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Life after Rape: Survivors' Experiences of Parenting Responses through an Attachment Lens

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Declaration

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of MA by coursework and Research Report in the field of Research Psychology, in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 13 May 2024.

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

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Signed 

Dated 13 May 2024

Abstract

South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world, with an estimated one in four women experiencing sexual assault in their lifetime. It becomes crucial to explore how these post-trauma experiences including resilience and identity are shaped by pre-existing attachment cultures[1]. This research investigates the nuanced experiences of six South African women following rape, with particular focus on the interplay between attachment cultures and experiences with parental support. Drawing on attachment theory and expansions, qualitative interviews were conducted on the sample who represented diverse attachment cultures. Thematic analysis revealed distinct patterns in how these rape survivors appraised their early attachment experiences, experiences of parental support and the quality of their life post-trauma. Securely attached systems demonstrated adaptive coping strategies and positive experiences with parental support while insecurely attached survivors reported varying degrees of maladaptive coping and perceived parental unavailability or instability. These findings magnified the complex interplay between quality of attachment cultures and response to a traumatic event. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of early attachment experiences in shaping perceptions of support and resilience. These contributions may inform tailored interventions to support sexual assault survivors based on their attachment organization. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on attachment theory and trauma recovery.

Keywords: South Africa, rape, attachment theory, attachment culture, trauma recovery, parental support

[1] Sections of the adult attachment interview was interpreted, and terminology was adjusted to attachment 'culture' due to the absence of formal assessment.

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Lastly, this research is dedicated to South African survivors of rape. Never let your experience define you, you will conquer.

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INTRODUCTION

Rape is an evolving social concern in South Africa (SA), having introduced substantial psychological effects and social adjustments in the lived realities of countless women. Regardless of improvements in legislation, increased efforts from public protectors and mass social movements, SA ranks amongst the highest reported incidences of rape worldwide (Dosekun, 2013). Reports of these events have been obscured by the broader crime statistics and suggest that the severity of this issue may never be fully acknowledged (CrimeStats, 2013). The ways in which mental representations of attachment bonds impact coping mechanisms, resilience and quality of life in the aftermath of trauma are diverse. This supports the need for tailored interventions that address the unique needs of survivors based on their attachment dynamics. Gathering that attempts to decrease this social epidemic remain inadequate, it is relevant to advance knowledge of the recovery environment. This study looks particularly at how innate psychological resources shape the survivor's current reality. By investigating how survivors experience parental support and the quality of their lived experience, in terms of recovery and resilience, it may be possible to assess how attachment cultures have impacted these realities.

The research is led by John Bowlby's seminal works and subsequent expansions on attachment theory. Notably, in his 1953 publication, he emphasized that 'attachment' denotes the emotional bond between caregiver and child. Under ideal rearing conditions, experiences of comfort, support and nurturing promote healthy attachments. The quality of these bonds has significant influence on childhood development and importantly, on psychological strength and resilience throughout the lifespan (Shen et al., 2021). While research on this framework is wide, there remains a limited scope of literature which looks at how rape survivors' experiences of parental responses are nuanced by attachment cultures. Furthermore, there is scant literature which considers how attachment patterns may be mobilized in different ways post-trauma and determine quality of life.

Central to the conclusions generated by this study, is the incorporation of two pertinent frameworks that build upon Bowlby's attachment theory, viz Ainsworth's patterns of attachment (1978) and the Main & Goldwyn. (1984a, 1998a) adulthood classifications. By integrating these frameworks, this research sought to offer insight into how attachment cultures established in childhood, may shape experiences of parental support following rape. Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate how attachment cultures potentially nuance

the lived experience post-trauma, with regard to recovery responses such as emotional regulation and resilience. It is the objective of this research that such holistic understanding may potentially inform interventions and support strategies aimed at promoting healing, recovery, and growth in survivors of rape.

Research Aim

This research aims to generate insights into the nuanced dynamics of attachment cultures in the context of sexual assault trauma. Grounded in an attachment theory framework, it seeks to report on the impact of attachment cultures on women's lived experiences and parental support following rape. This investigation aspires to uncover common themes, differences and intersections amongst participants with varying attachment dynamics. It is anticipated that the key themes generated from the data corpus may provide insight into early attachment cultures' shaping of lived experience in terms of coping, resilience and perceptions of parental support.

Rationale

Despite numerous legislative advancements, mass social movements and increased efforts from public protectors, South Africa ranks amongst the highest reported incidences of rape in the world (Buiten & Naidoo, 2016). The distress caused by sexual assault may present obstructive social and psychological effects on both the survivor and their family members. Considering that this social epidemic remains unfettered, it becomes vital to focus attention on the post-trauma environment, and specifically on how experiences of resilience and identity building are secured by the caregivers' response and support. This is significant as post-trauma, the survivor becomes overwhelmed with feelings of guilt, devaluation, distrust, and conflicts around independence (Campbell, 2008). This study suggests that attachment representations ingrained in early childhood play a pivotal role in developing stress management strategies and resilience necessary to mitigate distress (Cowan, 2020).

O' Connor and Elklit (2008) suggest that these early formed attachment styles equip the individual with psychological resources that are used in adulthood. Considering that these attachments are shaped by the quality of experience with the caregiver, this will also shape the way the individual experiences their parent's responses to their traumatic situations. If high quality social support has been encountered following experiences of danger and insecurity, the survivor's recovery may well be positively impacted, depending on how the

individual makes sense of their post-trauma attachment environment (Bretherton, 1985). Following in-depth review of the literature, research on these attachment systems largely focus on the parent's experiences in relation to general trauma (Brown, 2005). However, an unexplored area remains around how the survivor's lived reality following sexual trauma, and their process of recovery may be nuanced by their attachment culture with their caregiver. This research primarily seeks to deepen an understanding by exploring what attachment-related factors potentially help or hinder how a survivor reconstructs their reality in a positive or negative way post-trauma.

Due to a multitude of factors, including fear of retribution, stigma or re-traumatisation, survivors of rape do not typically experience the possibility of having their voices heard around their post-trauma recovery (Cowan, 2020). A secondary motivation for this research is to provide a platform for expression for survivors of rape. Furthermore, the research may offer essential information for caregivers, stressing the importance of building healthy attachment cultures to safeguard psychological wellness in the face of unforeseen traumatic event.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Rape remains an ongoing societal challenge in SA, leading to significant psychological impacts and necessitating profound social adaptations among women. Despite legislative advancements, intensified efforts by public advocates and widespread social mobilization, South Africa continues to rank among the countries with the highest prevalence of rape globally (Dosekun, 2013). Rape in the context of SA introduces a unique cultural influence that may provide insight into why a large percentage of incidents are reported. Post-colonial discourses will be reviewed to inform how these messages have embedded a culture of violence in SA. By assessing the past use of intimidatory tactics to enforce dominant ideals around race, we may understand how South African society is skewed towards gendered inequalities, locating women as social subordinates.

Personal, social, and psychological effects are introduced by the experience of sexual assault, and it becomes necessary for this research to review the aftermath of victimization (Emm & Mckenry, 1998). The post-trauma environment and embedded psychological resources are significant to not only recovery but how the individual rebuilds their identity as a victim or survivor (Brown, 2004). Thus, the reader will be introduced to feminist researchers' assumptions that promote feminist consciousness and its contributions to healthy development. Lastly, studies suggest that this process may be accommodated or hindered by the psychological resources embedded in early childhood through formed attachment cultures (Ainsworth et al., 2015). In particular, the attachment paradigm will provide the theoretical framework for the study, to explore the way in which the survivor experiences her parents' responses to sexual trauma.

1.1. Conceptualizing Rape

The Criminal Law Amendment Act 32 of 2007, informs that citizens have the right to make autonomous choices about their sexual relations (South African Government, 2023). An infringement of this autonomy is considered as a violation of one's human rights, that may be projected through 'sexual assault'. This umbrella term refers to any unconsented act(s) of a sexual nature. This may range from verbal to physical harassment and may predispose the victim to discomfort in the form of physical and psychological effects (Dowds, 2019). In this study, this conceptualisation will be used interchangeably, as it encompasses the main focus of the study, the act of rape, which is defined as a violation of sexual rights through forced penetration (South African Government, 2023).

1.2. Rape in the South African Context

In the South African context, rape has become a significant crisis of epidemic proportions. Alarming rates of these acts are reported through public service infrastructures and crime statistics. In particular, the province of Gauteng has generated a figure of 11, 235 reported cases of sexual assault in the first quarter of 2023. Therefore, placing this location as the highest ranked, nationwide (CrimeStats, 2023). Importantly, it has been gathered that there are clear gender disparities present in these statistics, as this social concern significantly affects the female population.

Mcilwaine (2013) suggests that this imbalance is a result of the broader gendered power divide and persisting inequalities in the social world. This factor is furthermore supported through the growing rates of gender-based violence in SA. These acts refer to any form of verbal, emotional and physical violence that is motivated by the gender of the victim. Local reports reveal that women living in informal housing areas are especially vulnerable to these crimes. Prevalence in these areas, have been explained by a combination of ecological risk factors, placing great focus on political and social adversities (Baldasare, 2012).

Debates around political contributions to obstructive gender ideals, suggest that post-colonial discourses have embedded a culture of violence that still governs a large portion of citizens today. Moffet (2006) proposes that the dominant group historically used intimidatory tactics to enforce their power and social status. Tactics of which were often violent in nature and used to remind excluded groups of their subordinate ranking. While messages about racial divide are outlawed today, the messages of these oppressive ideals linger and are reinforced through obstructive notions about gender. By this logic, it is proposed that women have now assumed the subordinate status, and men are using sexual assault as a means of asserting power and maintaining a desired social balance (Buiten & Naidoo, 2016).

Using institutionally informed messages as an influence, it becomes important to understand these ideals as a projection of unequalised gendered power at a social level. Feminist researchers have challenged debates of individualised motivations such as sexual desire and compulsion and magnified an intersection between social constructions of gender and power (Reef, 2005), suggesting that sexual assault manifests through the pursuit of gendered power. Instead of problematizing the concept of patriarchal masculinity, it is worthwhile to consider this conceptualisation as socially constructed and institutionally enforced. In essence, this

suggests that masculinity is not static but performed and that sexual violence is rather a performance in the social world (Jewkes, 2011).

In line with these assumptions, Baldasare (2012) suggests that the shifts in social and economic order, which aspire for female inclusivity, had been proposed as a risk factor. The increasing opportunities for women in the workplace have contributed to a 'crisis of masculinity'. As a response to this deviation of traditional social structure, it is suggested that sexual assault is used as a tool in reasserting one's social identity. Contrary to this assumption, Dworkin et al. (2021) propose that unemployed and lower educated women are exceptionally vulnerable, as they are not exposed to global discourses around the intolerance of sexual assault. Combining these factors with social disadvantages such as legal and medical resources, South African women are facing a unique and challenging social concern, regardless of attempts at inclusivity and political intervention.

1.2.1 The Aftermath of Victimization

Descriptive research exploring the lived realities of rape survivors has conceptualised rape as a crisis. Subsequent to the event, the survivor experiences a state of disorganisation. Emm and Mckenry (1998) suggest that disruptions to daily life and behaviours are observed and triggered by the onset of intense fear, anxiety, depressive characteristics, and physiological responses such as fatigue. According to Campbell (2008) the survivor then undergoes a period of 'pseudo-adjustment' when denial about the reality and effects of the stressor is assumed. Should this adjustment subside, the survivor attempts internal resolution by dealing with reactions such as self-blame, sexual dysfunction, and depressive symptoms. This internal resolution may often be impacted by social stigmatization, failure on the part of the justice system and most importantly, influence by the survivor's significant relationships, more specifically, insufficient social support (Kennedy & Prock, 2018). These are experiences that may introduce additional risk or resilience factors and affect the ability to regain independence.

Essential to the conclusions of the study, it is important to consider that trauma and traumatic symptoms affect the survivor's immediate microsystem. In particular, 'secondary victims' is a term developed by Siady et al. (2019) to stress the shifts in family structure post-trauma. Emotional responses are proposed to be a key motivator in changes within the parent-offspring relationship, on the basis that actions are a projection of emotions. Parents that

display obstructive emotional responses to their offspring's sexual assault often hinder their ability to be constructively accommodating to their needs (Kim et al., 2015).

Guilt and self-blame were amongst the highest reported reactions in the Siady et al. (2019) study and were said to have inspired a shift towards authoritative parenting practices. Practices of which manifested as negative methods for discipline and overinvolvement in the offspring's behaviours and decision-making. Such shifts in this dynamic were said to produce negative outcomes in psychosocial dimensions.

These notable shifts in parenting interventions, invite questions about the severity of adverse psychological effects, in particular, why certain survivor's experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) whilst others do not? Harris (1991) proposed that clinical manifestations post-trauma, are determined by a number of factors such as past traumatic experience, personal characteristics, and perceived emotional support. Fear, that is characteristic of PTSD, has been explained as a biological response, that may also be activated by subjective perceptions about how to react to overwhelming emotion (Hauck et al., 2007). The capacity to manage overwhelming affect is a developmental skill engaged in response to early childhood development, where resilience and security regulation techniques are transferred from caregiver to child (Bretherton, 1985). With this in mind, this research suggests that it would make sense to interrogate how attachment systems secure mechanisms for resilience and how these attachment cultures may nuance post-rape experiences of parental support and responses.

1.3. Victim or Survivor Debate

A final consideration around rebuilding normalcy following rape, is the identity one assumes; in particular this research is concerned with whether individuals consider themselves to be a victim, or a survivor of rape. Having considered the factors that may alter one's ability to rebuild daily structure, it is worthwhile to consider how established internal systems have contributed the shaping of one's identity and how this contributes to rebuilding oneself as either a victim or a survivor. As a significant development of feminist therapy, the overall ambition of this approach to intervention is that women build and possess feminist consciousness (Brown, 2005). In essence, these assumptions relay that one's distress is not simply a product of the individual's deficit, but rather as society's invalidation, exclusion and silencing of the nondominant group, women (Shen et al., 2021). This research will then explore how this adopted identity of survivor or victim may be shaped by childhood

experiences that develop the self-concept. However, as a means of conceptualisation prior to commencement of the study, the term ‘survivor’ is used to describe these participants.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Bowlby's Attachment Behavioural System

It must be emphasised that attachment is much more complex than an emotional bond between caregiver and child. Rather, it is a psychological organisation resourced across one's lifespan, determined by the quality of intimacy between caregiver and child (Bowlby, 1953). During the crucial years of infancy and early childhood, the offspring has limited ability to self-regulate. Thus, one's primary caregiver acts as a moderator of impulses, a guide through space and time, and a *conditioner* of one's environment, acting as the ego and superego until these abilities are learned and the role is transferred to the offspring (Bowlby, 1958). By the age of one year, there is a noticeable shift in the infant's desire for independent locomotion. Holmes (2006) explains that this motivation is counterbalanced by an internal drive to seek closer proximity to the caregiver should a stressful situation arise, looking to the attached figure as a secure base. Independent exploration of the environment is then assumed should the child feel secure, and thus the attachment system is deactivated. The study has drawn on the principles of attachment theory, developed through the collaborative efforts of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Bretherton, 1992). This contribution to developmental psychology has magnified the influence of emotional connectedness between parent and child and in particular, the disruptions to the stability of this attachment, in the event of traumatic stressors such as bereavement, deprivation and most significant to this research, rape (Buiten & Naidoo, 2016). The model originated as an alternative to the assumptions proposed by the psychoanalytic object relations theory. As Bretherton (1985) outlines that attention was placed on understanding the likeness between adult and childhood grief; solidifying answers as to why separation may induce anxiety and lastly, defensive mechanisms that serve to selectively filter out signals that may activate attachment behaviours.

