults and 50% of Indian young adults enter higher education. The number for Coloured young adults entering higher education is at 7% (MacGregor, 2014). These statistics further indicate that the Black sample of the study is representative of both the total South African population as well as the young Black adult population. However, the Coloured sample within the study is under-represented within the overall South African population as well as the young Coloured adult population.

### **Overall romantic attachment style.**

With respect to the overall attachment in romantic relationships, the results showed that regardless of the early maternal employment status, the majority of the sample was avoidant (79.40%) in their romantic attachment style, whilst 18.83% of the sample was securely attached. Within the literature, no research could be found, internationally or within the South African context, that used the ASQ as a measure of romantic attachment for the 18-24 year age group as was done in the present study. Thus, no direct comparisons could be made between the findings of the present study and other research. However, as generally expected, attachment percentages have been provided by Feeney et al. (1994) for the ASQ. Comparisons between these trends and the results of the present study were made. According to Feeney et al. (1994) the expected percentages of each attachment classification for the ASQ are consistent with those as reported by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991). Of the four categories reported by Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) only three categories can be directly related to the original attachment categories as proposed by Ainsworth (1985); secure (47%), dismissing as avoidant (18%) and preoccupied as ambivalent (14%). Based on this comparison the findings of the present study were unexpected. An overall higher rate of secure attachment would have been expected followed by avoidant attachment and lastly ambivalence.

While the ASQ has been used to measure attachment in relation to various other constructs (such as gender differences in romantic relationships, emotional regulation, the conflicting pressures on relationship commitment as experienced by anxiously attached individuals and attachment and work satisfaction ), these studies did not report on the attachment categories

found within their samples and instead focused on reporting the associations between the various attachment styles and the variables being measured (Joel, MacDonald, & Shimotomai, 2011; Karantzas, Goncalves, Feeney, & McCabe, 2011; Kharsati & Bhola, 2016; Linder & Ossiannilsson, 2011). Thus the researcher was unable to compare the attachment percentages found in the present study to other research that used the ASQ as their attachment measurement instrument.

However, some research was found that looked at attachment percentages within a similar age range (18-24 years old) as was used within the present study. The instruments for measurement of the attachment styles of participants did however vary. The study by Hamilton (2000) on an adolescent population measured attachment using the adolescent version of the AAI (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1984). While their study also found avoidant (43.3%) attachment as the largest attachment style followed by secure attachment (30%), their percentage of avoidance was significantly lower than that of the present study. Other studies by Lewis et al. (2000); Waters, Merrick, et al. (2000) and Zimmermann & Becker-Stoll, (2002) measuring attachment between the ages of 18 – 21 were in contrast to the present study as they all showed higher rates of secure attachment than avoidant attachment.

A plausible explanation for the rate of attachment styles found in the present study can be found by looking at international research done on university-based students (Konrath, Chopik, Hsing, & O'Brien, 2014). The results of the present study are in line with the general international population trends as reported by Konrath et al. (2014), which show a decrease in secure attachment styles and an increase in avoidant attachment over the last 23 years (Konrath et al., 2014). Konrath et al. (2014) measured changes in the percentage of American college students endorsing each attachment style over time and found that the proportion of American college students with secure attachment styles had significantly declined by 15.04% over a 23 year period (from 48.98% in 1988 to 41.62% in 2011). They also found a 56.12% increase in the avoidant attachment style over the same 23 year period (from 11.93% in 1988 to 18.62% in 2011) (Konrath et al., 2014). Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van Ijzendoorn (2009) found that adolescent attachment distributions in non-clinical groups were different to adult distributions, with more dismissing attachments (35%), as was the case in the present study.

Research on the effects of negative life events, such as parental loss, serious illness, moving to a new school or town, higher income to needs ratios, divorce and a change in family structure, on attachment has shown that negative life events may result in the change of attachment to a more insecure attachment style (Fraley, 2002; Konrath et al., 2014; McConnell & Moss, 2011; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). It may be possible that participants within the sample experienced one or more negative life events resulting in an avoidant attachment style. The trend of an increase in avoidant attachment suggested by Konrath et al. (2014) as well as the experience of negative life events may be contributing factors to the overall high rate of avoidant attachment found in the present study. However, as the present study did not measure the occurrence of negative life events in participants' lives the possible factors influencing their attachment are not known. It may thus be beneficial to consider the occurrence of negative life events in the young adult population and the effect on attachment in future research.

The results of the present study indicated that a relatively low number (1.79%) of participants were ambivalent in their romantic attachment style. Based on the general expected trend reported for the ASQ (14% as ambivalent) by Feeney et al. (1994), a higher rate of ambivalence would have been expected in the sample. However, when comparing the results of the present study to international trends on ambivalent attachment in infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van Ijzendoorn, 2009; Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Konrath et al., 2014), the results of the present study were found to be consistent. Research has found that only a small group of people (7%-15%) are classified as Ambivalent.

### **Early maternal employment status and romantic attachment style**

The study sought to measure whether an association exists between early maternal employment status and young adults' romantic attachment style. The results of the study showed that maternal employment status does affect the romantic attachment style of young adults ( $p = 0.009$ ). It must be noted that the associations found were weak ( $\Phi = .175$ ). Thus, these results need to be interpreted with a level of caution. The results suggest that those with stay-at-home mothers are more likely to have secure romantic attachment styles and less likely to have avoidant romantic attachment styles, while those with full time employed mothers are more likely to be avoidant than secure in their romantic attachment style. This

result is difficult to compare with other studies since no research could be found, internationally or in South Africa, that directly measured early maternal employment status and its effect on romantic attachment styles in young adults. Based on the idea of attachment as a relatively stable construct from infancy through to adulthood the higher rates of avoidance found are consistent when compared to research conducted on maternal employment status and attachment in infancy and early childhood (Barglow et al., 1987; Belsky & Rovine, 1988). However, studies comparing working and non-working mothers on a variety of dimensions including attachment were in contradiction of the results of the present study. These studies found no significant indications of less stable attachments due to maternal employment (Hock, 1980; O'Connell, 1983; Owen et al., 1984; Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987 and Stifter et al., 1993).

The results yielded in the present study may be explained by considering the effect of an internal working model on the development of an attachment style. Children classified with a secure attachment style have built up an internal working model of their caregivers as responsive and accessible. Securely attached children develop confidence that their caregivers will be available, responsive and helpful should they require their caregivers' help or encounter adverse or frightening situations (Ainsworth, 1979, 1985; Bowlby, 1988; Senior, 2009). Stay-at-home mothers dedicate the majority of their daily lives to nurturing and rearing their children (Crowley, 2014). As primary caregivers to their children, these mothers are accessible and responsive to their children throughout the day; "as the primary caregiver, the mother is ideally best suited to comprehend her child's needs and can interpret and respond to those needs intuitively" (Macdonald, 1998, p. 30 as cited in Paré & Dilliway, 2005). The consistency in their mothers' availability and responsiveness allows these children to build more secure and less avoidant internal working models of their caregivers. These models serve as the blueprint for the formation of future relationships and new attachments (McConnell & Moss, 2011).

On the other hand, those classified with an avoidant attachment style have built up an internal working model of their caregivers as rejecting and likely to refuse any attempt they make for close bodily contact (Ainsworth, 1985). These infants show no preference for their caregivers over strangers and have no confidence that their caregivers will provide a helpful response when seeking care (Ainsworth, 1985; Berman & Sperling, 1994; Senior, 2009). Due to the

nature of full-time employment, mothers who are employed full-time may not be as responsive and accessible to their children as are their part-time employed and stay-at-home counterparts. While they are able to dedicate time to their career development and job they do however experience ambivalence about their roles as employees and mothers (Paré & Dilliway, 2005). Mothers have reported feeling tired and rushed and experiencing a constant overlap between their work obligations, home lives and vice versa (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). These constant feelings of dissonance and the pressure experienced from their two roles would likely have resulted in decreased availability and responsiveness to their children. The nature of their employment means that these mothers may not be available to their children throughout the day (Crowley, 2014). As a way to compensate for their decreased energy and attention, many mothers reported engaging in a variety of activities such as hiring nannies or au-pairs or working the night shift in order to ensure that they are able to be there for their children during the day (Crowley, 2014). While alternative caregivers may be present, they too may not be as responsive as is required by the child. While mothers are available to their children in the evening, their fatigue and possible preoccupation may result in them not being as available and responsive as is required by their children. It could be argued that these factors may contribute to the formation of an internal working model of a caregiver that is unlikely to be available and helpful when care is sought. These internal working models are then used as the blueprint for the formation of future relationships and new attachments which pervade into adulthood (McConnell & Moss, 2011; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

While the above factors are able to provide a possible explanation for the higher rates of secure attachment found in participants with stay-at-home mothers as compared to those with full time employed mothers and the higher rates of avoidance in participants with full-time employed mothers, the overall high rate of avoidance, regardless of employment type, cannot be ignored. Research by Belsky, Campbell, Cohn, & Moore (1986), Benn (1986), Chase-Lansdale & Owen (1987) and Etaugh (1974) has shown that it is not the sheer availability of the mother that affects attachment but rather the quality and intensity of the mother-child interaction. Thus while stay-at-home mothers are physically available it may be their emotional un-availability or over-stimulation that may contribute to increased incidences of avoidance. It could be hypothesised that the overall changing trend of an increase in avoidant attachment as reported by Konrath et al.(2014), coupled with maternal (un)availability and

the possible experience of negative life events could lead to more avoidant attachment styles in the overall sample.