2.1.1. Felt Security

Having discussed the attachment system from a broader relationship context, it becomes necessary to overview Bowlby's (2012) insights on a goal-corrected control system, this goal being security regulation. From an external, physical scope, it is believed that attachment behaviours are used to attain close contact with the attachment figure. These behaviours are most noticeably activated under states of physical and psychological distress such as illness, fear and anxiety (Bowlby, 1980). From a psychological perspective it is understood that the underlying goal is that of felt security (Ainsworth et al., 2015). An attachment figure

symbolizes a source of protection and security that exceed general close relationships. One of the more prominent features of the attachment relationship is 'separation distress' whereby the offspring experiences a predictable series of states such as crying, calling and searching. Bowlby (1969) characterized this as a normative response to impending loss of this source of safety and security.

On the contrary, should the primary AF be physically or emotionally unavailable amid times of distress, and do not respond to the offspring's interactive bids for attention, the set-goal for felt security is unsuccessful. Instead, the distress that initially triggered the attachment system is intensified by uncertainties around feeling secure (Bowlby, 2012). The attached dependent is then challenged with doubts about reliance on others and their own abilities placing the attachment system in a continuously activated state with insufficient resources to self-regulate emotions. For offspring to feel secure, the experiences of the interaction must be of continuous content, warmth, and protection, as the mere perception that the attachment figure is a responsive and reliable source of protection is enough to alleviate distress (Bretherton, 1985).

2.1.2. Hyperactivation and Deactivation

Main et al. (1985) expanded and outlined that the set-goal will be unsuccessful should the attached figure be unresponsive or inadequately tend to proximity seeking. As a response, the attachment system may be readjusted or secondary strategies will be employed, this is referred to as *fight or flight* or *hyperactivation or deactivation.* The former is activated through an attached figure that is at times responsive and at times not. The dependent, through hyperactivation will commonly protest and adopt energetic attention-seeking strategies, reinforcing that the attached figure will sometimes respond to demands for affection and love. Unfortunately, these efforts often produce emotional distress and relational conflicts (Main & Goldwyn, 1984).

The latter flight or deactivation, is a result of the attached figure's unavailability, defined through unresponsiveness, punishment or disapproval of bids for security (Mikulincer & Shaver 2003). This reinforces that the dependent may achieve the attached figure's attention by supressing needs and vulnerability. Despite the sense of security not being achieved, the attachment system is deactivated, and the dependent manages threat and distress independently so as to avoid additional distress through unavailability. Both strategies create representational/working models that guide behaviour, feelings and emotions which can

influence how an individual records, interprets, and retains memories of subsequent interactions with their attached figure (Hesse, 1996).

2.2. Attachment Styles Across the Lifespan

Infants are not naturally inclined towards a particular attachment style. Bowlby's (1958) explanation of balance between proximity seeking and environmental exploration had been critiqued as an instinct theory. Furthermore, the proposed attachment behaviours of smiling, crying, clinging, following, and sucking, that were said to integrate with an attachment behavioural system, had created room for misunderstanding and measurement problems. However, operationalizing this theoretical framework inspired the Ainsworth et al. (1978) development of *Patterns of Attachment* and this procedure had expanded on the attachment theory to now be reflective of an attachment paradigm. Through qualitative interpretations, she enhanced Bowlby's works and identified three distinct attachment classifications. This groundbreaking contribution paved the way for multiple expansions, and significantly, piloted Mary Main's attachment classifications in adulthood, that will lead this research.

2.2.1. Strange Situation Procedure

In their publication, Ainsworth et al. (1978) explain that the Baltimore Project gave rise to the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) that involved several observations of separation and reunion between the attachment figure, an adult stranger and the child. These observations drew conclusions from how the child regarded the attached figure as a secure base and the expectations alongside it. More specifically, the procedure elicited unfamiliarity and separation to trigger anxiety about the availability of the caregiver. The concept of a secure base was assessed through a mutual process of provision and receipt. Thus, this strange situation was made secure by the presence of the attached figure and outcomes differed by the dependent qualities of the child (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

The study findings summarised individual variations in patterns of attachment, and were categorised as *secure, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent.* These classifications were established on qualitative differences around how the child organises and maintains its secure base with the attached figure. The response to reunion with the attached figure gave clearer indication into the state of attachment, suggesting that separation informs about the child's trust around accessibility and responsiveness (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The most noticeable observation was classified as a *secure* attachment, whereby Benoit (2004) reiterates that

infants who project a noticeable balance between proximity-seeking, and exploration are viewed as *securely attached.*

More specifically, these responses exhibit working models of successful proximity-seeking and felt-security. Experiments observed that this attachment type is comfortably secure with the attachment figure yet displays reticence around the adult stranger (Ainsworth et al.,1978). When reunited, the offspring greet their mothers with warmth, contact, respond positively to her affection and proceed to explore their surroundings. During home observations, researchers concluded that these mothers were emotionally available and attentive to the offsprings bids for security (George & Solomon, 2015).

Other observations had reported feelings of anger and abandonment, which did not entirely vanish upon reunion, and left an *ambivalent* response around the desire for resumed contact. This was displayed through an inability to resource the caregiver's attempts at consolation, yet equal attempts to maintain close proximity (Ainsworth 1967). Maternal sensitivity is a central antecedent to the offspring's attachment security. Ainsworth et al. (1978) reported that one of the main contributions to anxious/ambivalent behaviors are inconsistent maternal availability. Focus on more general characteristics of the mother found only slight variations when compared with mothers of the securely attached.

In this group, the caregivers reported more depressed and anxious features and commonly expressed dissatisfaction with their marriages. These mothers were categorized as inconsistent in their parenting duties and showed less sensitivity than those of securely attached offspring. George and Solomon (2015) mention that this type of caregiving is a response to providing security for the child and balancing life conflicts. For these mother's this requires greater physical and psychological effort and increases frustrations about constantly monitoring the offspring at the expense of their needs. Ultimately this affects sensitivity as the caregiver cognitively disconnects to alleviate the frustrations brought on by the source of discomfort. This leaves them uncertain and confused about their role as caregiver (Scher, 2000).

Similarly, high intensity of *avoidant* responses, were projected through detachment behaviours, that suggested nonchalance about the separation from the attached figure. This implied that the offspring possessed working models resembling attachment system deactivation. This detachment was proposed to be a result of conflict between high levels of attachment behaviour and avoidant behaviour induced by the perceived rejection and failure

of a secure base (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). The attachment dependents displayed significantly less distress than those secure and avoided their AF's upon return. Upon home observations, researchers concluded that these mothers seemed emotionally distant and showed anger and rejection towards their infants bids for proximity-seeking (Ainsworth et al. 1978).

2.2.2. Main's Expansion: Disorganized Attachment

Proposed gaps in behavioural patterns influenced works by Main and Solomon (1990) and introduced a group of infants who were unclassified and are now categorised as *disorganized.* This suggests that these offspring may encompass a disintegration of organized attachment strategies. This group had displayed odd and unpredictable behaviours such as fearful, confused and contradictory responses upon reunion (Main & Hesse, 1990). Behaviours of which were incomprehensible and difficult to classify under the conditions of the Baltimore Project. It was conveyed that these responses were reinforced through disorganized, unpredictable and discomforting responses by the attached figure. Home observations suggest that, when the offspring seeks them for comfort and security, they are greeted with uncertainty, and dissociative expressions (Main, 1996).

The assertions behind the SSP claim that, in a fearful situation (induced here by separation), the child seeks close proximity to their secure base. Through experiences of responsiveness and accessibility, or lack thereof, the situation introduces a high intensity of fear (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Suggesting that the perception of availability of a secure base in a threatening event is vital for feelings of security. However, the doubt about this availability sets the foreground for fear and anxious behaviours (Ainsworth, 1967). This stresses the importance of the attached figure as a trusted companion in a fear-arousing situation such as sexual assault, and the experiences had for determining outcomes.

2.3. Attachment in Adulthood

While Bowlby's works predominantly emphasize attachment behaviors in childhood, he acknowledged that these behaviors may be activated across one's lifespan. Manifesting through thoughts, behaviors and proximity-seeking in times of distress (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2010). In the current research it is important to consider that autonomous adults equally benefit by seeking physical comfort from the attached figure. Proximity-seeking is a natural and primary strategy in the attachment behavioral system. A variety of behaviors

reflect this need such as maintaining closeness and interaction bids through overt displays of negative emotion such as anger, sadness, and anxious characteristics. These bids for comfort may not manifest in every threatening situation, although the individual consciously or unconsciously selects the most appropriate depending on the given context (Bowlby, 2012).

The basic assumption of attachment theory is that if mental health is to be positively maintained in adulthood, then this reflects a childhood of support, comfort, availability and understanding of the self and the others (Bowlby, 1958). Understanding these attachment cultures across generations requires a leap across various realms spanning from early nonverbal cues in infancy to perceptions on experiences of their parents' support in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

Similarly, Gottman and Declaire (1998) suggest that goal-corrected behavior is altered as the individual matures. Determined by the quality of the attachment system, these behaviors are context sensitive and more flexible. A person that has been efficiently coached through varying situations are likely to develop skills such as effective communication of feelings and emotional intelligence and becomes more successful in having their needs met through trauma. This cycle of experiencing threats or distress, seeking proximity, receiving felt security and experiencing a reduction of stress serves as a prototype for individual emotion regulation. Bowlby (1969) supported that through the attachment system the individual may possess a working knowledge of their behavioral skills and abilities. This is embedded through representations of the AF's responses and is resourced in times that require felt security.

2.3.1. Internal Working Models/Representation

An adult's attachment style reflects its functioning and their most chronically accessible working model (Steele & Steele, 2008). Working models create both excitatory and inhibitory connections with each other. Activation of one model prepares similar models while suppressing those that are inconsistent. In other words, recalling or contemplating felt security triggers memories of other successful attempts to proximity-seeking and makes memories of heightened activation and deactivation less available. Over time, as related memories are repeatedly retrieved, these associative links are reinforced, promoting the development of more abstract and generalized representations of how the attachment system operates in connection with others (ibid).

Main et al. (1985) reconceptualized individual differences in attachment behaviours in adulthood by emphasizing mental representations and language. They proposed that attachment organizations may be understood through representations of emotion and relationships, as well as the recalled memories. Through patterns of language, one may uncover these mental structures or representations, in line with grounded theoretical work in attachment (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969). Similarly, Bowlby (1980) emphasised the internal working model, or a representational model of oneself, others or relationship that is significant to the individual. The offspring's first schemata are guided through experiences of need fulfilment. Depending on whether the caregiver fulfils or frustrates these needs, will determine how working models are constructed about the relationship. In this view, it is said that what is encoded and guides the individual is a generalized view of one's overall experience. Bretherton (1992) explains that this model leads an essential component of the attachment behavioural system as it nuances appraisals of experience based on goals, efforts and outcomes. This organization of knowledge by the attached figure's actions, will reflect a perception of their availability and responses rather than the person themselves.

Also referred to as a 'script', the individual reflects on experience and is cognizant of how stress is reduced through affection, problem solving and assistance. Should the caregiver not be in proximity, the offspring may resort to self-soothing through mental representations of these past encounters and techniques employed by the attached figure. This creates a sense that distance and autonomy is compatible with closeness and reliance on social support.

2.4. Main's Adulthood Attachment Patterns

Significant to this research that reports on adult survivors of rape, Main's (1996) contributions on adulthood attachment dynamics suggest that behaviours can evolve and manifest differently as the individual matures. While the underlying principles of Bowlby's (1969) attachment behavioural system remain relevant – that childhood experiences with the attached figure guide internal working models and influence emotional regulation- Main's expansions emphasize the complexity and variations present in adulthood. While childhood attachment systems continue to shape perceptions, behaviours and coping in adulthood, they manifest in different ways (Main & Solomon, 1990). These adulthood patterns are characterized by one's internal representations of their attachment, their appraisals of parental relationships and the quality of their stress management (Main et al., 1985). It is true that

attachment styles may remain consistent across the lifespan, however, some may experience shifts based on life experiences and developmental transitions (Main, 1996).

2.4.1. Secure Attachment

Adults that exhibit a secure attachment reflect a childhood of support, availability and consistent caregiving. This fosters the development of a positive internal working model of attachment (Main & Solomon, 1990). This group exhibits comfort with intimacy and closeness in relationships. Furthermore, they are easily dependent on others for social support, while providing support in return (Main et al., 1985). Securely attached adults display a coherent understanding of attachment-related experiences and exhibit productive emotional regulation methods. This higher quality attachment style is aligned with higher appraisals about relationship satisfaction, trust and overall psychological well-being (Scharie & Bartholomew, 1994).

Secure attachment patterns are characterized by open-communication and empathy. This group is able to effectively express their needs and emotions, fostering a sense of emotional safety and security in their relationships. Research suggests that these attachment styles are associated with positive outcomes within relationships, therapeutic settings and trauma recovery (Simpson et al., 2002).

2.4.2. Dismissing Attachment

Adults that exhibit a dismissing attachment style tend to prioritize independence and self-reliance over attachment relationships (Main & Goldwyn, 1984). It has been said that this group may have experienced emotional neglect or unavailability from their attached figure's in childhood. This results in a defensive attachment strategy focused on minimizing attachment needs and emotions. Dismissing adults often have limited recall or negative appraisals about their early attachment experiences. This may manifest as a lack of emotional depth or avoidance of intimacy in their adult relationships (Main, 1996).

Dismissing patterns in adulthood are aligned with emotionally distancing, avoidance of intimacy and difficulty in forming close relationships (Bartholemew & Horowitz, 1991). Through narrative, one might observe the devaluing of the importance of attachment bonds, and the prioritizing of self-sufficiency and autonomy in their interactions with others. These defensive coping methods may lead to challenges in expressing vulnerability or seeking

support from others. This may ultimately hinder their personal development in the event of trauma.

2.4.3. Preoccupied Attachment

Adults that exhibit a preoccupied attachment pattern reflect high levels of dependency and anxiety within relationships (Main & Goldwyn, 1984). These individuals display a heightened need for closeness and fear rejection or abandonment leading to preoccupation with relationships and difficulty with emotion regulation (Main & Solomon, 1990). Preoccupied adults may have experienced inconsistent caregiving or unresolved attachment-related trauma in their childhood which contributes to their anxiously attached behaviour (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They usually seek excessive reassurance and validation and tend to ruminate on relationship concerns, which can lead to instability and emotional distress.

Preoccupied attachment patterns are associated with hyperactivation of attachment systems, which result in intense emotional responses and clingy behaviour. Furthermore, some exhibit a chronic fear of rejection which can undermine trust and intimacy in their relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Regardless of their desire for closeness, this group may grapple with feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, often seeking external validation to alleviate their attachment-related anxieties (Main & Goldwyn, 1984).

2.4.4. Unresolved/Disorganized Attachment

Adults who exhibit unresolved/disorganized attachment reflect past experiences of trauma or unresolved losses in childhood. This may result in unresolved grief, fear, or unresolved-trauma related memories (Main & Hesse, 1990). This group may produce contradictory or disoriented behaviours, alternating between proximity-seeking and withdrawing from intimacy (Main & Goldwyn, 1994). Unresolved adults often struggle to integrate past traumas into their sense of self and may experience difficulties in regulating emotions and maintaining stable relationships.

Unresolved/disorganized attachment patterns are associated with a lack of coherence and organization in narratives about attachment-related experiences (Hesse & Main, 2006). Unresolved individuals may demonstrate lapses in attention or cognition when discussing traumatic events, suggesting ongoing emotional distress or unresolved trauma-related memories (Van Ijzendoorn, 1995). Their unresolved attachment status may contribute to a

range of psychological difficulties, including disassociation, post-traumatic stress symptoms and relationships dysfunction (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2008)

2.5. Patterns of Appraisals

By awakening childhood memories and thoughts and emotions surrounding their trauma, one's attachment dynamic may surface. As Bowlby (1969) had suggested, current symptoms manifest through previously reinforced patterns of behaviour. Interview questions in the current research were carefully considered and used as a means of surfacing the attachment system. Probing into early childhood environments and touching on key attachment activation scenarios such as separation, distress and validation (Ainsworth, 1978), may take the survivor back to a time where their attachment systems were activated. Main et al. (1985) had employed a similar cognitive-development approach to the unconscious, by awakening early memories and associated emotions that might not have been ordinarily retrieved. They suggested that perceptions of attachment security in adulthood, is gathered through the speaker's discourse. More specifically, through key verbal indicators such as 'good', 'warm', 'unstable'. 'fearful' or 'loving', when appraising childhood memories with the caregiver(s).