The results of the study further suggest that those with part-time working mothers (4.26%) are likely to show a higher incidence of ambivalence in their romantic attachment style than those with stay-at-home (2.5%) or full-time employed mothers (0.8%). The small percentage of ambivalent attachment is consistent with international trends on ambivalent attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van Ijzendoorn, 2009; Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Konrath et al., 2014; Main & Solomon, 1990). No research could be found, internationally or in the South African context which measures maternal employment and its effect on ambivalent attachment style. Thus we are unable to ascertain whether the results yielded in this study are consistent with or contradict other research of a similar nature. In attempting to explain the results yielded in the study, the effect of internal working models on attachment styles was used.

Research to date on anxious/ambivalent attachment has shown that those classified with this attachment style have built up an internal working model of a caregiver who is inconsistently available and inconsistently responsive (Ainsworth, 1985; Berman & Sperling, 1994; Scher & Mayseless, 2000; Senior, 2009). Caregivers were also found to be less involved during periods when the infant wanted attention and more involved at times when they preferred to explore and did not necessarily require or want attention (Jones et al., 2015). By nature of their employment type, part time employed mothers would have only been available to their children during certain times of the day and unavailable at other times due to their work responsibilities. Furthermore, it is possible that times that the part-time employed mothers were available may not have coincided with periods when their children wanted attention. Taking this into consideration, it may be possible that due to the inconsistencies in their caregiving, those with part-time employed mothers may have experienced high levels of distress during periods of separation from their mothers as they were uncertain of the availability and responsiveness at times when they may have needed them (Ainsworth, 1979, 1985; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994; Senior, 2009). Taking the above into consideration it could be hypothesised that these experiences may have led the children of part-time employed mothers to build internal working models of their mothers as inconsistently available and responsive (Senior, 2009). These factors are likely to have resulted in an ambivalent

attachment with their children which likely influenced and shaped their ambivalent attachment patterns in their romantic relationships (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press; Simpson et al., 2007).

In the media, stay-at-home mothers have been depicted as ideal versions of what a good mother is and should be (Paré & Dilliway, 2005). While these messages and the mothering ideology may be cognitively consistent with the way in which mothers construct their day, research has shown that mothers themselves experience a lack of emotional, social and political support in their roles and may often experience ambivalence around their roles as stay-at-home mothers (Hertz, 1997; Johnston & Swanson, 2003a, 2004, 2006, 2007; Rubin & Wooten, 2007; Stone, 2007). A study conducted by DeChick (1988) (as cited in Johnston & Swanson, 2004) found that mothers are ambivalent about their parent-work identities and that 56% of stay-at-home mothers said they would choose a career if they could. Research has shown that the strength of a child's emotional attachment to its mother is a function of the quality and intensity of mother-child interactions, rather than the sheer availability of the mother (Etaugh, 1974; Benn, 1986). Furthermore, although society views stay-at-home mothers as available mothers because they are not engaging in income earning activities, most mothers carry out other activities as well (e.g. housework). From this we are able to deduce that physical availability alone is not sufficient for the formation of a secure attachment. Emotional availability is a key component to the formation of secure attachments. Emotional unavailability may thus result in the formation of avoidant or ambivalent attachment styles. It may be hypothesized that the stay-at-home mother's ambivalence toward her role coupled with her emotional unavailability may have resulted in the development of an ambivalent attachment style which pervades into adulthood.

While research has also shown that full-time employed mothers experience ambivalence in their decision to work, the percentage (21%) of mothers who feel this way is substantially lower than the percentage of ambivalence as experienced by stay-at-home mothers (Johnston & Swanson, 2004). A study conducted in 2002 by Harrison and Ungerer found that mothers who returned to work earlier, had less anxiety about non-family child care and who were committed to work were more likely to have secure infants. Thus, full-time employed mothers may experience a greater sense of cognitive consonance in their decision. For the duration of the working day, children of full-time working mothers are generally cared for by

alternative caregivers who may be more available and responsive. Full-time employed mothers' cognitive consonance as well as the availability and responsiveness of their children's alternative caregiver allows for a more consistent internal working model to be built and as a result less ambivalent attachment patterns in these children is seen than in children with part time employed mothers or stay-at-home mothers.