From a psychodynamic lens, semantic memories are unified with episodic memories, suggesting a clear integration between the conscious and preconscious structures of the mind (Steele & Steele, 2008). Childhood memories are readily accessible in adults who possess a secure and well-organized attachment. They can articulate these thoughts coherently and suggest that their attachment is valued. Such narratives are indicative of autonomy when dealing with worries of the past and invasive feelings about the future (ibid).

Individuals with insecure attachment represent exhibit discernible patterns of response. Most notably, speakers with an avoidant or dismissing attachment style tend to be defensive or rigid when appraising attachment experiences in childhood (Main & Solomon, 1990). This suggests a disassociation between their emotional connections and conscious awareness. These detachments may manifest as difficulty in recall or negative appraisals of their experiences. Conversely, those possessing preoccupied attachment styles often become overwhelmed by emotion when revisiting unfavorable memories. Expressing feelings of being misunderstood or inadequately loved in their attachment relationships (Hesse, 2008).

A good portion of the insecure group, present negative appraisals and attitudes when emphasizing their caregiver(s) misdoings. Disorganized attachments on the other hand,

present with a combination of these responses. Presenting through lengthy and often, incoherent storytelling (Main & Hesse, 1990).

2.6. Trauma Responses through Attachment Dynamics

Considering Bowlby's (2012) assertion that this attachment system is a lifespan resource, the implications of traumatic stressors on this attachment has been considered throughout the years. There is the consideration that previously secure attachments may be compromised during these stressful events, or significant to this research, that experiences of parents' responses to sexual assault may be influenced by this established system (Shen et al., 2021). The effects of a traumatic stressor such as rape may produce risky or resilient behaviours depending on the dynamic that has been developed (Jacobvitz et al., 2018). However, the majority of observations report that individuals who are secure in their attachment relationships develop a positive sense of self, comfort with social support, empathy and most importantly, resilience. Thompson et al. (2018) outline that despite stressful events, securely attached individuals are able to maintain positive self-esteem and a sense of security.

These securely attached offspring who experienced availability and consistency with their attached figure develop internal working models of self-value and feelings of self-efficacy (Ognibene et al., 1998). In adulthood, they are said to effectively manage stressful events. Rooted in the belief that they may influence positive outcomes and that others are available to assist should the need arise. It has been observed that this group are more inclined towards seeking social support as anxiety increases and are comfortable maintaining close relations. This may be influenced by the positive expectations they hold about others' assistance.

On the contrary, Ognibene et al. (1998) explain that insecure groups who have experienced inconsistency and unavailability develop a pessimistic model of others (working model of others) and themselves (working model of self). They remain doubtful about their ability to effectively alter an outcome and remain sceptical about others' willingness to assist. This lack of interpersonal resources results in a challenging experience when overcoming traumatic events. Suggesting that attachment styles do in fact predispose individuals to certain ways of coping.

Interestingly, Morse (2012) outlines that avoidants or dismissively attached individuals tend to develop a positive working model of self and reject the attempts of others, rooted in a self-reliance and independent nature. Once embedded these models are resourced across the

lifespan to direct interpersonal functioning when the attachment system is activated. Anxious styles in particular report that they are in need of assistance amid distress yet perceive that the help is unavailable. Yet when they do receive social support, they are often unsatisfied with the result or influence over their emotional state. A disorganized attachment system at times deviates from the insecure parts, as they are more susceptible to future psychopathology (Belsky, 2002).

Overall, Bowlby (1973) explained that the attachment system serves as a protective mechanism, activating under distress. Distress of which prompts anger and anxiety and signals that coping action should be taken. Following distress management, the system deactivates and results in feelings of relief, positive emotions, and gratitude for others. Should the means of support ineffectively manage distress, anxiety and anger increases and leads to feelings of helplessness and detachment. Bretherton (1998) outlines that variations in attachment style have significant implications for well-being and emotional adaptation. These differences are especially observable in emotional regulation when coping with stressful life events.

There remains a narrow scope of literature on longitudinal investigation on whether these attachment styles affect future resilience to stressful events, particularly in adulthood (Belsky, 2002). These very factors have inspired the current research aims. It is anticipated that the conclusions generated from this research may contribute to an understanding of attachment styles' influence on the post trauma perceptions of caregiver contributions. Optimistically, should a link between early attachment culture and resilience or hinderance be deduced, the research may produce valuable contributions to this theoretical model.

2.7. Attachment in the Therapeutic Relationship

The quality of the therapeutic relationship is significant to the current research, as coping mechanisms in the form of seeking professional help, greatly contributes to the quality of lived experience and resilience following rape. Furthermore, the way in which one benefits from the therapeutic setting is impacted by the attachment culture. Considering Bowlby's (1969) assertions that every individual builds generalized models of relationships determined by the quality of the parent-child relationship, this reflects in the therapy setting. It was suggested that the therapist embodies some notable characteristics of the attached figure and influences the manner in which they engage in this interaction (Ruiz et al., 2021). This being

said, individual differences in attachment will nuance the way in which one openly communicates and responds to their therapist.

The Main et al. (1985) contributions to discourse and coherence in communication, outlines that attachment styles in the therapy setting reveal differences in closeness and comfort. In that, secure patients may deem their therapists as available and competent in handling their emotions; avoidant patients display reticence and fear intimacy, and last preoccupied patients will fear rejection and abandonment in this relationship. Kietaibl (2012) report that a strong working alliance between therapist and client equates to positive therapy outcomes. Strong, positive and trusting relations enhance the quality of the working alliance and allow feedback to have an impactful effect on the client. Studies found that clients with healthy attachments were more attentive to goals and outcomes and engaged more actively in the setting. On the other hand, it was observed that clients with insecure attachment systems were more reluctant to form bonds and produced poorer therapeutic outcomes. These behaviours were fostered by an expectation that distress management is unrewarding or may be managed independently (Bowlby, 1958).

2.8. Conclusion

It has been established that the alarming and daily increasing statistics of rape in SA is a crisis of epidemic proportion. While concrete understanding of why perpetrators are increasingly contributing to this social concern remains elusive; it is noteworthy to consider how political influences play a part in the gender disparity. While we are a distance away from lessening the events of rape on South African women, it is important to deepen psychological resources to the best of our ability. By placing focus on how childhood development plays a crucial role in resilience from traumatic events, we may equip survivors and their caregivers with the knowledge needed to better outcome and resolution. This research focuses on the quality of attachment cultures and how this contributes to experiences of psychological resilience and recovery in the lives of sexual assault victims. By expanding on adulthood patterns of attachment, the It is essential that future caregivers realise this importance, and the contributions gathered from the experiences of the receivers of these parenting responses may provide this knowledge.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the methodology which leads this investigation which is rooted in the qualitative paradigm. In an effort to report and interpret the lived experiences of rape survivors, the associated interpretivist paradigm is assumed. Interpretivism in this context views reality as subjective and socially constructed, emphasizing the importance of individual perception (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The following sections delve into the specific guidelines and methodological approaches employed within this paradigm.

3.2. Research Questions

The current research is led by the following questions:

1. How do attachment cultures nuance women's experiences of parental support following rape?
2. How do attachment cultures shape women's lived experience and responses following rape?

3.3. Research Design

As the study aspires to understand how rape survivors perceive and interpret their experiences, ontological, epistemological assumptions and philosophical underpinnings suggest that qualitative research, grounded on an interpretivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) is most relevant to the research at hand. Furthermore, the study may be characterized as exploratory in nature. The existing literature on the study focus is limited and this approach allows for in-depth exploration into a relatively unexplored area.

3.3.1. Research Method

Meaning is created and acted out by social agents and the universe is not necessarily definitive and guided by a universal set of laws (Moch & Gates, 2000). Rather, reality is subjective to the interpretation of the individual or the group. These realities being multiple, yet equally valid suggest that social realities are independently constructed and thus, to gather knowledge on specific phenomena, one may explore the richness of insight from reported experiences (Belsky, 2002). Using personal narrative as a pipeline into the configuration of

meaning, we may use these thick descriptions to interpret and generate said knowledge (Hammersley, 2012).

Husserlian phenomenality had been developed as a radical criticism to social science research that had become detached from the reality of human experience. By assuming consciousness to be an object of nature, this disregards the value generated from human subjectivity (van Manen, 2017). In Husserl's (1999) publication, he explains that this subjective reporting, may be gathered from language, and that through the retelling of ordinary experience, the researcher may orient themselves to lifeworld meaning that is embedded in these events. Focus on incidences, situations, thoughts, and feelings all become the topic for phenomenological inquiry. Asserting that any ordinary experience may become extraordinary should we shift our focus from daily living to a phenomenological lens.

Thus, to gather experiential understanding of the interrelationship between this social phenomenon and nuanced experiences, a phenomenological inquiry is suitably positioned (Ramsook, 2018). It is once more conveyed that the part intention of this study was to interpret the lived experiences of rape survivors through personal narrative. More specifically, by giving voice to this demographic, questions as to how attachment cultures shape lived experiences and experiences with parental responses following rape, can be uncovered.

The focus on lifeworld meanings is significant to the study, as attachment systems in early development are established through the quality of the parent-child dynamic (Ainsworth et al., 2015). This system foreshadows the individual's place in the world, sense of self and construction of their independent reality (Belsky, 2002). Should a stressful event such as rape occur, how is the interpretation of one's reality altered? Most significantly, is experience about the social resources that a parent provides altered? All these questions may be answered through a phenomenological lens.

3.4. Sample and Recruitment

It is considered that this research is centred on a specific identity, an identity of which may be perceived differently across cultural groups, age, education levels and even varying locations. It may have been the case that, the rape survivor does not experience their rape as a form of assault or victimization (Jones et al., 2002). These issues were addressed by funnelling down the sampling parameters and specifying eligibility criteria (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). Bearing

these factors in mind, eligibility for participation in the study was determined by the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

3.4.1. Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Women older than 18 years of age.
- Women who have experienced rape less than ten years ago.
- Parents of the rape survivor are aware of the incident.

Exclusion Criteria:

- The survivor was raped by the parent.
- The rape had occurred less than three years prior to the study.
- Unwillingness to sign the letter of consent.

3.4.2. Sampling

A non-random/non-probability sampling approach was assumed in the study, as the recruitment process was structured by a particular selection scheme. The targeted demographic of rape survivors was essential to the goal of reporting of their real-world experiences on their parents' response to the incident. These assumptions directed the study to convenience and snowball sampling approaches, both of which were time and cost efficient. These methods relied on the motivation of the potential candidates to participate in the study (Stratton, 2021).

To accommodate these criteria, the study employed a dual sampling strategy, the first of which was convenience sampling. This method was conducive to the self-selection process that was used here. Recruiting individuals who self-identified and who were confirmed to have met the criteria, was practical for the limited timeframe. The sampling approach proved most beneficial in terms of ease of availability and willingness to participate.

In this research, potential participants were targeted through social media platform Facebook. A research call, that contained a brief study overview, inclusion criteria and contact details was created and posted on local sexual assault survivor Facebook groups. Acknowledging that this particular population may not have been as easily accessible through traditional

recruitment, interested participants were invited to contact me should they wish to participate, forming a self-selected sample.

The research call was then passed on and adopted a form of snowball sampling. The graphic was also initially shared within my personal WhatsApp network. Subsequently, university colleagues and friends disseminated on their social connections and served as intermediaries, creating chains of referrals. This collaboration was leveraged and beneficial for accessing a broader pool of potential participants and led to recruitment of 70% of the sample. Emphasizing the advantages of interpersonal networks for reaching the wider population.

3.4.3. Participant Demographics

Statistics generated by CrimeStats (2023) suggests that the province of Gauteng has generated a figure of 11,235 reported cases of sexual assault in the first quarter of 2023. Considering these figures, the sampling scope had been limited to this particular region. The study had further been limited to reporting on the experiences of solely women. As most current systematic reviews suggest that the African culture views sexual assault of men as emasculating (Nyeck et al., 2019); thus, eliminating the possibility that this group of men may be reluctant to participate.

Following these criteria and recruitment processes, a sample of six females aged 19-38, met the criteria and volunteered to be interviewed for the study. Led by the definition provided by the employment equity act, race was categorised as black (Africa, Coloured and Indian) and white, and resulted in a sample of 4 (67%) classified as black and 2 (33%) classified as white.

This diverse group of women have all experienced the profound and difficult aftermath of sexual assault. Encompassing a range of backgrounds, ages and cultures. The intentional inclusion of participants from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds ensured a multifaceted exploration of experiences within a culturally heterogeneous context. Although all six women held a tertiary level of education, four were students at the University of the Witwatersrand, providing an interesting sub-group. Which bring unique insights into the intersectionality of traumatic experiences within an academic context.

3.5. Procedures

The study reported on the experiences of six participants. Considering that the sampling method is purposive, this sample size was beneficial for providing richly textured data that is

insightful for the phenomenon under investigation (Vaseleiou et al., 2018). Furthermore, the structure of interview questions allowed for ample insight into the research aims, ensuring that each participant will provide usable data that could be analysed (Yung & Casey, 2018).

Once the candidates met the criteria and confirmed their willingness to participate, they were asked to select a date and time that was suitable for them. The majority of the participants had requested that a date be selected for them, and they were eager to accommodate. They were informed of the date, time and venue and were sent a participant information sheet (PIS) to read. This document formally presented the intentions of the study, provided assurance of confidentiality, and most significantly affirmed the safety and freedom to withdraw should the participant experience psychological discomfort (Shah et al., 2022). To accommodate such an event, the contact details of the nominated counsellor were included in the PIS, fortunately none of the participants felt the need to use this service.

The participants were emailed one day prior to the interview to once more confirm their willingness to participate and to confirm the venue. In an effort to build rapport and respect the sensitivity of these narratives, face-to-face meetings were encouraged. As Horsfall et al. (2021) note, a relationship may be established with the participants where the appropriate reactions such as empathy, encouragement and attentiveness may be projected. Considering that the sample reported sensitive information, it was gathered that fostering of this rapport introduced a human element and was a vital part of the data collection process. From a reflexive stance, it can be said that this method was largely beneficial. Judging from tone, physical and verbal cues, the women felt safe, comfortable and uninterrupted.

3.5.1. Interview Protocol: Inferring Attachment Culture

The attachment theory literature was used to direct a portion of the questions of a semi-structured interview, which informed interpretations about the participants' foundational 'attachment culture'. In essence, it guided how I probed insight into who the attachment figure is and what their childhood responses to key events like separation, rejection and validation was. Literature and interpretations of the Main & Goldwyn (1984a, 1998a) Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) scoring, and classification were ideal for guiding assessment of attachment patterns in this adult sample. While formal training is required for accurate classification of attachment style, it is not uncommon for researchers to infer from qualitative interpretations and theoretical frameworks. Therefore, this study drew from existing literature in attachment theory to unveil patterns consistent with Mary Main's attachment

classifications. It must be reiterated, that only partial constructs and interpretations were adapted from the AAI for the current research. This ensured a rigorous methodological approach and adherence to theoretical principles which provided a robust foundation for inferring attachment cultures.

3.5.2. The Interview Structure

Under eight relevant constructs, a set of questions were developed to guide the interaction and generate information for both research questions, leaving room for emerging questions to be raised. The first construct looked at *attachment culture and early relationships* these questions were designed to explore the early familial environment and relationships giving indication into the embedded attachment style. By exploring the nature of the parent-child relationship in the formative years. Enquiring about early childhood memories and the emotions they evoke, forms part of the groundwork for understanding how coping mechanisms and support-seeking behaviours were instilled.