### **Participants' ages at which their mothers returned to work and romantic attachment style**

The Pearson chi-square run in order to measure whether an association existed between the age at which participants' mothers returned to work and their romantic attachment style was significant ( $p = 0.005$ ). While these results indicate that the age at which participants' mothers returned to work does affect their romantic attachment style in adulthood, the Phi statistic ( $\phi = .251$ ) indicates that the impact is weak. Thus, these results need to be interpreted with a level of caution. As no research of this nature exists, internationally or in South Africa, we are unable to make comparisons between the results obtained in this study and other research. In looking at possible explanations for the results yielded we turn to the existing literature on attachment.

The present study found that children whose mothers returned to work when they were between 6 months and 1 year old were more likely to have secure romantic attachments in adulthood and least likely to have avoidant romantic attachments. According to Bowlby's (1969) four main phases of attachment, these children fall into Phase 3. Phase three begins at 6 months and continues to about 1 year (in some cases it may continue into the child's third birthday) and it is during this phase that children are able to select other figures to whom they may become attached to conceive of their mother as independent figures and begin to develop internal working models of the regularities of their environment and their attachment figures (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1969). Mothers returning to work during this phase, return at a stage in their child's life when they are open to forming attachments to other figures. Furthermore, alternative caregivers are more easily able to form attachments with children who are responsive and accessible, allowing the development of a secure attachment. As children are also able to build up expectation of regularities of what happens to them during this stage (Ainsworth, 1985), these children are also able to develop an understanding of which caregiver is available to them at which times allowing them to develop confidence in

the responsiveness and helpfulness of their caregivers should they require their help (Ainsworth, 1979, 1985; Bowlby, 1988; Senior, 2009). Thus a higher incidence of secure attachments and lower incidence of avoidant attachments can be seen in children whose mothers returned to work when they were between 6 months to 1 year old.

The results of the study also showed that children whose mothers returned to work when they were between 1 and 3 years old were the least likely to have secure romantic attachments and most likely to have avoidant romantic attachments. As detailed above, children between 1 and 3 years old continue to fall within Bowlby's (1969) third attachment phase. Those who were able to fully achieve the developments of this stage by age 1, would already have optimally developed internal working models which are likely to continue as they change caregivers when their mothers return to work. However, research has shown that the experience of negative life events can result in a change in attachment style (Fraley, 2002; McConnell & Moss, 2011; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). While it is possible that their previously formed secure attachments may continue, it is also possible that experiencing a negative life event may disrupt this secure attachment and result in an anxious attachment style. For some children this phase is only fully achieved by age 3, thus their internal working models at this stage are unlikely to have been optimally developed. While children would have started to build expectations of regularities in their environment, the change of caregiver upon their mothers' return to work may disrupt these expectations. Furthermore, the alternative caregiver may not be as responsive and accessible as is required by the child. These changes may result in the adaptation of working models to avoidant attachment styles rather than more secure attachment styles. As these working models are the mechanisms through which continuity in attachment is achieved (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994), we may begin to understand why higher incidences of avoidant attachment and lower incidences of secure attachment are found in children whose mothers returned to work when they were between ages 1 and 3. These attachments pervade into adulthood, resulting in higher avoidant romantic attachments and lower secure romantic attachment for these young adults.

Participants whose mothers returned to work when they were older than 5 years were most likely to be ambivalent in their adult romantic relationships. Bowlby (1969) posited that by age 5 children's attachments have mostly been formed and that the groundwork for the development of a more complex relationship, a partnership, is laid. Thus, it could be argued

that the high incidences of ambivalent romantic attachment found in the group where mothers returned to work when their children were older than 5 years may be due to the attachments that had already formed between caregiver and infant. The stability of attachment from infancy through to adulthood (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press) meant that their ambivalent attachment continued to exist in their romantic attachment style in adulthood. It is also possible that these participants may have experienced a negative life event and that the results yielded in the present study may not be directly related to the age they were when their mother returned to work but rather to the experience of a negative life event.

From the above we can see that while there is some research available to support the various findings in the study, results for when the optimal time to go back to work may be contradictory. In order to gain a clearer picture, more detailed research is required to examine the alternative care plans during each age range and how these may affect attachment. In addition, as negative life events (e.g. death, divorce) have been found to affect attachment, it may be beneficial to consider the occurrences of these and their effect on attachment in future research as well.

### **Early maternal employment status and participants' preferred employment status for their mothers**

The results of the Pearson chi-square that was run to measure whether an association existed between maternal employment status and participants' preferred employment status of their mothers was significant. The Phi statistic of  $\phi = .556$  indicates that a moderate association exists between maternal employment status and participants' preferred employment status of their mothers. Results further indicate that participants with employed mothers were more satisfied with their mothers' employment status than those with stay-at-home mothers. Although a paucity of research exists that looks at children's preferred employment status of their mothers, two international studies were found that contradict these results. A study by Sugar (1994) which looked at the perspectives of daughters with employed or stay-at-home mothers, found that daughters with employed mothers reported feeling lonely and isolated as they felt that their mothers had devoted too much of their time to paid work. In Nomaguchi & Milkie's 2006 study, they found that adults whose mothers were employed during their childhood reported having less support than their counterparts who had stay-at-home mothers. While the results from both these studies (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006; Sugar, 1994)

do not directly indicate participants' preferred employment status of their mother, they imply a certain level of discontent. The study by Gerson (2002) was consistent with our findings that those with full-time employed mothers were the most satisfied with their mothers' employment status.

Thirty two percent of participants with stay-at-home mothers indicated that they would have preferred their mothers to be employed. Although no research could be found in support or in contradiction of these results, a possible explanation could be found by looking at the makeup of the South African population, its high poverty rates in particular. Statistics South Africa (2015) reported that in 2011, 20.2% of South Africans were living in extreme poverty and 45.5% met the criteria for moderate poverty. South Africa's Human Poverty Index (HPI) ranks 85 out of 135 countries (UNDP, 2009). The South African government views education as a path to reducing poverty and expediting long term economic growth. However, a significant portion of students entering university come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and still experience financial, nutritional and other socio-economic deficiencies (Gwacela, 2013; Machika & Johnson, 2014). The majority of South African university students come from households where income ranges between R400 to R1600 per month (Gwacela, 2013) and while some students are able to secure funding for university, this funding most often only covers their tuition. Students therefore continue to be faced with the inability to cover additional costs such as food, accommodation, stationery, resulting in their needs being unmet. With already constrained home environments, students often have little or no support from home or other funding schemes, making university attendance and survival a difficult endeavour (Gwacela, 2013; Machika & Johnson, 2014). One of the main themes elicited (further discussed below) for the reason participants would have preferred to have a working mother was 'Financial Difficulty.' Thus it is likely that the findings of the present study are due to the high rates of poverty experienced within the South African context.

### **Participants' perceptions of their mothers' employment status**

Part of the aims of the present study was to gain a more profound understanding of participants' feelings toward their mothers' employment status. The theme that emerged for students who had working mothers was 'Mother's limited emotional and physical availability.'

### ***1. Mothers' limited emotional and physical availability.***

Mothers' limited emotional and physical availability was one of the main reasons cited why participants would have preferred their mothers to be stay-at-home mothers. Participants felt that as working mothers, their mothers were not available and accessible to them in a manner that they would have liked. They believed that as stay-at-home mothers, their mothers would have been more physical: "*so that she could make me a packed lunch*" (Participant 36), "*help with homework*" (Participant 213) and emotionally: "*feelings of loneliness/distance from her*" (Participant 89) available to them. A study by Trimberger & MacLean (1982) showed similar themes: the majority of their sample reported feeling that their mothers would have been more interested in them, and thus more available to them, if they did not work. These themes were also found in studies by Sugar (1994) and Nomaguchi & Milkie (2006). Findings from research done by Galinsky (1999) (as cited in Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2006) are in contradiction to our findings. Galinsky (1999) found that children's ratings of how their parents treated them (e.g. making them feel loved, making them feel appreciated, controlling their temper) was not related to their employment status. Based on the high incidence of avoidance found in the present study, this theme is not unexpected. Research, as detailed earlier in this chapter, has shown that attachment patterns are more related to the quality of care given by the infant's mother rather than the infant's experience of quantity of maternal absence and presence (Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987; Rice, 2016; Stifter et al., 1993).

The themes that emerged from participants with stay-at-home mothers were 1) Financial difficulty and 2) Stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling.

### ***1. Financial difficulty.***

Participants in the present study who had stay-at-home mothers experienced financial difficulty with regards to both their basic needs: "*Not enough money to give us all a proper education...*" (Participant 198), "*...we depended only on my dad, so we only had access to our basic needs like food and clothes and sometimes we didn't*" (Participant 254) as well as some of the luxuries their other friends, who had working mothers, enjoyed: "*...it was never easy to get the same benefits like my other friends got from their working mums. It took me more than a month to get sweets at home*" (Participant 358). In the literature reviewed, no research could be found that contained the theme 'Financial difficulty' as elicited in the present study. As discussed earlier in the review of literature, no research is available that examines directly

at children's perceptions of their mothers' employment status. Thus the findings of the present study is likely a new finding that requires further investigation and research in future research of a similar nature.