The second construct guided the *attachment culture assessment,* vital to the research goals, this section relied on memory and perception to report on attachment-related behaviours during childhood. These questions covered emotional responses to positive and negative experiences such as separation, feelings of reassurance, validation and rejection from the attached figure. This section provided a holistic view of the participant's attachment culture outside the trauma they experienced with sexual assault. It assists in uncovering emerging patterns between potential discrepancies and between trauma-related attachment and more generalized attachment behaviours.

Impact of attachment on coping led the interview to these women's experiences with the trauma following sexual assault. By reviewing initial reactions and previously assessing the childhood instilled resources for coping, this section served to link attachment cultures with adaptive or maladaptive coping methods.

Parents' response to rape inquired about the overall goal of the study and delved into individual perceptions and experiences post-trauma. Participants were asked about their attached figure's initial and subsequent reactions after learning of their sexual assault. Exploring the dynamics of interpersonal support, questioned their expectations for comfort, experiences with support strategies and changes in the relationship quality. The narratives provided here generated valuable information on how attachment cultures shape their

experiences with their caregiver's support. Whether this be perceived as supportive or unsupportive, it clearly reflected how their emotional reactions were nuanced.

Coping strategies examined how they utilize the early instilled coping mechanisms when dealing with trauma in their adulthood. Questions of employed strategies and reliance from their trauma further contributed to the influence of the parent-child relationship on emotional regulation. This section contributed to illustrate how attachment behaviours and instilled resources manifest amid times of distress.

Seeking professional help, explored an aspect of coping and managing emotions. The willingness to openly communicate and believe that their distress may be alleviated is an indication of past experiences and quality of the attachment culture. Providing greater insight into how this affects their lived experience and the methods employed to reduce their stress. A nuanced analysis between therapeutic interventions, attachment and trauma recovery generated further insight into how this context might improve.

Lastly, *resilience and healing* gave a final indication as to how the participants navigate on their journey towards recovery. Adaptive responses to trauma were reflected here and magnified their ability to self-regulate following this traumatic experience. Uncovering how coping mechanisms, learned responses and experiences with distress are managed and guide adult behaviour. Steering personal reflections on current transformation and accomplishments in their daily lives, magnifies how the participants view themselves following their experience and examines their willingness to recover and transcend beyond their trauma. Finally, it reflects the diverse paths that survivors take towards healing and offers valuable implications for trauma-informed interventions and support systems.

These questions were aligned well with each overarching research question and gave global insight into the various stages of trauma, support and recovery. This allowed for a comprehensive exploration into how attachment cultures nuance experiences and perceptions of support and their motivation to recover.

3.6. Data Analysis

Each participant provided verbal and written consent to their interviews being audio recorded to assist analysis. They were reminded that the interaction would take a maximum of one hour and should they wish to continue further this would be warmly accommodated. The durations of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours long. These audio files were

recorded on my personal laptop using the sound recorder function and was automatically saved to an encrypted file. These files have since been destroyed following transcription.

3.6.1. Transcription

It was crucial to the integrity of the analysis that the data be transcribed soon after each interview. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect identities and the audios were transcribed onto Microsoft Word documents manually using the standard audio player. As Braun and Clarke (2012) outlined, transcription is a not a straightforward process, for written and spoken language differ. When we speak, we speak without punctuation, with fluctuations in pitch, tone and volume all of which does not reflect on our transcriptions. For these reasons, the transcriptions captured elements of how narratives were reported and effectively documented real speech. Engaging in this active process, an orthographic or verbatim transcription method was used and produced complete records of the words that were spoken. The process took up to six hours per one hour of audio and in total the entire endeavour took roughly 40 hours. The length of time and repeated listening was beneficial to the study, as it allowed for familiarisation of the data, initiating the first step towards data analysis (Bailey, 2008).

3.6.2. Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis employed in this study facilitated the identification and exploration of key themes pertaining to attachment dynamics and post-rape experiences. By following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, review, final analysis, and report, the study systematically unpacked the complexities of survivor-caregiver interactions. Through this methodical approach, themes emerged organically from the data, providing valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics at play.

In this context, a "theme" refers to a recurring pattern or concept that encapsulates significant aspects of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2015). These themes were derived from the narratives shared by survivors and were carefully analyzed to uncover underlying meanings and responses. Notably, theoretical frameworks, such as Bowlby and Ainsworth's seminal works on attachment theory, guided the analysis process. By integrating these theoretical underpinnings, the study adopted a deductive approach to analysis, aligning with established research in the field.

The thematic analysis process allowed for a comprehensive examination of attachment cultures, drawing from both foundational theories and the unique insights extracted from participants' narratives. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of how attachment dynamics manifest in the aftermath of trauma, shedding light on the complexities of post-rape recovery and interpersonal relationships. Through rigorous analysis and interpretation, the study aimed to contribute to existing knowledge in the field while providing practical implications for clinical practice and support services for survivors of sexual assault.

The flexibility of this methodological tool allowed for researcher judgement to determine what counts for a theme. Thus, a theme was not defined on the basis that many data items give considerable attention to, but rather that it captures valuable information in relation to the research question (Braune & Clarke, 2006). As the basis of this qualitative method, is the richness captured rather than a quantifiable prevalence of patterns. This being said, the individual attachment cultures introduced diverse responses that had not necessarily emerged across the dataset. While presenting emerging patterns across the dataset provides comprehensive understanding, presenting results within individual data items, offers a focused examination of the unique content within each piece of data. This gives rise to a final culmination of themes in the discussion, when contrasting the secure and insecure attachment groups in relation to the research goals.

3.7. Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative research has often been emphasised as a method for the researcher to ensure rigor and high-quality work. It is vital that the researcher acknowledges the role of self in interpretation and generation of knowledge (Abrams et al., 2020). By carefully reflecting on the potential influence of personal beliefs, biases, and experiences, it becomes easier to maintain a balance between subjectivity and what is universal (Berger, 2015).

I acknowledged the importance of contextualising the phenomena under the future study. Thus, it must be addressed that personal motivations to conduct this study were driven by my own experience with childhood and adulthood sexual assault. By reflecting on this personal aspect, it was acknowledged that my own perceptions may colour these participant experiences and guide the interview process. Therefore, continuous internal dialogue and self-reflection was maintained throughout the interview and interpretation processes (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

Although this is classically deemed as bias, it must also be realised that participants were more inclined to divulge honest information as they identified with me on a more personal level. By expressing these subjective experiences, the researcher-researched relationship was enhanced (Abrams et al., 2020). Personal observations and thoughts following each interaction were documented to remind of the interview context and assess whether I might have introduced bias and influenced participant responses. Fortunately, this was not the case, from this analysis it was concluded that majority of the participants were initially rigid and anxious to communicate until I had shared that this study is not purely driven by academic motivation but by personal encounters with sexual assault.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

The targeted demographic for this research may be deemed by some as a vulnerable population. However, it must be considered that the way in which 'vulnerability' is conceptualised by research guidelines indirectly reinforces stigma and stereotypes associated with these groups (Nkosi et al., 2022). In the case of rape survivors, these ethical guidelines result in exclusion from beneficial research that may serve to empower their agency. As noted by Jewkes et al. (2012) empirical research should educate and raise public awareness around the effects of sexual assault, worldwide. This unresearched area may inspire future caregivers to realise the significance of building positive parent-child experiences. Experiences which assist lifespan development and resiliency for potential stressful events (Bretherton, 1985).

3.8.1. Letters of Consent

Ensuring that the agency of this population was respected and safeguarded during the research process, participant consent was secured. This was established through informed consent, which requires that the researcher must make the participant aware of the aspirations for the study, what it entails and the processes that are involved. Most significantly, any foreseen physical or psychological risks must be clearly stated so that the participant acknowledges what they consent to (Falagas et al., 2009). Considering that self-determination is vital to their contributions, the candidates were furthermore reminded of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time (Walford, 2005). This is attached for review as Appendix B. This document was administered to potential candidates following their willingness to participate in the research. A digital copy was sent prior to the scheduled

interview, followed by a physical copy, signed at the venue. Alongside this document, candidates will be given a copy of the letter of consent, which is attached as Appendix C.

3.8.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Considering the possible stigmatisation of these identities, the participants anonymity and confidentiality was upheld. Led by the guidelines set out by Walford (2005) I acknowledge that the information shared is of a sensitive nature and thus, entitlement to privacy will be held through interpretation of results that does not expose the identities of the subjects. Similarly, the participants right to confidentiality of audio recordings, which is attached as Appendix C, was reminded. The subjects felt secure in knowing that this information will not be shared with any individuals who are not directly involved in the research process (Falagas et al, 2009). It is reiterated that when the final write up is submitted, its transcripts will be digitally encrypted and safely stored should the need for future secondary analysis arise.

3.8.3. Beneficence

The recounting of sexual assault may prove sensitive to some, and I acknowledge that this may potentially introduce psychological harm for some. However, it must be realised, that the reliving of these events plays a very minimal role in the interview process. These accounts are limited to a brief description as to gather a sense of whether the survivor has in fact had an experience of sexual assault basing on theoretical definitions. Guided by principles set out by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1978) beneficence on the part of the researcher is upheld ensuring that the wellbeing of the participants exceeds standardised obligations in ethical practice.

The expertise of the supervisor was regularly consulted to ensure that interview questions did not pose psychological discomfort to the participants. However, support structures detailed in a distress protocol were set in place had the participant at any time felt stressed or emotionally distressed. It was reminded that, if the participant finds that psychological discomfort has increased days/ hours following the interview, they would be encouraged to contact the nominated counsellor who will coach the participant for a maximum of four sessions. Thereafter, should long-term therapy be required, I would assist the participant in contacting the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter marks the culmination of this qualitative investigation by presenting the emerging themes that categorize individual attachment cultures and patterns that support the study's research objectives. A deductive approach to thematic analysis was used and led by Bowlby and Ainsworth's theoretical insights, and interpretations of the Main & Goldwyn. (1984a, 1998a) adult attachment interview. Through perceptions of the attached figure, behaviors and response to trauma, these themes reflect the diverse tapestry of attachment cultures.

The analysis revealed distinct patterns within attachment styles. Securely attached individuals demonstrated seeking and finding behaviours, adaptive coping mechanisms, and experienced post-traumatic growth. In contrast, those with a preoccupied attachment style exhibited complex early relational dynamics, conflicted perceptions of support, and an ambivalent response to trauma. Individuals with dismissing attachment tendencies projected characteristics such as self-reliance through isolation, desire for external validation, and dismissively seeking support. Anxious-avoidant attachment patterns were marked by family instability, maternal unavailability following trauma, and maladaptive coping and fragility. Additionally, those with unresolved/disorganized attachment, showed signs of adverse childhood experiences, longing for maternal availability, and a disorganized perception of recovery. Finally, paternal emotional withdrawal in childhood was often associated with paternal neglect following trauma across the data.

This deep exploration yielded numerous patterns and variations, fostering a profound understanding of how these attachment cultures nuance experiences of parental support and overall lived experiences. These themes offer perspective on crucial areas such as the need for tailored therapeutic interventions and contributions to the broader discourse on recovering from sexual assault.

4.1. Patterns of Secure Attachment

According to Hesse (1996), individuals with a secure attachment style exhibit distinct characteristics in their relationships, demonstrating self-regulatory, relational, and emotional aspects of attachment. Participant TJ emerged as the only individual among the five survivors displaying traits indicative of a secure attachment system.

TJ's secure attachment is evident through multifaceted behaviors, emotions, and interactions. Her consistent seeking of emotional support and comfort from her mother, particularly during distressing moments, underscores a deep emotional bond marked by warmth, love, and security. Her proactive efforts to seek solace and reassurance during times of need highlight her trust in her mother as a reliable source of support, a key characteristic of secure attachment. Additionally, her effective communication of her emotions and needs to her mother further demonstrates a secure base for exploration and self-expression.

Moreover, her adaptive coping strategies and positive outlook on seeking social support reflect the resilience fostered by her secure attachment to her mother. Her ability to articulate her needs, seek assistance when necessary, and engage in therapeutic interventions signify a healthy self-esteem and confidence in her interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, her capacity for post-traumatic growth, as evidenced by her proactive efforts to seek justice and her reflections on personal growth and newfound strengths, underscores the enduring impact of her secure attachment experiences on her psychological well-being and adaptive functioning.

Her behaviors, emotions, and coping mechanisms collectively support her classification within the secure attachment framework. By delving deeper into these aspects, we gain a more nuanced understanding of the self-regulatory, relational, and emotional dimensions of secure attachment and its implications for resilience and growth in the face of adversity.

4.1.1. Seeking and Finding

This theme emerged as a result of exploring early childhood dynamics and relationship appraisals. As a means of surfacing the attachment system, each participant was asked to recall a childhood memory, to determine automatic associations (Main, 1996). The sub-theme of "seeking and finding" encapsulates her consistent efforts to seek emotional support and comfort from her mother, particularly during moments of distress. In this context, “seeking" refers to her proactive search for her mother's presence and emotional reassurance when faced with challenges or negative emotions. Conversely, "finding" signifies the fulfilment of her attachment needs through her mother's responsive and supportive presence, which provides her with a sense of security, warmth, and emotional connection. Overall, seeking and finding highlights her reliance on her mother as a secure base for emotional exploration and as a source of comfort and reassurance in times of need.

The automatic association of her attached figure and positive emotions underscored her well-organized attachment culture and is reflected in these narratives:

> "She's been both parents, it was just like love, support, understanding and caring."

> "Love, just love. When I was going through stuff with my father, she just helped me cope, she was always there."

> "My childhood was just like an overwhelming, like a lingering love, she loves me unconditionally."

These positive responses and clear proximity-seeking during the distressing event, is well aligned with that of a securely attached adult. Here she describes admiration for her mother's attentiveness and support, which show this positive perception and value for the relationship.

> "I'd be like sobbing, and like fighting her and she would just come and hold me, and I would be like gushing or screaming or whatever, and she would just come and hold me and that was one of the most helpful things. It was this reminder that physical touch doesn't have to be violent."

> "She was my main support structure, when it was hard, I just had that feeling of I want my mummy."

Her organized attachment culture was resourced in her adulthood and were especially pronounced here when she recounts her recovery journey following rape. By seeking and finding her mother during this distressing time, her secure base surfaced.

4.1.2. Adaptive Coping

This sub-theme emerged when probing on TJ's experiences with distress management, coping mechanisms and attitude towards seeking social support. "Adaptive coping" refers to her ability to regulate her emotions, maintain positive self-esteem, and utilize constructive strategies to navigate the challenges posed by her traumatic experiences. This includes seeking professional therapy, relying on her mother for emotional support, and actively engaging in self-soothing activities. Through adaptive coping, she demonstrates resilience and a capacity to integrate her experiences in a constructive manner, contributing to her overall well-being and recovery process. As she recounted:

> "I'm incredibly grateful for her… memories like that definitely helped me when I was going through the moments… She's given me like really clear strategies to help deal with anger."

> "I would say to her listen mum, I'm doing really badly, and I need some extra help right now."

> "I've been in therapy for a while now and been working through this stuff and I've moved past the anger and resentment and stuff."

By these recollections she expresses her comfort with seeking her mother in order to cope during distress. Her willingness to depend on social support aligns with theoretical underpinnings of a secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1978). Furthermore, we see how she is able to benefit from the therapeutic relationship, contributing to her adaptive coping response. Ultimately, she indicates here, how instilled resources associated with a secure attachment allow her to foster resilience.

4.1.3. Post-Traumatic Growth

The sub-theme of "post-traumatic growth" highlights TJ's ability to find meaning, personal growth, and positive transformation in the aftermath of trauma. Here, post-traumatic growth refers to her reflective stance on her experiences, where she identifies valuable lessons learned, personal strengths developed, and a deeper appreciation for life's challenges. Through her proactive efforts to seek justice for herself and other survivors, as well as her acknowledgment of personal growth and resilience, she exemplifies the potential for individuals to thrive and find purpose amidst adversity. Overall, post-traumatic growth underscores her resilience and capacity for positive adaptation following traumatic experiences.

> "For me my thing was, I never want this to happen to anyone else… So I compiled 9 different stories from girls who had been in some way assaulted by him and delivered a victim mandate to my school."

Her strong attention to the emotional needs of others and a commitment to social justice despite the negative aftermath of her assault is evident. Here we see how these embedded psychological resources was necessary to navigate trauma and cultivate post-traumatic growth. Remarkably, she explains that:

> "I'm incredibly proud of how far I've come, I can look back and say whoa, I've really grown."

> "In a weird way I've learned to appreciate that it was a learning curve, an event that helped me grow."

TJ was the only one of five participants to hold this perspective of lessons gained following an adverse experience. Through her constructive actions and an optimistic attitude, she had exemplified how nuanced and positive experiences of parental support contribute to resilience and growth following sexual assault.

4.2. Patterns of Preoccupied Attachment

This sections presents thematic dimensions extracted from an in-depth analysis of participant GS's narratives. Preoccupied attachment, as elucidated by Ainsworth (1978), encompasses a complex interplay of behaviours and emotions characterized by an intense longing for closeness coupled with fears of rejection or abandonment. Participant GS's narratives provide valuable insights into the manifestation of preoccupied attachment dynamics, revealing a multifaceted relationship with her primary caregiver and nuanced coping strategies in response to trauma. Delving into emerging patterns about the participants experiences, memories of early childhood interactions with the attached figure and importantly, coping mechanisms and lived experience following rape. This theme of preoccupied attachment umbrellas three sub-themes which maintains a steadfast commitment to unravelling her preoccupation about her mother's availability and ambivalence about the relationship.

4.2.1. Complex Early Relational Dynamics

This sub-theme delves into her early experiences and their profound impact on her attachment orientation. Specifically, it explores her preoccupation with her mother's availability and emotional instability, highlighting her attempts to seek validation and attention through rebellious behaviours. These insights align with theoretical frameworks, particularly Main and Solomon's (1990) concept of hyperactivation in individuals with preoccupied attachment styles. She recalled that:

> "So, my mum suffered with postnatal depression with me, I know. I was also, I was born,

> uhm, I was a couple of weeks premature I was in an incubator for a while, and she struggled with wanting two kids."
>
> "She also struggled with my dad being away a lot so there wasn't a lot of emotional attentiveness. We ended up feeling quite responsible for my parents' emotions."

When probing on early memory recall about experiences with her mother, she was challenged with the task, and instead recounted on how she had once run away from home leaving her mother "understandably frustrated". More specifically she recalled that:

> "I have no idea what spurred it, but I felt very misunderstood and like I didn't belong, and nobody wanted me uhm, and so I was going to go to my grandparents."
>
> "I remember this wasn't the first time I ran away. I just felt like I couldn't talk to anyone, and I felt really bad."

She explains that her mother addressed her feelings about why she needed to run away, although, she continued to seek validation by engaging in attention-seeking behaviors such as these. Aligned with theoretical underpinnings, we see her anxiety around her mother's availability and attempts to garner attention through these acts of rebellion. Findings of which align with reports of hyperactivation in those with preoccupied attachment cultures (Main & Solomon 1990).

4.2.2. Conflicted Perceptions of Support

Here, we examine her nuanced perceptions of parental support post-trauma, revealing a complex interplay of emotions within the caregiver-dependent relationship. Despite expressing appreciation for the support received, she grapples with feelings of being misunderstood and unheard during moments of distress. Her reluctance to seek comfort from her mother underscores her intricate emotional landscape and insecurities within her attachment dynamic. While she expresses appreciation for her support following her trauma, she reveals that this support is limited to acts of service and provision of physical resources. She also exhibited feelings of being misunderstood and unheard during her moments of distress.

> " I mean I appreciated the way that she cared for while I was staying at her house. That I didn't have to worry about cooking or any of the, like laundry or you know, stuff that you do when you're living as an adult on your own."

> "I don't know I just want her purely to share the sadness, not because I need anything different from her."

> "For the police statement, I had to go through step-by-step and she was crying, it made feel better because I wasn't able to, but also made me feel like I was hurting her."

Her conflicted perceptions of maternal support describe her reluctance here to seek comfort. Despite this, themes of external help-seeking through friends and professional counselling emerged. This dependence on emotional support is a clear indication of coping mechanisms associated with this attachment culture. Her desire for closeness yet preoccupation about reassurance from her attached figure illustrates her intricate emotional landscape and feelings of insecurity within her attachment dynamic.

4.2.3. Ambivalent Response to Trauma

This sub-theme explores her response to trauma, characterized by a complex interplay between resilience and internal conflict. Despite notable accomplishments and positive growth, she experiences a profound sense of internal turmoil and fluctuating self-perception. Her reluctance to seek justice and uncertainty about producing positive outcomes reveal the ambivalence inherent in her lived experience following rape, reflecting her anxiety about her attachment figure's availability and her post-trauma responses. There were many instances where she expresses her positive growth and achievement however, she subsequently reveals a loss of identity. In her own words:

> "I mean in one sense I've done amazingly since like, I've been promoted at work, I've published, I've carried on teaching doing the teaching that I love, I've innovated in my courses, I'm dating somebody new. I've got these beautiful children, uhm I adopted. On the other hand, I feel like it's always a fight and I miss those pieces of me that are gone. Just more darkness, but like what do you do? You kind of get through day by day."

> "Some days I'm a victim, some days I'm a survivor. But there are days where I don't identify with these at all."

Despite her remarkable accomplishments, she reports a profound sense of internal conflict and emotional turmoil. This debate between victim and survivor aligns with the fluctuating nature of her self-perception, which assisted in classifying her attachment culture. This was also demonstrated by her reluctance to seek justice and reveals her uncertainty and anxiety

about her ability to produce positive outcomes despite this trauma. While she described her recovery as: “a period of euphoria that I survived”, shortly she follows with the above quotes.

Overall, the themes that emerged here suggest an ambivalent lived experience following rape. It can be said that her feelings of responsibility for her mother, even in the event of her trauma, reflect her anxiety about her availability and characterize her post-trauma responses.

4.3. Patterns of Dismissing Attachment with Preoccupied Tendencies

Participant MB's narrative presents a nuanced attachment profile that transcends traditional classifications, showcasing a blend of dismissing attachment traits with underlying preoccupied tendencies. While her attachment style predominantly aligns with dismissal, there are discernible patterns indicative of a deeper longing for connection and validation. This section seeks to define the dismissing attachment style with preoccupied inclinations, elucidating themes of self-reliance, external validation, and ambivalent engagement with social support. Through an exploration of her experiences, we delve into the intricate interplay between independence and a covert desire for emotional connection, shedding light on the complexity of her attachment dynamics.

4.3.1. Self-Reliance through Isolation

This narrative unveils a profound sense of self-reliance stemming from early experiences of isolation and independence. Growing up with a physically and emotionally absent caregiver, she learned to fend for herself from a young age, shouldering responsibilities beyond her years. Her reluctance to express vulnerability or seek emotional support is rooted in a childhood marked by limited emotional availability from her mother. Her tendency to withdraw into herself and withhold her traumatic experiences reflects a deep-seated pattern of self-reliance shaped by early attachment dynamics. . In her words she says: “She was still too busy you know, so I had to start like cooking for myself from grade 1”.

> “I am closed off; I’d just tell them what I needed them to know.”
>
> “I would see her at 6am and again and 6pm and by then she’s too tired we can’t even talk. So, I just kept to myself.”

Her dismissing behavioural patterns extended into her adulthood when she withheld her experience of sexual assault from her mother out of fear that she would not receive sufficient support. Guided by her childhood scripts of being unheard and unsupported amid periods of

distress, she reflects on internalization of her traumatic event and the subsequent reactions. When her attached figure became aware of the assault, she defined her experiences as practical, where logical solutions were prioritized and once more this mirrored her childhood isolation and emotional neglect.

> "She never really asked how it made me feel, so what. So, I just didn't say anything, why should I?"

> "She never created a space for me to be comfortable to share those feelings after I was raped, so I don't want someone to invalidate my feelings, I know they're valid."

> "She was more concerned about justice, like ask me how I feel you know? I wish she would have asked. But anyways I'm dealing with me."

Through her reports it is evident that her feelings of isolation and independence were intensified throughout her recovery. Her narratives may come across as her being dismissing and lacking emotional depth, however her ambivalence about her need for maternal support illustrates her preoccupied tendencies here.

4.3.2. Desire for External Validation

Despite her outward projection of independence, MB harbours a strong desire for external validation and emotional connection. Her reluctance to open up to others contrasts with her yearning for attention and affection, leading to a pattern of seeking validation from external sources. This dichotomy in her behaviour underscores the complexities of her attachment culture, as she navigates between self-sufficiency and a longing for emotional intimacy. Her vulnerability to exploitation by others highlights the consequences of unmet attachment needs and underscores the importance of secure attachment bonds. An event as traumatic as rape was hidden from her caregiver through a schemata led by unavailability (Bowlby, 1969). What is interesting is that while she projects this self-reliance with her caregiver, she desires and seeks external social support. Her behavioural patterns contradict when she emphasises that:

> "I don't really like opening up to people. I will act like I'm okay. I will really act like I'm okay, you will never catch me sleeping. So, I've always stored that in me, get up and go, no crying."

> "When I feel like someone is giving me attention, then I become so like attached to that person and then I want to talk for months!"

> "I'll be like oh my gosh, this person loves me, then I get hooked."

Her overlapping attachment cultures are once more illustrated when she reveals that her perpetrator took advantage of her need for emotional intimacy. "He knew that I was like longing for affection and he used that". This reflection clearly illustrates the importance of high-quality attachments and a secure base. This help-seeking behaviour outside of the family unit resembles a desire to alleviate her attachment-related insecurity. As Main and Solomon (1990) emphasized, adults who exhibit preoccupied attachment behaviours grapple with a fear of rejection which often leads to difficulties in emotional regulation. This aligns with MB's reliance on friends and partners for emotional validation and illustrates her negative experiences with parental support following rape.

4.3.3. Dismissively Seeking Support

MB's lived experience post-trauma encapsulates her complex and overlapping attachment behaviours. Her dismissing attachment culture is reflected by her lack of emotional expression with her caregiver. Initially her response to her sexual trauma manifests through maladaptive methods such as drinking and partying. This revealed her tendency to prioritize independent solutions and dismiss attachment needs. She described periods of darkness and reflects that her life might have turned out differently. Furthermore, she emphasizes that: "this one event altered the entire trajectory of my life". Yet she refrains from communicating these emotions to her attached figure.

On the other hand, her preoccupied behaviours are exhibited through her reliance on social support for recovery. Her friendships and religious institution played major influence on her perception of herself as a survivor. Her desire for external validation was driven by her need to independently seek help. She expresses that since her caregiver failed to find her professional help, she was tasked with fending for herself in this regard. She views her external help-seeking as an independent behaviour:

> "They taught me independence, use the independence… I told them that I'm getting help for myself, and they just want to bash me for it."

> "I was just like you know what, they are never going to help me. I will get help from church."

Ultimately, MB expresses that she has seen positive growth in her life following her trauma, she expresses that she was once pessimistic but her attitude towards life is now positively altered. Although she reflects on positive growth, shortly after she expresses:

> "No, you know what, I'm good like I do well but man, I've been sad before, but this darling is depression".
>
> "It's such a dark thing to like have within you."

Despite her brave front and fear of projecting weakness, she explains there are days where she is unable to sleep, lives in darkness and harbours hatred for her perpetrator. These behaviours indicate that the impact of her trauma still lingers affecting her daily-functioning and emotional wellbeing. Her limited ability to emotionally regulate leaves her in a state of vulnerability yet her dismissing dynamics has not allowed her to acknowledge this.

4.4. Patterns of Anxious-Avoidant Attachment

This section presents emerging characteristics and behaviours that resemble an anxious-avoidant attachment culture. This theme of an anxious-avoidant attachment culture umbrellas sub-themes of family instability, maternal unavailability and maladaptive coping and fragility. Although the Main & Goldwyn. (1984a, 1998a) classification system primarily includes the four mentioned attachment patterns, it acknowledges that one may exhibit multiple styles depending on the situation.

This participant presents with dynamics similar to Ainsworth's (1978) SSP classifications and underscores the importance of viewing attachment classification as a multifaceted concept. This infant classification might suggest that her emotional neglect in childhood has left her stagnant in this regard and unable to progress onto the adulthood attachment-related behaviours.

4.4.1. Family Instability

The first indication into participants FA's attachment culture was through reports of experiences with her parent's separation and frequent changes in caregivers. When asked to appraise her childhood environment, she immediately associated this with chaos and mentions her parents separation. She recounts that because her mother had to seek employment she was sent to live with aunts and uncles, her home frequently shifted. She

recalls that she would often withdraw from forming close bonds and her home would never be permanent.

Patterns reveal that life stressors left her emotionally vulnerable and without support, FA was without consistent support in this period of childhood distress. This is supported when she reflects that she asked her mother about her separation from her husband and was ignored.

> "I was so confused and scared, I just wanted to know what is going on so I called her, and she just would not tell me. Hey I was sad."

> "As I grew up, I just noticed that I kind of got withdrawn from everything else. I had nobody to listen."

Separation is an emerging theme throughout this data item. FA many memories of her early childhood are guided by this stressor. It may be said that she associates this event with overall separation of a stable family structure, love and the beginning of her traumatic experience. Her desire for unity, however, was illustrated when she recalls going to work with her mother and speaks about her employer's availability.

> "I used to have a really lovely time because her employer was very nice and she used to take really good care of me."

> "I remember times in Eastern Cape we would stay with my mum and my sisters, that was really nice."

She associates feelings of warmth and love with this memory and through this, her desire for affection and attention is revealed. By associating early memories of 'mother' with a person who showed her periodic care and affection, the cracks in this attached-dependent relationship are illuminated.

4.4.2. Maternal Unavailability Following Trauma

FA's tendency to supress feelings of stress and distress are exemplified following her experience with rape. Similar to participant BM, she concealed this traumatic experience from her mother. The following narratives reveal well-aligned characteristics of an anxious-avoidant attachment. Therefore, her sensitivity to rejection leads her to purposively avoid situations where she might encounter this.

> "I couldn't tell her she wouldn't have believed me…I was really scared of what she might think of me and if she would still love me".

> "My mother loved my cousin; I couldn't tell her what he did. She wouldn't be on my side."

> "I just thought well she won't be there for me; I will just keep these feelings for myself."

These themes illustrate FA's perceptions and experiences of parental support post-trauma. Having encountered significant life stressors she reports that she navigates these obstacles independently. Her perception of her mother's support is characterized by misunderstanding, rejection and a lack of emotional validation. Yet, her desire for support is evident when she describes that:

> "I just wanted her to ask me how I was doing… Just tell me that it's going to be okay."

4.4.3. Maladaptive Coping & Fragility

FA's feelings of security during distress are non-existent. This has resulted in unacknowledged emotions and maladaptive coping methods. When asked if she would disclose her assault had her parents not found out from a relative, she stated:

> "I would not have said anything, it was better off unknown than when they knew and were just thinking I'm cursed."

Her total reluctance to request social support exceeds the family unit and extends on to professional therapy when she explains that:

> "I want to talk to someone who can relate, I can't talk to someone who's going to tell me no you're going to be fine."

> "I want to feel different, but I can't, I don't feel like I survived anything... There's still a part of me that feels really inadequate, unworthy, I feel like I deserved it."

This ambivalence about social support reflects both an anxious and an avoidant stance, confirming her overlapping attachment cultures. It is expected that through family instability, maternal unavailability and maladaptive coping methods that FA grapples with resilience. Her lived experience is now one of suffering and pessimism.