## ***2. Stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling.***

In this study, participants found that the time dedicated to them by their mothers was stifling and their mothers were “*very controlling and overprotective*” (Participant 62). Participants felt that their mothers lived vicariously through them “*... she seems to be living vicariously through her children... It takes away a sense of Independence*” (Participant 62) and this often did not allow for their independent development: “*... having a stay-at-home mom meant she had an over attachment in our lives and she sometimes intervened too often*” (Participant 163) and “*...she gets a bit too controlling on what I do and many of the decisions I make about life are determined by her as to which suit her liking* (Participant 332). As no literature exists on the experiences of children with stay-at-home mothers, no research or literature could be found that confirmed or contradicted this theme. Literature available on children's perceptions of their mothers' parenting practices did not show any themes consistent with those of the present study.

## **Conclusion**

According to Bowlby (1977) attachment behaviour has characterised human beings from the cradle to the grave. Since this conceptualisation, much research has been conducted to support the idea that a stable latent pattern of attachment endures from infancy through to adulthood (Pietromonaco & Beck, In Press). A key idea of adult attachment theory is that the adult attachment bonds between romantic partners and peers are similar to the bonds between infants and their primary caregivers (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). While studies on the influences of early attachment style on romantic relationships exist, no studies were found that looked at the possible effects of maternal employment on young adults' romantic relationships.

The results of the study in relation to the overall attachment in romantic relationships showed that regardless of the early maternal employment status the majority of the sample was avoidant (79.40%) in their romantic attachment style. Eighteen percent (18.83%) of the sample was securely attached and 1.79% was ambivalent in their romantic attachment. As no research could be found that used the ASQ as a measure of romantic attachment for the 18-24 year old age group no comparisons could be made between the findings of the present study and other research. However, a comparison between the generally expected trends in attachment for the ASQ (Feeney et al., 1994) showed that higher rates of secure attachment and lower rates of avoidant attachment should have been expected. A plausible explanation for the high percentage of avoidant attachment in the present study was found when looking at research by Konrath et al. (2014). Their research showed a decreasing trend in secure attachment styles and an increase in avoidant attachment in university based students over the last 23 years. It was hypothesized that the trend of an increase in avoidant attachment suggested by Konrath et al. (2014) as well as the experience of negative life events may be contributing factors to the overall high rate of avoidant attachment found in the present study.

Upon closer inspection, the results showed that in comparison with the other employment categories participants with stay-at-home mothers had the highest rate of secure romantic attachment and the lowest rate of avoidant romantic attachment. In order to provide a possible explanation for these results, the researcher looked to the development of internal working models and their effects on attachment. It was argued that the consistency in availability and responsiveness of stay-at-home mothers allowed for more secure internal working models to develop in these participants. Even though this provided a possible

explanation for the results yielded the high rate of avoidant attachment in the overall sample as well as within the stay-at-home category could not be ignored. Research on maternal availability and its effect on attachment showed that it is not physical availability that affects attachment but rather the quality and intensity of the mother-child interaction. While stay-at-home mothers are physically available it may be their emotional (un)availability or overstimulation that may contribute to increased incidences of avoidance. The overall changing trend of an increase in avoidant attachment, coupled with maternal (un)availability and the possible experience of negative life events could lead to more avoidant attachment styles in participants with stay-at-home mothers as well as in the overall sample. Participants with full-time employed mothers had the lowest incidences of secure romantic attachment and the highest of avoidant romantic attachment. Reasons cited to explain this result included the quality of alternative caregivers as well as the decreased availability and responsiveness of full time employed mothers, due to the nature of their employment and working hours. Within the ambivalent romantic attachment style, participants whose mothers were employed part time had the highest rate of ambivalent romantic attachment (4.26%), followed by those with stay-at-home mothers (2.5%). Those with full time employed mothers were the least ambivalently attached in their romantic relationships (0.8%). The inconsistent experiences of availability and responsiveness experienced by children with part-time employed mothers and the personal ambivalence of stay-at-home mothers around their roles were likely to have resulted in higher rates of ambivalence in their children.

The study also looked at the association between participants' ages at which their mother returned to work and their romantic attachment. Result showed a significant, albeit weak, association. The study found that children whose mothers returned to work when they were between 6 months and 1 year old were more likely to have secure romantic attachments in adulthood and the least likely to have avoidant romantic attachments, while children whose mothers returned to work when they were between 1 and 3 years old were the least likely to have secure romantic attachments and most likely to have avoidant romantic attachments. Children whose mothers returned to work when they were older than 5 years were the most likely to be ambivalent in their adult romantic relationships while those whose mothers returned to work when they were between 4 to 6 months, 1 to 3 years or 3 to 5 years old were the least likely to be ambivalent in their adult romantic attachments. While some research was available to support these findings, results for when the optimal time to go back to work

were found to be contradictory. In order to gain a clearer picture, more detailed research is required to examine the alternative care plans during each age range and how these may affect attachment. In addition, as negative life events (e.g. death, divorce) have been found to affect attachment, it may be beneficial to consider the occurrences of these and their effects on attachment.

Results for the association between maternal employment status and participants' preferred employment status of their mothers were moderate. Participants who had stay-at-home mothers were the least satisfied with their mothers' employment type and preferred them to have been employed. Those with full time employed mothers were the most satisfied with their mothers' employment status. As no research could be found in the literature that examined this relationship, extrapolations from research on children's perspectives of their mothers' parenting practices were made in order to provide some evidence for the results of the study. No research could be found in support or contradiction of the result found for participants' preference for their stay-at-home mothers to be employed.

The theme 'mothers' limited emotional and physical availability' was elicited from participants' responses to the reasons they wanted their mother to be stay-at-home mothers and from participants' responses to the difficulty they experienced at having a working mother. Two further themes of 'financial difficulty' and 'stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling' were elicited from participants' responses to the difficulty they experienced at having stay-at-home mothers. In order to gain further insight into these results, the researcher looked to research on children's perceptions of their mothers' parenting practices in order to provide evidence for the results of the present study. However, from the literature available no themes could be found that were consistent with the themes of 'financial difficulty' or 'stay-at-home mothers were experienced as controlling,' as was elicited in this study. These themes appear to be new findings for research in this area and require further investigation in future research of a similar nature.

### **Limitations of the study**

Based on the gender and race information obtained from Statistics South Africa (2015), the sample used for the study did not entirely reflect the population of South Africa. The study had an over representation of females. Within the larger South African context, females only

account for 51.1% of the population and within our study females accounted for 78.9%. Within the study White people were the second largest race group, followed by Indians and finally Coloured people. However, within the larger South African population Coloured people are the second largest race group followed by White people and lastly Indian people (Statistics South Africa, 2015). Furthermore, a report by IEASA indicated that the participation rates of Black young adults (i.e.: those aged between 18 and 24 years old) in higher education is only 11%. The number for Coloured young adults entering higher education is 7% (MacGregor, 2014). These statistics indicate that while the Black sample may be representative of the total South African population, the Coloured sample within the study remains under-represented within both the overall South African population as well as the young Coloured adult population. Therefore results obtained from the study may not be representative of the overall population of South Africa in all its diversity.

When examining the effect that participants' ages at which their mother returned to work has on their romantic attachment style in adulthood, the research did not examine the alternative care plans for participants and the possible effects these may have had on influencing their attachment styles. Thus only limited conclusions could be made for the results found.

Research has shown that the experience of negative life events can result in a change in attachment styles (Fraley, 2002; Konrath et al., 2014; McConnell & Moss, 2011; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). As the research did not include the occurrence of negative life events in participants' lives, the research is unable to conclusively say that the attachment patterns found are purely as a result of participants' mothers' employment status.

Research has shown that the rate of participation in studies is considerably higher when an incentive is offered as compared to instances where none is given (Sharp, Pelletier & Lévesque, 2007). Incentivised participation is also likely to result in sampling bias, affecting the overall generalisability of a study (Sharp et al., 2007). The 1% course credit awarded to all participating first year psychology students could thus have impacted on the type and number of Psychology 1 students who participated in the study. It is possible that a sampling bias exists. Therefore results obtained from the study may not be simply generalised to all South Africans.

### **Suggestions for future research**

As there is a paucity of research measuring possible associations between the employment status of mothers and romantic attachments in young adults, internationally and in the South African context, additional research of this nature should be conducted in order to ascertain whether these results can be replicated. Further research of this nature would also allow for comparisons to be made both internationally and within the South African context.

Future research of this nature would benefit from evaluating the alternative care plans of participants of working mothers as well as any negative life events that participants may have experienced. These will assist in more conclusive results on the effect of maternal employment on adult romantic attachments.

No research could be found, internationally or in the South African context, that investigated the effects of maternal employment (full-time, part-time and stay-at-home) from the perspective of the child (presently or retrospectively). Future research in this regard is required.

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## Appendix A

### Participant Information Sheet



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Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Sumayya Seth; I am currently completing my postgraduate degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting research into the attachment styles of young adults in relation to maternal employment. The purpose of the research is to look at the difference in attachment styles of young adults whose mothers were employed either full time or part time from those who had full time stay-at-home mothers during their childhood.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. In order to participate in the study the following criteria needs to be met: 1) you must be between 18 and 35 years old, 2) your mother was your primary caregiver, 3) she had to have either been a stay-at-home mother until you were at least 4 years old or employed full time, she worked 5 days a week and was home from 16:00 (4pm) onwards, or was employed part-time, she worked between 15 and 30 hours a week. You will need to complete the attached questionnaire which should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. All Psychology 1 students are entitled to a 1% course credit for their participation. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. The completion and return of the questionnaire will be considered as your informed consent to use your responses for the research project. Should you choose not to participate, this will not be held against you in any way.