4.5. Patterns of Unresolved/Disorganized Attachment

Contradictory behaviours alternating between proximity-seeking and withdrawal have been reported and resemble patterns of unresolved/disorganized attachment. Emerging themes between two participants who exhibit disorganized patterns of behaviour have been observed here. Sub-themes outlining traumatic childhood experiences, longing for maternal sensitivity and maladaptive coping are reflected here. Furthermore, a fragmented sense of identity was unearthed and common between these participants, which resulted in a disorganized and unresolved response to their sexual assault and childhood traumas.

4.5.1. Adverse Childhood Experiences

One of the contributing dynamics that led to this classification of disorganized/unresolved attachment styles was the traumatic experiences endured by two participants in their formative years. It was reported that both participants LS and BM experienced unstable and traumatic developmental environments. Experiences reported by these survivors reflected disruptions in attachment bonds which developed feelings of instability and insecurity. In particular, participant LS recounted experiences of physical and verbal abuse by her father. She expressed that she endured:

> "A lot of abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse. I think all of us at some point were way broken about certain things and so you're not dealing with it properly, it affected how we were growing up. Because now you're not growing up like in a, I'd say with healthy boundaries, healthy relationships, that was not there at all."

> "All I remember is my mother getting punched and dragged."

Similarly, participant BM recounted her struggling after witnessing years of her mother being bedridden and eventually euthanized. During significant developmental years, she was left vulnerable without a secure base.

> "My mum did not die naturally she was euthanized. I don't know if that is used in human terms, but my mum was so sick that they had to end the pain for her. So, I remember everything, I remember being in that room, I remember her being on the bed and my dad doesn't know that I remember.

> "Man, my life was struggling they moved me from place-to-place living with relatives. I couldn't even tell my father; he shouts at me."

Both these experiences support Bowlby's conceptualization of attachment concerning grief and loss. Later themes will elaborate on how these unstable attachment bonds led both these women to struggle with feelings of abandonment, fear and instability.

4.5.2. Longing for Maternal Availability

This sub-theme delves into the profound impact of maternal availability or instability within the attached-dependent dynamic. Participants LS and BM both recount experiences marked by periods of maternal unavailability, leading to feelings of abandonment and emotional neglect.

LS reflects on her father's abuse and the subsequent emotional turmoil, longing for her mother's comfort and support. However, her mother's denial and inability to address the abuse left LS feeling unsafe and emotionally neglected. Similarly, BM grapples with loss and instability, seeking maternal figures in those around her but unsure of their consistency. Her unresolved trauma is evident in her attachment to her deceased aunt and her struggles with coping and emotional regulation.

Both participants exhibit difficulty in regulating emotions and self-soothing in times of distress, stemming from inconsistent caregiving and invalidation from their fathers. Their disorganized/unresolved attachment styles manifest in ambivalence around emotional intimacy and struggles with emotional regulation.

> "She saw what was happening and I'd never want to make my mum choose between us, but she also needs to see she can't allow this abuse. From my dad, from her dad on like that, and if you speak it's almost like that's where we hit a block."
>
> "I'm acknowledging that this is the problem, and my mum is in denial. I could never feel safe."
>
> "I wished she will just sit and tell us, 'Baby, it's going to be okay."

Similarly, BM struggled with loss and unstable attachment which diminished any sense of safety and stability she could form. She reflects on a desire for a maternal figure and seeks this in people around her but is unsure of their consistency. Her unresolved trauma is illustrated when she forms an attachment with an aunt who eventually passes on from illness.

Her disorganized/unresolved attachment culture is exhibited when she is unable to cope with the loss and begins speaking to her deceased aunt before bed.

> "I remember saying that to her, I don't remember if it was in a grave or a dream, but I told her I promise I will stop crying if you visit me at least once a week. I told her I know that you are caught up there but just visit me just once. If I can just see you just once and I feel like she agreed, she said yes, and I told her that I loved her in my dream.
>
> "For the longest time even when I would went back to school I would talk alone in class, sometimes I don't even realize it."

It is clear to see that both participants experience difficulty in regulating emotions and self-soothing in times of distress. This absence of consistent caregiving compounded by constant invalidation from their father's created distrusting and fearful individuals. Their disorganized/unresolved attachment styles are clearly exhibited through an ambivalence around emotional intimacy.

4.5.3. Disorganized Perception of Recovery

This sub-theme explores the challenges of recovery associated with disorganized/unresolved attachment, characterized by maladaptive responses to trauma. Both participants struggle with coherently narrating their post-trauma experiences, displaying incoherent speech and rapid shifts between narratives.

> Participant LS and BM recount experiences in a disjointed manner, reflecting difficulties in processing and articulating their trauma. Their narratives are marked by self-destructive behaviors, dissociation, and avoidance, as they attempt to navigate their unresolved trauma (Main & Hesse, 1990). These disorganized perceptions of recovery underscore the profound impact of unresolved attachment dynamics on coping mechanisms and emotional well-being. "I am not something to be pitied, I am anything but a victim, I survived it because I'm living. I don't know though eish, maybe I can call myself a victim, I still struggle every day."
>
> "It does not hurt every day because I hide it."

Similarly participant LS recounts on what can be described as a disorganized retelling of events.

> "I did not want to talk about it, I didn't feel comfortable talking to them or the pastor and I had good reason not to talk about it, I mean sometimes you know, sometimes. Did I tell you. Oh yeah, did I tell you my mother needs her kids with her all the time, she's so clingy sometimes."

Both recounts of lived experience following their trauma were disorganized making it difficult to pinpoint the specific methods they used to cope with their trauma. What was common between these participants was that both reported self-destructive behaviors, disassociation, and avoidance as they attempted to make sense of their unresolved trauma.

4.6. The Detached Figure

In exploring these survivors' experiences, a notable focus emerges on the paternal figure's role in recovery from their trauma, despite the varying attachment bonds. Although this study emphasizes the attachment relationship, it becomes clear that this figure should not be overlooked. All six participants reported strained relationships with their fathers pre- and post-trauma. Themes of emotional disconnect and withdrawal were present across the data despite the quality of the attachment organization.

4.6.1. Paternal Emotional Withdrawal in Childhood

Irrespective of the quality of attachment bonds all participants reported experiences of emotional withdrawal by their fathers. From these narratives, the profound influence of paternal emotional unavailability and it's contributions to distress management can be seen. When probed on early childhood experiences, these participants followed early recollections with their mother, with detached behaviours from their fathers. In their own words:

> "He had like little to no emotional intelligence. My relationship with my father seriously deteriorated at around 9. When I think about how he treated me, I can just say I miss a paternal figure in my life."

> "When my dad came home it was a lot of like, be quiet, be contained, don't upset him. Basically, don't be a kid."

> "I never knew that man, I still don't know him. He was always working; I'd always have to like force him to do simple things for me."

> "When he would come back from Eastern Cape, I would expect him to spend time with me and he wouldn't. I would tell him to play with me and he would tell me to go. I felt like I wasn't his daughter."

> "My dad shouted at me always, like at anything I say. Like I'd want to tell him things, but I was so scared."

> "It never seemed like he was part of the family, there was so much fighting I don't know if he ever got tired of it."

These narratives highlight the experiences of emotional neglect, lack of connection and a sense of absence or disengagement in the father-child relationship. These survivor's express feelings here of longing for a more nurturing and involved paternal figure, as well as frustration and disappointment with their father's behaviors. These narratives collectively describe the impact of emotional disconnect on their emotional wellbeing.

4.6.2. Paternal Neglect Following Trauma

> Experiences of dejection, being dismissed, unsupported were linked to a father figure that was experienced as distant, cold and unresponsive. The participants seemed to hold an image of an either physically absent, emotionally unavailable, reactive or collapsed figure. For example the following quotes emerged from these participants. "Like we were all present for the attack, even though I was the only one assaulted, but my father was the only one who got to show his anger. It was his way and nobody else's he never cared about me."

> "A parent is supposed to protect their child, but my father brought hurt. Even when I cried after the rape, he would shouted at me for it."

> "My dad could have at least been there. Even once to tell me I know what happened to you and I'm really sorry, but he never showed up."

> "Like my dad didn't even talk about it, I don't have a memory of him being like, 'are you okay?"

> "My dad didn't talk about it a lot. He found it very difficult to talk."

> "Oh, I didn't tell him, why would I share this impactful, traumatic experience with a man who doesn't even know me."

These reports all offer poignant insights into the experiences of paternal neglect following sexual assault trauma. The survivor's express feelings of abandonment, disappointment, and a profound sense of betrayal by their fathers lack of support and acknowledgement. These narratives highlight their longing for comfort and validation following their assault. This absence exacerbates their feelings of isolation and distress.

Conclusion

This thematic analysis revealed several key themes that generated insight into the diversity of attachment cultures and their associated responses. While the themes emerged from individual data items, this was necessary for interpreting individual attachment dynamics and allowed for exploration into the intricacies associated with each. However, what can be observed across the data is that there are clear variations between the secure and the remaining insecure attachment representations. The securely attached survivor demonstrated adaptive coping strategies, relying on supportive relationships and effectively managing distress. In contrast, individuals with insecure attachment styles exhibited maladaptive coping behaviours, characterized by ambivalence, emotional dysregulation, and avoidance of social support. Across the data, a theme of paternal neglect emerged and creates room for future investigation. Overall, the findings underscore the enduring influence of early attachment dynamics on an adult samples' response to trauma, shaping not only coping mechanisms but also perceptions of self and others.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The findings confirmed that the quality of attachment cultures does indeed nuance the aforementioned elements in diverse ways. In essence, it was revealed that an individual with a secure attachment system had positive appraisals about maternal support during her recovery. It may be said that this served as a protective factor and instilled adaptive coping mechanisms, a positive internal working model and comfort with social support. This appraisal of parental support and tripartite of internal resources ensured that she was much more resilient than the insecurely attached counterparts. Whom on the contrary, exhibited behaviours that are theoretically aligned with an insecure attachment organization. These survivors reported unfavourable or conflicting appraisals about their attached figures' support. Alongside these perceptions, an array of adverse and disorganized coping mechanisms was exhibited. Narratives and interpretations suggest that this group experienced diminished life satisfaction and internal conflicts about their recovery.

From a global perspective, the data unveiled themes which support that the strength of the attachment bond established in childhood, persists in shaping experiences with parental support in their adulthood trauma. Childhood experiences with distressing situations and the resulting maternal responses continue into adulthood, where these women now grapple with more complex distress. Led by responses to earlier interactive bids for attention, the attached dependent now reflects on these scripts which shapes her post-trauma responses.

5.1. Discerning Attachment Cultures

Discerning the varying attachment cultures were a vital element of this research. As it was proposed to shape the quality of the participants' experiences with parental support and their lived experiences which represent their responses to sexual trauma. Considering that conclusions were made on an adult sample, it is interesting to consider that while adulthood attachment patterns can be influenced by early attachment experiences, they are not solely determined by them. Instead, they are guided by a complex interplay of factors including impactful life circumstances (Main & Solomon, 1990). Therefore, while childhood experiences are the foundation of the attachment model, it can be recognized that current attachment systems may be a product of life events. By taking a holistic approach and considering the broader context of these participants lives, particularly their experience with social support during recovery, a more comprehensive understanding of their attachment cultures was unearthed.

The following section lays out the unique attachment behaviours self-reported by the sample. Through theoretical guides, their diverse responses and the quality of post-trauma experience were uncovered. The attachment cultures were examined on their similarities and variations through a secure and grouped insecure lens. The insecure cluster was categorized based on the similarity of their experiences with maternal instability, emotional neglect and unresolved trauma. An interesting pattern of overlapping attachment cultures were seen in two of the insecure participants. Although the Main & Goldwyn. (1984a, 1998a) classification criteria primarily include secure, preoccupied, dismissing and disorganized, the findings suggest that it is important to consider the diversity in attachment dynamics in adulthood and acknowledge that one may exhibit multiple styles depending on the context. This is presented in the previous results section, where the responses of two insecurely attached survivors overlapped. Interestingly, whereby one resembled characteristics of Ainsworth's (1978) SSP criteria.

It must be said this investigation exceeds categorization of the attachment cultures, but rather, it magnifies the rich tapestry of emotional responses and employed strategies for emotion regulation. As we delve into the discussion of these emerging themes between the secure and insecure groups, the reader may consider this a lens of enlightenment that precedes the richness of findings between attachment behaviours and the lived experiences of women who have survived rape.

5.2. Childhood Appraisals of Attachment

All interactions with the participants began with reflections about their early familial context and appraisals of the overall quality of their childhood. Steele and Steele (2008) affirm that questions such as these capture social and emotional well-being of the individual, exhibiting the ability or lack thereof to project an organized and clear valuing of their attachment bond. While Main et al. (1985) indicate that this warmup is not meant to begin assessing the quality of the relationship, this research supports the contrary. Guided by works such as Rasmussen and Berntsen (2011) it is valuable to acknowledge that automatic autobiographical memories, especially those relating to childhood, contribute to the individual's immediate associations. This warmup piloted interpretations about how the overall quality of childhood and family environment were perceived. Furthermore, in all narratives, the participants began recounting experiences with the attached figure without being directed.

Following this inquiry, the survivors were tasked with recalling two memories specific to each of their parents. This task confirmed existing assumptions about who the attached figure is and were then immediately prompted to provide two adjectives that described how they felt when they recalled these memories. The effort put into these adjective associations and discourse presented when describing selected memories, were critical to the attachment culture assessment. As they gave indication into the affective dimension of the attachment relationship. This was supported by Mikulincer and Shaver (2010) who informed with a psychodynamic lens, that semantic memories are unified with episodic memories, which suggest a clear integration between the conscious and preconscious structures of the mind.

Guided by Bowlby's (1969a, 1970 & 1973) works on *Attachment and Loss,* attachment cultures were assessed on childhood responses to separation, validation and proximity seeking during stressful events, of which specific questions can be found in Appendix A. Each of the reported perceptions and behaviors magnified the quality of their attachment systems. Reported experiences of maternal responses to these events, provided a nuanced understanding of their interpersonal relationships and align with the core tenets of attachment theory. All of which contribute to a broader understanding of human development. Considering these processes and their outcomes, the following sections detail a comprehensive analysis of the participants' early childhood experiences and embedded attachment cultures.

5.2.1. Attachment Styles and Childhood Appraisals

As supported by the study findings, the securely attached individual communicates a clear value for their attachment bond. This was illustrated through her clear flow of developing ideas and an autonomous approach to expressing thoughts and feelings. As evidenced by Main and Goldwyn (1998), coherent and vivid recall of childhood experiences suggest that sequences of this discourse is closely unified and form a logical whole. This speaker was truthful, supporting recollections with evidence, succinct yet complete, remained consistent with the topic and was clear and orderly in communicating experiences. All points of which form and adhere to the 'cooperative principle' which reflects coherent discourse in interviews (Grice, 1989).

The quality of her mental representation, appeared to be automatic, easily accessible and without interference from defensive mechanisms. This was emphasised in her ability to quickly recall memories and characterize associated emotions. What can be said, is that her

most chronically accessible working model was revealed through the memories she associated with felt security (Steele & Steele, 2008). This made memories of heightened activation and deactivation less accessible. As a result, the nature of a supportive and emotionally attuned caregiving style was recalled.

Lastly, security regulation in the early developmental years were a prominent theme in this narrative. Her interactive experiences were surrounded by love, warmth and security, embedding a repertoire of behaviours to assure proximity and protection, which reveal affect regulation and healthy exploration (Bowlby, 1958). This working model of positive caregiver responses formed her attachment representation, embedding a sense of security and connectedness which reflects in her adaptive coping mechanisms and perceptions of parental support following sexual trauma.

Compared to the securely attached counterpart, those who reported behaviours consistent with an insecure attachment culture, recalled terse, contradictory or pessimistic experiences in their early developmental years. The preoccupied, disorganized/unresolved, and overlapping attachment cultures of dismissing preoccupied and anxious-avoidant were classified by their reports of inconsistent maternal availability (Ainsworth, 1978). These recalls confirmed assumptions by Hesse (1999) in that the transcripts lacked coherence and reflected internal inconsistencies. The dismissing and avoidant transcripts showed descriptions of the attached figure as highly unfavourable, while the preoccupied interview showed violations to the cooperative principle. Where this survivor displayed difficulty in maintaining focus and containing responses to a certain question. Her experience with her mother oscillates in rapid shifts between present and past tense in this recall. What was observed, was that the dismissing and anxious-avoidant speakers tends to focus primarily on depicting childhood experiences positively while avoiding specific discussion. On the other hand, the preoccupied speaker prioritizes attention to the attachment-related experiences and their impact at the expense of maintaining conversational collaboration.

As supported by the literature, individuals with histories of emotional neglect or abuse, presented markers of insecure attachment cultures through anxious or dismissing characteristics (George & Solomon, 1993). Reports of childhood memories for each of the insecurely attached survivors began with reflections on their mother's struggles. Depression, marital concerns, abuse and physical illness resulting in death were a theme across this group. Supported by Bowlby (1982) who outlined that when challenged with these events, the

attached figure's ability to offer responsive caregiving is compromised. This interference with secure base functioning has impacted the development of autonomy and competency. The data revealed that these attached figure's preoccupation with their life struggles disrupted the offspring's ease with seeking comfort. It may be inferred that the caregivers' struggle with emotion regulation resulted in a transmission of intergenerational patterns. Belsky and Fearon (2002) similarly found that patterns of attachment and caregiving tend to be transmitted across generations. This lack of nurture as a result of life struggles, was modelled by the offspring. It is reasonable to conclude that these survivors internalized their mothers emotional turbulence and adopted coping strategies that mirrored this.

This inconsistency by the attached figure emerged across the insecure transcripts, marked by periods of warmth and affection and neglect. This resulted in unstable attachment bonds, interchanging between hyperactivation and deactivation (Main et al., 1985) in all these cases. Parental invalidations were equally reported as the interviews progressed, wherein emotional needs and expression were rejected or belittled. The participants then resorted to readjustment of the attachment strategy or adopted secondary strategies. Hyperactivation, was observed in the preoccupied participants, who resorted to energetic attention-seeking strategies (Steele & Steele, 2008) to demand love and attention from their mothers. Similarly, the remaining disorganized and overlapping attachment cultures all emotionally suppressed, by internalizing their needs as a means of winning affection. In all cases, emotional strain and relational conflicts emerged. This crafted models of worthlessness, shame and a reluctance to express emotional vulnerability in childhood.

5.3. The Interplay of Attachment Cultures & Experiences of Parental Support

This study concludes that the quality of the attachment culture does indeed nuance rape survivors' experiences of parental support. The following sections provide comprehensive insight into this research goal with specific focus on three criteria: perceptions of maternal support, emotional availability and the role of the non-attached figure following trauma. In unison these criteria have offered a global perspective on the central role of attachment cultures in resilience from sexual trauma. Furthermore, it emphasizes how fostering positive parent-child attachment dynamics can inform interventions and strategies aimed at healthy outcomes following sexual assault.

5.3.1. Perceptions of Parental Support

Perceived social support has been reported to buffer the effects of traumatic experiences and facilitate recovery from trauma. It moderates the adverse effects of trauma and promotes resilience (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). However, the resources required for recovery varies in effectiveness between attachment organizations. Literature supports that experiences of trauma, particularly sexual assault can significantly influence the perceptions of parental support (Johnson et al., 2018). This study supports the idea that attachment cultures can exacerbate pre-existing attachment insecurities and complicates the evaluations of the relationship.

On the contrary, the participant who has an established secure base optimizes the resources and mental representations that influence positive appraisals of her attached figure's support. Her experiences with consistency and availability endorses that this representation shaped her internal working model of relationships (Steele & Steele, 2008). As a result, this influenced her expectations about support and security in adulthood. The perception of parental support through a securely attached lens is illustrated through positive evaluations about the caregivers' abilities and personal traits. Throughout the narrative, the survivor consistently magnifies the virtues of her mother, often emphasizing her support during her recovery. The mere perception of the attachment figure as a responsive and reliable source of protection, is enough to alleviate distress (Bretherton, 1985). It can be said that the survivor's remarkable resilience and willingness to navigate through the trauma was motivated by the perception of her mother's support. Emphasizing this unwavering support and understanding throughout her recovery was followed by her perception of resilience. By attributing her mother's supportive nature to her resilience, it is reasonable to infer that perceived social support buffers the adverse effects of sexual trauma.

The survivors who exhibited insecure models of attachment, all projected a longing for empathy from their attached figures. As previously covered, depression, marital concerns, abuse and physical illness resulting in death, were a theme across this group. This pattern emerged when making inferences on the representations they hold about their attached figures. Through these associations, it is fair to conclude that the quality of the mother-child attachment bond is salient in this regard. George and Solomon's (1990) reports that mothers who were categorized as inconsistent showed less sensitivity than those of securely attached offspring, were supported here. It may be said that this balance between grappling with life

conflicts and providing security for offspring resulted in inconsistent support. This representation of instability in childhood has manifested in adulthood through perceptions of unavailability and emotional neglect in their recovery from sexual assault.

Across this insecurely attached data, narratives underscored a desire for emotional validation, yet all transcripts highlight moments of support and acceptance through academic achievements. This association between validation and academics reveals a struggle to trust the support of their attached figures in responding during times of distress. It is suggested that the perception of parental support by an insecure attachment is communicated through unfavorable or ambivalent appraisals of availability following sexual trauma. Working models constructed about these relationships reflect perceived neglect. The organization of knowledge by the dependent's actions, will produce perceptions of their unavailability and inconsistent responses. This reflects a distrust or reluctance to rely on the caregiver for support.

5.3.2. Emotional Availability & Responsiveness

Assessing how a secure attachment culture nuances one's experience of parental support is guided here by reports of maternal emotional availability. Ainsworth (1978) confirmed that parents in her SSP were observed to be emotionally available and attentive to the offspring's bids for security. This research supports that the securely attached individual, underscored by a positive and trusting attachment bond, developed a secure base from which she explored the world and effectively coped in the face of adversity. These experiences of a reliable and comforting parent-offspring dynamic promoted emotional wellbeing through confidence in her mother's ability to alleviate distress.

Following her experience of sexual assault, the associated distress immediately activated proximity-seeking behaviours. Stemming from her first schemata guided by experiences of need fulfilment, she sought her mother's emotional comfort and gives first indication into the working models constructed about this relationship. Drawing from childhood attention-seeking strategies, she once more sought attention by exhibiting signs of distress. Successfully fulfilling a need for security following this traumatic event became a priority. This transcript reflected the enduring impact of her mother as a central figure in managing emotions and fostering a sense of safety. Interestingly, during moments of frustration, there emerged a subconscious desire which yearned for physical comfort. This gives rise to ideas about the profound impact of sexual assault in activating childhood behaviours. This supports

Mikulincer and Shaver (2010) who discussed that in adulthood, an individual resorts to overt displays of negative emotion such as anger and this interactional bid is illustrated in this data. As she cries for her mother, the attached dependent is overcome with emotion and covertly summons her mother's love through these displays. It becomes clear that her experience of parental support is immensely valued.

This case illustrates that through reaction, an attached figures' immediate emotional availability models successful emotion regulation (Bretherton, 1985). Narratives here, suggest that the survivors' distress was accommodated attentively and insightfully. More specifically, this outcome suggests that distress management involved making sense of the experience and finding effective solutions. This places emphasis on the attached figures' role in coaching self-regulatory strategies. Drawing from foundational principles of Bowlby's (1982) attachment works, this survivors' attached figure facilitated effective outlets for managing frustration, anxiety, and distress that she resourced throughout her recovery. A clear indication into how stress management is demonstrated and adopted.

Throughout the analysis, a prominent motif of empowerment was unveiled, and supports the role of secure attachment bonds in shaping a favorable self-concept (Collins et al., 2002). This survivor reflects on multiple events where her mother modelled confidence in her abilities as a woman and has leveraged these resources to navigate her distress. This case aligns with the basic tenets of attachment theory and expansions, that if mental health is to be maintained in adulthood, then a childhood marked by availability is vital.

On the basis that actions are a projection of emotions, emotional responses are said to be a key determinant in the recovery journey. Parents that display unfavourable emotional responses to their offspring's sexual assault often hinder their resilience (Kim et al., 2015). Opposed to the securely attached counterpart, individuals here with insecure mental representations of their attachment bonds, reflected biases in their thinking. It becomes clear how their encounters with emotional detachment have diminished their capacity to self-regulate. This research supports Bowlby's (1969) assertions that unsuccessful bids for attention intensifies uncertainties or feelings of insecurity. The data illustrated that the distress because of sexual assault, indeed triggered attachment behaviors. Although, the survivors were challenged with doubts about reliance. This left the attachment systems in a continuously activated state with insufficient resources to self-regulate emotions (Bretherton, 1985).

Those with preoccupied attachment representations or tendencies, harbored feelings of being misunderstood during moments of vulnerability. The survivors struggled with internal conflict around maternal responsiveness. This may be attributed to their heightened sensitivity to relational cues about their caregivers' emotions (Bowlby,1969). Both caregivers of these offspring responded with emotional outbursts when they were made aware of the assault and the participants expressed compassion in response. However, narratives suggest that this was a mixture of a sincere concern for their mothers' emotion yet a reluctance to fully confront or express their own vulnerability. This may be rooted in a fear of burdening or upsetting their attached figures further. This tendency to prioritize others' emotions and perceptions over their own, magnifies their intricate emotional landscapes and reveals a desire for emotional connectedness, yet a reluctance to introduce further emotional strain.

Those exhibiting patterns of a dismissing or avoidant attachment culture, grappled with physical and emotional isolation in their childhoods. This separation created a script of unavailability and independence throughout their developmental years and an internalization of distress. Experiences with emotional disconnectedness from the caregiver has reinforced the idea that they may receive attention by supressing needs and vulnerability (Main et al., 1985). Despite the lack of felt security, their attachment system deactivates, and they manage independently or ignore effects of rape entirely. What this suggests is that since childhood and throughout the lifespan, they developed working models that resemble attachment deactivation, and this is illustrated in their recovery contexts. It is clear that these survivors underwent periods of pseudo-adjustment, as denial about the reality and effects of the stressor are assumed (Campbell, 2008).

As both dismissing and anxious-avoidant participants did not disclose the assault to their caregivers, this suggests that earlier attempts at attaining comfort were unsuccessful and they are now led by a schemata of rejection (Bowlby, 1969). Their sensitivity to this rejection is illustrated as they purposively avoid situations where they may encounter invalidation, for this reason their experience with parental support is unfavourable to them.

The participants that exhibited a disorganized/unresolved attachment culture both endured unstable and traumatic developmental years. This immediately suggested early disruptions in their early attachment relationships contributing to a sense of instability and insecurity about emotional availability. Bowlby (1975) reminds that caregivers play a pivotal role in fostering a secure attachment bond with their children, providing a safe haven for emotional

expression. This research suggests that disorganized/unresolved attachment cultures are a byproduct of childhood emotional neglect and insecurity about their attachment bonds. As these survivor's mothers' were grappling with abuse and illness and were unable to accommodate emotional needs. Their own unresolved traumas may have complicated their willingness or ability to provide support, perpetuating the cycle of disorganization.

The absence of consistent caregiving in both these women's lives complicated by the invalidation from their fathers, might have hindered their abilities to develop a sense of trust and security in close relationships. For this reason, both women were reluctant and fearful about sharing their sexual assault and the associated emotions. However, when they finally disclosed their experience, they displayed contradictory behaviours such as proximity seeking yet lingering reluctance (Main & Hesse, 1990). This paradoxical response in both instances project their inability to effectively regulate their attachment-related behaviours during emotional turbulence. This may be considered a reasonable response considering that both reported inconsistent maternal responsiveness, which had exacerbated fear.

5.3.3. The Non-Attached Figure's Role

The narratives provided by participants magnify the influence of paternal figures in the aftermath of trauma, resonating strongly with attachment theory's emphasis on early caregiving experiences (Bowlby, 1969). Emotional disconnect and withdrawal from fathers following sexual assault suggest disruptions in this relationship, potentially contributing to insecure attachment patterns (Bowlby, 1969). Moreover, participants' accounts highlight the impact of paternal neglect on their self-perception and emotional well-being, aligning with Lamb's exploration of paternal influence on self-development (Lamb, 2010). Such experiences may disrupt the formation of a secure base, leading to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability.

The reflections on maternal protection offer insights into the interplay between maternal and paternal relationships in shaping attachment bonds. Participants' suggestions that maternal protection could mitigate the effects of paternal neglect underscore the importance of maternal responsiveness in promoting secure attachments (Bowlby, 1969). This dynamic highlights caregivers' potential to influence attachment outcomes through their behaviours, emphasizing the need for supportive caregiving environments. However, participants' frustration and disappointment with paternal responses reveal gaps in support systems, indicating a broader societal need to recognize and address their emotional needs.

Overall, these narratives underscore the profound contribution of paternal neglect on individuals' emotional well-being and recovery from rape. Understanding the role of paternal relationships in shaping attachment bonds provides valuable insights for interventions and support systems for survivors of sexual assault. By acknowledging the complex interplay between familial relationships and attachment outcomes, we can better inform efforts to promote healing and resilience among survivors within familial and societal contexts.

5.4. The Interplay of Attachment Cultures & Lived Experiences

This section of the discussion makes interpretations about the lived experiences of rape survivors with a specific focus on how attachment cultures shape coping mechanisms such as therapy responses, quality of recovery and the perception of the self as victim or survivor. Through these narratives the following sections elucidate how secure and insecure attachment dynamics manifest in lived experiences following a traumatic event of sexual assault.

5.4.1. Variations in Coping Mechanisms

Main's (1996) expansions on attachment theory suggest that attachment system behaviors manifest differently in adulthood. This research supports that one's internal representations of their attachment, guides the quality of their stress management in adulthood. Throughout these narratives, the insecure group exhibited challenges with expressing vulnerability, seeking support, or benefitting from support following sexual assault. While the securely attached individual used her experiences to support others and effectively navigate her trauma.

At its core, the securely attached survivor's mother's acceptance and responsiveness has ingrained models of trust for others and comfort with expressing emotions. Having experienced that distress management is connected to positive emotions and relief, her internal working models of self and others are positive (Bowlby, 1973). Throughout the interaction, there are emerging themes which affirm that she is able to emotionally regulate, apply adaptive coping mechanisms and comfortably rely on social support. From as early as childhood she had resourced this secure base and was able to self-sooth during distressing times.

She uses these instilled resources and affirms Steele and Steele's (2008) assertions that simply contemplating felt security triggers memories of other rewarding attempts and makes memories of heightened activation less available. This is demonstrated through her recounts

of hurtful experiences and reducing its emotional impact by reflecting on the secure base. She consistently refers to her mother's willingness to openly communicate and address her concerns. What has been observed is that these experiences inculcated emotion regulation through constant reassurance and response to bidding.

These observations are especially relevant when analyzing the quality of her therapeutic relationship. Her generalized model of reliable relationships is projected here. As Main et al. (1985) emphasized, the therapist embodies some notable characteristics of the attached figure and encourages healthy dialogue and engagement. It is evident that she views her therapist as competent in managing her emotions. It is clear here that her therapist is mediating the emotional and psychological effects of her experience with rape and her positive response to these interventions reflects her trust and dependence. She reflects on how this relationship has fast tracked her resilience and instilled positive lessons. However, it must be reiterated that it is through the quality of her attachment representation that the therapeutic interventions were successful.

In contrast, the preoccupied and with preoccupied tendencies attachment cultures exhibited a heightened need for closeness yet feared rejection, resulting in a preoccupation with their abilities and difficulty in regulating emotions. Ambivalence and contradictory coping mechanisms were observed. Both participants indicated a desire for support yet were reluctant to resource their attached figures to cope. This ambivalence suggests an oscillation between proximity-seeking and withdrawing, which is a prominent characteristic of a preoccupied attachment Hesse (1996).

Furthermore, they reported engaging in risky behaviors such as substance abuse and promiscuity following trauma, which may stem from a desire to regulate overwhelming negative emotions and seek validation or attention from others. This desire for and dependence on external social support is eminent across these specific attachment systems and explains their reliance on professional therapy (Ruiz et al., 2021). In both instances, a preoccupation with the therapeutic relationship was inferred. It is evident that one participant maintained a negative working model of herself yet a positive working model of her therapist. The other participants' positive internal working model may be attributed to her overlapping dismissing attachment organization. However, the desire to blur boundaries and the established dependence on the therapist in both cases could translate to a longing for emotional connectedness yet anxiety about their own abilities to effectively cope. Although

these feelings were reported, at a latent level it was inferred that patterns of relatedness outside of the therapy context are somewhat mirrored in their therapeutic relationships.

What becomes interesting is that these individuals exhibiting preoccupied attachment and tendencies, equally expressed dissatisfaction with their previous therapists. It is reasonable to infer that their high expectations for validation were easily disillusioned, or their heightened sensitivity to rejection was present in these instances. This uncertainty about the benefits of therapy could indicate a fear of being overwhelmed by the relationship. These findings support Main's (1996) reports about how attachment dynamics are unconsciously projected in therapeutic settings.

The overall quality of life for these participants exhibiting preoccupied attachment and tendencies, are ambivalent in nature. Led by Bartholemew and Horowitz (1991) it can be said that both narratives reflect resilience yet internal struggle that affect their daily affectioning. This dichotomy magnifies the ongoing nature of trauma and recovery in adults who develop insecure attachment organizations. This inability to cope effectively and following their sexual trauma resembles earlier experiences of conflict with a secure base. It becomes clear to see how the internal working model of self was established by previous schemata. Both uncertainty about themselves and ability to overcome trauma is reflected in their unwillingness to seek justice. Indicating their unstable model of dependence on others to alleviate distress yet fear of invalidation.

Similar to participant MB's overlapping attachment culture, the survivor exhibiting anxious-avoidant attachment dynamics, share similar characteristics in coping and quality of life following her sexual assault. Having encountered significant life stressors it becomes clear that she navigates her trauma independently. Her narratives about parental support following rape suggest she lacks the psychological resources needed to be resilient. Her perception of her mother's support suggests misunderstanding, rejection and a lack of emotional validation, these beliefs further exacerbate her maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Contrary to the hyperactivation observed in the preoccupied survivors, the anxious-avoidant survivor reflects moments of attachment deactivation guided by her mother's ineffective modelling of stress management. Her secure-base script is non-existent, and this has produced a need to internalize emotions and cope maladaptively. The mental representation she holds when dealing with a distressing event is one of emotional neglect and unstable availability. Her childhood attempts for assurance amid a major life stressor was neglected

and this reinforced her beliefs that help-seeking is unrewarding. Through this perspective, it can be said that her deep-seated fear of intimacy and dependency stems from early experiences with the caregiver and unfulfilled needs (Bowlby, 1969).

This survivor was equally reluctant to disclose her rape with her caregiver and ensured that she would have kept it concealed had she known the outcome. It becomes clear that her tendency to internalize distress is a defensive strategy used to devalue a need for intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). Produced by a lack of working model of self and others, she resorts to maladaptive coping mechanisms independently. Her defensive stance towards forming close relationships symbolizes an anticipation of further disruptions in her relationship.

She deviates significantly from the previously assessed attachment cultures as she has completely detached from social support. At times, she appeared emotionally distant and described what seemed like interpersonal detachment from members outside her family (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Despite this avoidant behaviour, her desire to emotionally connect was unveiled by her interest in seeking professional help. Although she explicitly states that she would not benefit from therapy, she proceeds to say that she wishes to communicate with someone who understands. Through this, it is suggested that her inability to form therapeutic relationships are based off an insecurity that stress cannot be managed.

Assessing the lived experience through coping and quality of life on participants who exhibited disorganized/unresolved attachments required in-depth interpretation. Both women produced incoherent speech and sudden shifts in narratives which suggest difficulty in emotion regulation. Van Ijzindoom (1995) outline that unresolved individuals display lapses in attention, and this was clearly illustrated in the participants' narratives about their coping responses. In particular, post-trauma experiences were poorly articulated and reflected in disorganized appraisals about the quality of their lives following their sexual assault.

Coping mechanisms through these narratives may be deemed as maladaptive. This research supports Main and Solomon's (1990) insights that disorganized attachments resemble a lack of coherent attachment strategies and internal working models. This was supported here by narratives that suggest unfavourable coping strategies such as avoidance and denial as a means of alleviating distress. In particular, emotional dysregulation was a recurrent theme here and might indicate a reluctance to confront intense emotions. Due to their lack of a secure base and a consistent source of comfort, it is clear that these women felt overwhelmed

by the intensity of their emotion and avoided the distress. This is further supported by their complete reluctance to seek professional support.

These disorganized shifts in coping mechanisms resemble emotional volatility (Blair, 2013), marked by fluctuating periods of distress, numbness or disassociation when responding to triggering stimuli. It is reasonable to conclude that this emotional dysregulation has inhibited their ability to engage in adaptive coping strategies. Their disintegration of organized attachment strategies is evident by their limited capacity to form trusting relationships and depend on others for social support. Considering their difficulty with forming coherent narratives about their sexual trauma, this possibly led to fragmented memories and a sense of disorientation in the therapeutic setting. It may be said that their reluctance to seek help is stemming from a fear of integrating their experience into their fragmented sense of self and identity (Main & Solomon, 1990). Through these patterns it is inferred that past experiences of maternal rejection and invalidation produced a deep-seated fear of expressing their sexual trauma.

These disorganized/unresolved adults resemble a struggle with integrating past traumas into their sense of self and experience difficulties in regulating emotions (Main & Hesse, 1991). The quality of life following their sexual trauma remains unsettled and overcome by the previous years of trauma and abuse they had endured. Their lived experience is marked by confusion and ambivalence around their abilities to heal. Their desire for closeness, yet a fear of rejection or harm results in an unpredictable lived experience for these survivors. The resulting self-isolation following years of unresolved grief and trauma has exacerbated feelings of isolation and alienation following their sexual trauma. Without the buffering effect of a secure base, it is clear that these survivors are more susceptible to chronic loneliness, despair and hopelessness which is eroding quality of life.

5.4.2. Navigating Identity After Trauma: Victimhood vs Survivorship

The interviews all concluded by asking the participants whether they perceive themselves as a victim or survivor of sexual assault. These insights gave indication into their sense of identity (Brown, 2005), lived experiences and final perception of how rape has defined their womanhood. Here it was interesting to navigate how internal representations shapes one's identity following trauma and affects their ability to regain normalcy in most cases.

This question garnered a diverse range of responses from the participants. The securely attached individual expressed a reluctance to identify with either label. She communicates a deliberate decision to deny these labels power and refuses to let her rape define her. Guided by Ognibene et al. (1998) it may be said that such a response reflects a strong sense of empowerment and autonomy over her narrative. By rejecting these labels, she demonstrates a firm refusal to allow her perpetrator to dictate her life. Rather, she chooses to lead with resilience and navigate through her ordeal with strength and determination.

The survivor with the preoccupied attachment organization deviated from the remaining insecurely attached participants as she refused to identify as either victim or survivor of rape, stressing that each day brings about different associations. Along with her behavioral projections and quality of life post-trauma, this reflects a complex relationship with her trauma. Where it seems, she is ambivalent and conflicted about her identity in the aftermath of her rape. As it was confirmed through interpretation, she struggles with unresolved emotions or a possible sense of disconnection from her experiences.

The remaining insecurely attached participants all classified themselves as victims of sexual assault. This illustrates that their internal working models and scripts formed in early childhood remain instrumental in how they perceive themselves. Through a lens of vulnerability, worthlessness, powerlessness, and fear. It becomes clear how these perceptions align with an insecure base. These perspectives reveal their internalization of the trauma and its consequences for their sense of self and agency. What it suggests is a need for support and assurance to categorize themselves amongst survivors of rape. Overall, these diverse responses highlight the complexity of the victim-survivor debate and the effects of attachment quality on an individual's life.

5.5. Future Directions

Future research on this topic may benefit from a longitudinal investigation. Although time constraints eliminated this possibility, the varying recovery times between the participants may have limited or influenced responses. A longitudinal investigation could provide insights into the long-term effects of trauma on attachment relations. It may also reveal shifts or stability in these attachments bond in following trauma.

The interplay between maternal and paternal relationships and their influence on attachment bonds is a worthwhile investigation. Exploring how relationship troubles hinder a mother's

ability to be emotionally attentive during her own trauma could unveil how this exacerbates insecure attachment styles. This could also inform tailored therapeutic interventions where mental health professionals could integrate attachment-based approaches into therapeutic interventions. This attachment-focused therapy may be tailored to repair the consequences of insecure attachment bonds which the research confirmed is particularly impactful for this group.

5.5. Limitations

This research was limited by the narrow sample diversity, limiting generalizability, particularly the contrast between secure and insecure styles. Because of heterogeneity of attachment culture within the sample, the results and discussion are more of a case study nature, which allow for inferences for particular subjects. Generalizability of outcomes would need to be explored in future, comparable studies, broadening the evidence base. Gathering these insights from a female sample limits the generalizability of the findings and neglects to voice male survivors of rape. Furthermore, factors such as culture and socioeconomic status, which are influencing factors in a South African population may have added richness to the study findings and ensured broader representation.

This focus on cultural differences also raises questions about the validity of attachment classifications and their associated frameworks in this South African context. Uncovered discrepancies and overlaps in attachment cultures might suggest that these behaviors do not align with Western ideas of availability and recovery. It is proposed that Main & Goldwyn's adulthood attachment styles do not fully grasp the complexity of attachment dynamics in this particular context. Relying on distinct categories to classify attachment may have resulted in overgeneralization and failed to capture the fluidity of attachment cultures.

Lastly, the approach to classifying attachment cultures was guided by a comprehensive understanding of the attachment theory. Although the Adult Attachment Interview questions were modified, the preference for formal training in this instrument is acknowledged.

5.6. Conclusion

This study has provided remarkable insight into the complex interplay between attachment cultures and women's lived experiences and parental support, following sexual assault. Using thematic analysis on individual narratives, the study magnified the diverse ways in which mental representations of attachment bonds impact coping mechanisms, resilience and quality

of life in the aftermath of trauma. The distinct themes presented across individual attachment culture support the need for tailored interventions that address the unique needs of survivors based on their attachment dynamics. Moving forward, these insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of attachment culture in the recovery process and magnifies the need to develop more effective familial support strategies for survivors of sexual assault. By acknowledging the nuanced effects of attachment cultures, practitioners and advocates can move towards cultivating environments that promote healing, empowerment and resilience.

In concluding this investigation, I as the researcher acknowledge my positionality and how it may have influenced various aspects of the research process. My childhood and adulthood experiences with sexual assault have prompted greater introspection, where biases from my own experiences had allowed me to critically reflect about whether this is influencing my interpretation and interaction with the participants. This however enhanced my empathy and sensitivity when engaging with participants, my heightened sensitivity to this topic influenced the way I approached the questions. The survivors were noticeably comforted when I disclosed that this investigation was driven my personal experience and investment in the topic. Importantly, my experiences have sensitized me to the ethical considerations around this vulnerable population.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Introduction and Background:

- Are you comfortable discussing your experiences related to the sexual assault and your relationships with your parents?
- Can you provide some information on your early family environment. Where did you live?
- Who did you grow up with?

Attachment Culture and Early Relationships:

- How would you describe your relationship with your parents during your early years? Were they responsive, consistent, or emotionally available?
- Can you describe two childhood memories that stand out for you when you think of your mother?
- Can you give me two words that describes how you feel when you think of these memories?
- Can you describe two childhood memories that stand out for you when you think of your father?
- Can you give me two words that describe how you feel when you think of these memories?

Attachment Culture Assessment:

- If you were upset as a child, what would you do?

- Do you remember a time you were separated from your parent in your childhood? How did it make you feel?
- Can you describe a time you felt reassured or validated by your parent?
- Was there a time you felt rejected as a child by your parent?
- How were emotions in general managed or dealt with in your family?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and feelings with your parents? Why or why not?
- How do you think your childhood relationship with your parents has influenced who you are today?

Impact of Attachment on Coping:

- How did you initially react or cope with the assault?
- Do you believe how you were raised and what you were taught played a role in how you coped?

Parents' Response to the Rape:

- Did you find it challenging or encouraging to seek support from your parents, given your relationship?
- How did they react when you told them about your assault?
- Did you expect them to react this way?
- Were their responses supportive or unsupportive, and how did these reactions make you feel?
- If you could suggest three ways in which your caregiver could have helped you better, or three things they have done well, what would that be?
- Do you feel as if your relationship changed following the assault? If yes, why?
- Do you feel as if your parents have changed following the assault?

- Is there anything you wish you could share with them about how you felt about their support or lack of support?

Coping Strategies:

- How have you coped emotionally after the incident?
- When you think about your relationship with your parents, do you think it has had an impact on how you've coped?

Current Relationships and Support Systems:

- Are there individuals or support systems in your life that have been particularly helpful in your healing process?
- How have your relationships with friends, partners, or therapists affected your recovery?

Seeking Professional Help:

- Have you turned to professional help or counselling to help you manage your feelings about the assault?
- How has therapy or counselling influenced your understanding of your relationship with your parent and its impact on your experiences?

Resilience and Healing:

- What steps have you taken toward healing and recovery from the sexual assault?
- Are there any positive changes or growth you've experienced as a result of your experiences and your relationships?
- Do you view yourself as a victim or a survivor of the incident? Why?

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APPENDIX B

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Madam

My name is Nikita Govender. I am a student enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand completing my qualification of Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research. Under the supervision of Dr Yvette Esprey, I am conducting a study entitled: "Life after Rape: Survivors' Experiences of Parenting Responses through an Attachment Lens."

The purpose of my study is to gather information on rape survivors' experiences with their caregiver following incidence of sexual assault. I wish to understand the type of attachment you formed with your parents in childhood and how this impacts your experiences with them following the assault. By realising how you view your parents support or response to the incident, we may promote the importance of childhood bonds and how they are important for overcoming trauma.

This document invites you to share your experiences in a face-to-face interview with myself, that will take a maximum of 60 minutes to complete. The interview will take place in Umthombo building at the University of the Witwatersrand. The room number will be confirmed a day before the date is scheduled.

During the interview I will need to ask personal questions about your childhood memories with your caregiver(s). Thereafter, I will enquire about your relationship with your caregiver(s) following your incident of sexual assault. This is to understand how you have experienced their response or support during this time, whether this was a positive or negative experience for you.

The interview will be kept confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of this study, I will not include your name or anything that can be used to identify you. With your

permission, other researchers may use the data collected from the interview, but your name and identifiable features will not be shared.

If you decide to participate in the study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time you wish. You do not have to answer any question(s) you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study.

You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. Some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time with your consent. If you feel more stressed or emotionally distressed hours/days following the interview, four counselling sessions are available to you free of charge. The name of the counsellor is Trevelene Sewnundan and the contact details for the counselling services are 078 367 5040 or info@cultiv8coaching.co.za. Should long-term therapy be required following these four counselling sessions, the TEARS Foundation can be contacted on 010 590 5920.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Nikita

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APPENDIX C

Consent Sheet

Life After Rape: Survivors Experiences of Parenting Responses through an Attachment Lens.

Nikita Govender

I, _____ agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about. **YES ☐ NO ☐**

I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study **YES ☐ NO ☐**

I agree that the interview will be audio recorded **YES ☐ NO ☐**

I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter. **YES ☐ NO☐**

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter) **YES ☐ NO ☐**

I understand that my contributions will be stored for future secondary analysis subject to their ethical clearance. **YES ☐ NO ☐**

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. **YES ☐ NO ☐**

Participant:

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Researcher:

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____