As we will only focus on group trends, and have no way of linking any individual's identity to a particular questionnaire, we will not be able to give you individual feedback. You may email one of us approximately 6 months after completion of this questionnaire should you require general feedback on the results of the study. If you have any further questions or require feedback on the progress of the research, please feel free to contact us on the details provided below.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. Please detach and keep this sheet for future reference.

Miss. S. Seth  
[Sumayyaseth1@gmail.com](mailto:Sumayyaseth1@gmail.com)

Ms. R. Gericke (Supervisor)  
[renate.gericke@wits.ac.za](mailto:renate.gericke@wits.ac.za)

## Appendix B

### Demographic Information

Please answer the questions below by selecting the appropriate text box:

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Unspecified

2. Current age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Race:

- Black
- Coloured
- Indian
- White

Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. During your childhood your mum was:

- Employed full- time (i.e.: she worked 5 days a week until 4pm)
- A stay-a- home mum
- Employed part time (i.e.: she worked between 15 and 30 hours a week)

5. If employed part- time, please specify amount of hours worked:

\_\_\_\_\_

6. If employed, what was your mum's occupation?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. If your mum worked, would you have wanted her to be a stay-at-home mum?

- Yes
- No

8. If 'Yes' what are some of the reasons behind wanting your mum to stay at home?

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9. How old were you when your mum returned to or started working?

- 0-4 months
- 4-6 months
- 6 months – 1 year
- 1 – 3 years old
- 3-6 years old
- 6 +

10. While your mum worked you were taken care of by/at:

- A crèche
- A nanny/domestic worker
- A family member

Other (please specify)

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11. Was there anything difficult about having a full-time working mum? If so, what was difficult?

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### Attachment Style Questionnaire

Show how much you agree with each of the following by rating them on a scale from 1 – 6, where 1 = totally disagree, 2 = strongly disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = slightly agree, 5 = strongly agree, or 6 = totally agree

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Overall I am a worthwhile person.						
2.	I am easier to get to know than most people.						
3.	I feel confident that other people will be there for me when I need them.						
4.	I prefer to depend on myself rather than other people.						
5.	I prefer to keep to myself.						
6.	To ask for help is to admit that you're a failure.						
7.	People's worth should be judged by what they achieve.						
8.	Achieving things is more important than building relationships.						
9.	Doing your best is more important than getting on with others.						
10.	If you've got a job to do, you should do it no matter who gets hurt.						
11.	It's important to me that others like me.						
12.	It's important to me to avoid doing things that others won't like.						
13.	I find it hard to make a decision unless I know what other people think.						
14.	My relationship with others is generally superficial.						
15.	Sometimes I think I am no good at all.						
16.	I find it hard to trust other people.						
17.	I find it difficult to depend on others.						
18.	I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.						
19.	I find it relatively easy to get close to other people.						
20.	I find it easy to trust others.						
21.	I feel comfortable depending on other people.						
22.	I worry that others won't care about me as much as I care about them.						

23.	I worry about people getting too close.						
24.	I worry that I won't measure up to other people.						
25.	I have mixed feelings about being close to others.						
26.	While I want to get close to others, I feel uneasy about it.						
27.	I wonder why people would want to be involved with me.						
28.	It's very important to me to have a close relationship.						
29.	I worry a lot about my relationships.						
30.	I wonder how I would cope without someone to love me.						
31.	I feel confident about relating to others.						
32.	I often feel left out or alone.						
33.	I often worry that I do not really fit in with other people.						
34.	Other people have their own problems, I don't bother them with mine.						
35.	When I talk over my problems with others, I generally feel ashamed or foolish.						
36.	I am too busy with other activities to put much time into relationships.						
37.	If something is bothering me, others are generally aware and concerned.						
38.	I am confident that other people will like and respect me.						
39.	I get frustrated when others are not available when I need them.						
40.	Other people often disappoint me.						

## Appendix C

### Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/15/007 IH

PROJECT TITLE:

A Study Comparing the Attachment Styles of Young Adults with Mothers who were Employed Full Time or Part Time to those who were not Employed.

INVESTIGATORS

Sumayya Seth

DEPARTMENT

Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

10/06/15

DECISION OF COMMITTEE\*

Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 10 June 2015

CHAIRPERSON  
(Prof. Brett Bowman)

cc Supervisor:

Mrs Renate Gericke  
Psychology

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**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)**

To be completed in duplicate and one copy returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10<sup>th</sup> floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

**This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2017**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES