

Fear of Intimacy in Romantic Relationships During Emerging  
Adulthood: The Influence of Past Parenting and Separation-  
Individuation

Submitted by

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## **Abstract**

Intimacy is a central component of romantic relationships with the development of a capacity for intimacy regarded as being one of the milestones of adulthood. Fear of intimacy has been defined as “the inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued” (Descutner & Thelen, 1991, p. 219). Although a number of studies have focused on fear of intimacy, there has been limited research on the factors that might influence fear of intimacy. Past experience in the parent-child relationship has been found to influence both the capacity to form romantic relationships and separation-individuation. Establishing a romantic relationship and leaving the parental home have both been identified as important markers of adulthood, however current Australian statistics indicate that, compared to previous decades, in the period of emerging adulthood (18-25 years) fewer individuals are involved in a romantic relationship and a higher percentage of young people are living at home with their parents. The relationship between these social trends and past parenting, separation-individuation and fear of intimacy has not been explored.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the influence of past parenting (perceived maternal care and overprotection), and separation-individuation on young adults’ fear of intimacy regarding heterosexual partner relationships. A further aim was to examine whether there were differences in separation-individuation according to living situation and partnership status.

A sample of 134 unmarried heterosexual young adults (21-25 years) from the general population of metropolitan Melbourne participated in this study. They were recruited via

convenience and snowball sampling. All participants completed questionnaires regarding past maternal care, past maternal overprotection, separation-individuation and fear of intimacy.

A model was proposed to explain fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships and was tested using hierarchical multiple regression to determine the relative contribution of perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation. Results indicated that separation-individuation explained the most unique variance in fear of intimacy. The effect of perceived maternal care on fear of intimacy was partially mediated by separation-individuation. Hypotheses related to associations between fear of intimacy and perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy and separation-individuation were supported. As hypothesized participants who had left the parental home were more likely to be in a committed romantic relationship but hypotheses related to differences in separation-individuation according to living situation and relationship status were not supported. The results of the study were discussed in light of past research and limitations were identified. Suggestions for future research based on the current results were also provided.

## **Student Declaration**

“I, Marianne Elizabeth Lloyd, declare that the Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) thesis entitled Fear of Intimacy in Romantic Relationships: The Influence of Past Parenting and Separation-Individuation is no more than 40,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

Signature:

Date:

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# **1 Literature Review**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Intimacy is an important part of romantic relationships (Bagarozzi, 1997) and has been linked to the physical and psychological well-being of an individual (Hook, Gerstein, Detterich & Gridley, 2003). Fear of intimacy has been defined as “the inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued” (Descutner & Thelen, 1991, p. 219) and is believed to involve the “psychological processes within one individual” (Sherman & Thelen, 1996, p. 508). Although research has explored and emphasised the importance of fear of intimacy, there has been less attention on examining the factors and /or processes related to fear of intimacy in romantic relationships..

The attainment of a capacity for intimacy is regarded as an important developmental task. Erikson (1968) proposed a lifespan developmental theory, which includes a stage known as Identity vs Isolation (occurring during adolescence and young adulthood) which involves an individual establishing a sense of identity which prepares them for intimacy and the development of a romantic relationship. Similarly, Alperin (2006) in discussing the capacity for intimacy has suggested that genuine intimacy is “contingent on successful separation-individuation—formation of secure boundaries between self and object and acquisition of a separate self and identity” (p. 561). Children start life being dependent on their parents and independence is achieved over time through separation-individuation which is considered to be a central developmental task of adolescence and young adulthood (Blos, 1967; Scharf & Mayseless, 2007). Parents play a crucial part in facilitating or inhibiting separation-

individuation (Lopez & Gover, 1993) and Stierlin (1974) has pointed out that overly close relationships with parents during adolescence may inhibit a young person's attempts to establish partner relationships.

Research has found that the capacity to form partner relationships is influenced by past experiences, especially those that occur within the parent-child relationship (Boles, 1999; Collins & Read, 1990; Gittleman, Klein, Smider & Essex, 1998), with social learning theory and attachment theory providing theoretical frameworks for this link. Social learning theory recognizes the importance of modeling from the family (Stocker & Richmond, 2007) whereas attachment theory emphasizes the idea that internal working models developed in childhood influence later attachments (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Importantly a link has been identified between a parent's attachment representations and their child's own security in their relationship with them (R.A Thompson, 1999; van Ijzendoorn, 1995). Research has also looked at the influence of early child-parent experiences on romantic relationships with Hazan and Shaver (1987) arguing that romantic love for a partner is also an attachment process which is influenced by an individual's past history of attachments earlier in life.

Both the establishment of romantic relationships and leaving the parental home have been recognized as markers of adult status. Research has identified these two crucial tasks as being an important focus for the period of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2001; Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll & Badger, 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005).

The period of emerging adulthood (18-25 years) (Arnett, 2000) is associated with young people showing more autonomous functioning and less dependence on parents. During this period young people pursue more individual directions in their

life related to careers, romantic partners and living independently. There has been a growing focus on this period of development, including the recent publication of a book focusing on romantic relationships during the period of emerging adulthood (Fincham & Cui, 2010). Two major trends evident in current Australian statistics for this age group are that more emerging adults are living at home with their parents while a decreasing number of them are involved in romantic relationships (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2005, 2009).

## **1.2 The Importance of Emerging Adulthood for Young Adults**

The late teens and the early twenties is a time of great change and the ages between 18 and 25 years have been considered as a period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). However this age range may vary, with a lack of uniformity across studies on the exact age range for emerging adults. During this period there is a movement towards less dependence on parents to more autonomous functioning as individuals develop their own views on the world and explore varying life directions related to careers and relationships (Arnett, 2000; Cui, Wickrama, Lorenz & Conger, 2010). Although the dependency of childhood and adolescence is assumed to have been left behind, the full responsibilities of adulthood have not yet been undertaken (P. Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark & Gordon, 2003; Cui et al., 2010). This period involves exploration on the part of the emerging adult prior to settling into these adult roles and responsibilities (Cui et al., 2010; Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth & Tellegen, 2004). In particular, current social norms tend to dictate that emerging adults focus on their education first, commence their career and then be concerned with potential familial responsibilities (Cui et al., 2010). The period of emerging adulthood has largely been investigated within the United States, but the phenomenon of an extended period between adolescence and adulthood has also been identified in a

number of European countries (Spain, Italy, Finland, Germany and the Czech republic) with some slight variations across these countries (Buhl & Lanz, 2007), as well as in Sweden (Frisen & Wangqvist, 2011), and Canada and Australia (Fussell, Gauthier & Evans, 2007). Fussell et al. (2007) note that when comparing young people in the United States, Australia, and Canada, the transition to adulthood is shorter for those from the United States even though the movement towards this stage is extended for all three countries. The authors attributed this to more focus on traditional timing for education, early employment and earlier entry into marriage, which is associated with many of the American traditional values (Fussell et al., 2007). In the past decade studies have been conducted with young adults to investigate the important milestones of emerging adulthood.

Arnett (2001) investigated conceptions of the transition to adulthood in 171 American adolescents (13-19 years), 179 emerging adults (20-29 years) and 165 young to midlife adults (30-55 years). Across all three groups, the category of individualism was considered to be the most important marker of adulthood. The study measured individualism with items such as “decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences” (endorsed by 80% of all participants, 83% of emerging adults) and “no longer living in parents’ household” (endorsed by 57% of all participants, 61% of emerging adults). The item “committed to a long term love relationship” as a signifier of reaching adulthood was only endorsed by 13% of all participants and 10% of emerging adults. When asked whether they had felt they had reached adulthood, only 46% of emerging adults responded with a “yes” while the most common response to this question was “in some respects yes and in some respects no” (50% of emerging adults). The author

argued that the characteristics defining adulthood are somewhat intangible, with individuals using different criteria.

In a later study Nelson and Barry (2005) conducted a survey with 232 American college students (19 – 25 years) who were asked to rate the importance of 43 adulthood criteria and to endorse adulthood criteria they felt they had achieved. A small minority of participants (6%) indicated that they had not reached adulthood, 25% felt they had reached adulthood (perceived adults) with the remaining 69% responding that in some aspects they had reached adulthood (perceived emerging adults). Results indicated no difference on the importance ratings of the various adulthood criteria between the latter two groups (perceived adults and perceived emerging adults). Regarding achieved adulthood criteria, compared to participants categorized as perceived emerging adults those that were classed as perceived adults had achieved more of the adulthood criteria in the areas of independence (example of items, “no longer living in parent’s household”, “not deeply tied to parents emotionally”), interdependence (“committed to long-term love relationships”, “make life long commitments to others”), role transitions (“finish education”, “purchase a house”), norm compliance (“avoid becoming drunk”, “avoid illegal drugs”) and family capacities (“become capable of running a household”, “become capable of supporting a family financially”).

The same authors recently published a similar study of American college students aged 18-26 years (Barry et al., 2009) that investigated the achievement of adulthood criteria. As in the previous study, the items for these adulthood criteria were organized according to the categories listed above. Sex differences were revealed with women more likely than men to report having achieved the adulthood criteria of interdependence and norm compliance, but less likely to have achieved role

transitions. Interestingly, those emerging adults who had achieved the adulthood criteria of interdependence and chronological transitions achieved higher levels on the nine subscales measuring romantic relationship qualities (as measured by the Social Provisions Questionnaire). Those that had achieved fewer of the criteria in the category of independence had lower levels of alliance, intimacy, aid and emotional support in regard to their romantic relationships. These results demonstrate the important link between the capacity for intimacy through interdependence and the quality of the romantic relationship and highlight the association between the achievement of independence, including moving out of home, and the positive attributes of romantic relationships.

Emerging adulthood is fluid and it appears that many emerging adults are ambivalent with regard to their adulthood status. However, the studies described above provide support for criteria such as leaving home, being in a committed relationship and becoming less tied to parents being regarded as important factors associated with achieving adulthood. As noted by P. Cohen et al. (2003), it is evident that societal changes have delayed the processes of becoming an individual and gaining autonomy. In particular, greater involvement in higher education and individuals becoming financially independent later in life, seem to have affected two of the important milestones of this period, the development of partner relationships and leaving the parental home.

### **1.3 Trends in Leaving Home Patterns**

One of the first moves towards independence for an individual is moving out of the family home (Seifge-Krenke, 2010) but in many Western countries the living situation of young people has changed over the past two decades (Buhl & Lanz, 2007; Cherlin, Scabini & Rossi, 1997; Fussell et al., 2007). Such changes were recognized

more than a decade ago. Cordon (1997) noted that in central and western European countries (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) in 1994 61% of males and 41% of females aged between 20 and 24 years were living in the parental home compared to 60% and 38% respectively in 1986. The change was much greater in Southern European countries (Greece, Spain, and Italy) with 91% of males and 81% of females aged 20 to 24 years living in the parental home in 1994 (compared to 87% of males and 71% of females in 1986) (Cordon, 1997). Over the same period, 1986 to 1994, statistics from the United States (Goldscheider, 1997) for young people aged 20 to 24 years indicated that a smaller proportion of young people were living at home than in the European countries and the increase across the years had been relatively small, from 50% to 52% for males and 36% to 37% for females. A later study (Kins & Beyers, 2010) reported an increase in 20 to 24 year old young adults living at home in Belgium from 1990 to 2007, with 64% of women and 78% of males living with their parents in 2007 compared to 55% and 74% respectively in 1990.

According to figures from the ABS there is an increasing trend for members of the population in their 20's (20-29 years old) to live in the parental home. In 2001, approximately 30% of people in this age group lived with their parents in contrast to 1976 when approximately 21% were living in the parental home (ABS, 2005). More recently in 2006-2007, of young adults aged 18-24 years ( $n = 1,972$ ), 49% of males and 45% of females had never left their parental home ( $n = 928$ ) (ABS, 2008). The reasons cited for continuing to live at home were largely financial reasons (41%), followed by the convenience/enjoyment of living at home (36%). Some young people could not provide a specific reason (17%) and there was a small proportion of the sample who had never left home but were living separately from parents, including those who had parents who had moved or passed away (6%). Interestingly, of those



18-24 year olds that had left the parental home ( $n = 1,045$ ), the most common reason given for leaving was to gain independence (28%), followed by study (23%) and leaving to live with a partner or get married (14%).

There is also recent information from the Australian Temperament Project on the living situation of young Australians (Smart & Vassallo, 2008). The original cohort for this study comprised 2443 families and 24 years later approximately two thirds of this population participated in the latest data collection (no specific number of participants was provided). Published results from this data wave on the living arrangements of participants at the age of 23-24 years indicated that 38% were living with their parents, 28% were living with a partner/spouse, 22% were sharing a house or flat, 8% were living alone and 4% were in some other living arrangement (Smart & Vassallo, 2008). Other reported details of this cohort included employment status with 84% in paid employment, 21% studying, 8% looking for work, and 7% self-employed; most participants (almost 70%) had obtained a post secondary qualification (40% University degree, 3% graduate diploma, 1% postgraduate degree, 24% TAFE and 1% other post secondary qualification). However, based on these reported figures it appears that some participants may have endorsed more than one category of employment status, for example, studying as well as being in paid employment.

The demonstrated trend for young people to remain living in the parental home is notable given that leaving home has been regarded as an important developmental milestone that has been considered as a signifier of the movement into adulthood (Dubas & Peterson, 1996; Kins & Beyers, 2010). Clearly for some young people the search for individuality and self-fulfillment involves leaving the parental

home (Billari & Liefbroer, 2007), but there has been limited research into psychological factors that are influential in this important step.

In a longitudinal study conducted in Germany, Seiffge-Krenke (2006, 2010) examined young people's patterns of leaving home. Data was collected from young people ( $n = 93$ ) when they were in adolescence (14-17 years) and again when they reached young adulthood (21-25 years). The later publication (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010) reported on a number of individual and family factors that were predictors of the timing of leaving home for the 93 young German adults. Results indicated that in general at ages 20 to 21 just over half of the participants had left the parental home. The mean age for leaving home for the sample was 20 years for females and 21 years for males. By the time participants were 25, 81% had left the parental home. Those still living at home (age range 20-25 years) accounted for 17% of the sample. Approximately 10% had returned home during this time period (20 to 25 years).

An exploration of the perspectives of those participants who had left the parental home (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010) ( $n = 68$ , including those that had left home "on time" – based on the mean leaving home age of this sample, and those who had left late) indicated that 80% felt they had left home at the right time, whereas a small minority felt they had left either too early (9%) or too late (11%). At age 25, almost a third ( $n = 24$ ) of these 68 participants were living with a partner and this living arrangement had commenced at a mean age of 21 years. While the majority of this group of 24 participants felt that the timing of cohabitation was right for them (65%) there were some who experienced ambivalence as they reported that they had felt that their cohabitation had started too early (35%) (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010).

In an Australian study White (2002) conducted structured interviews with 83 young people (18-25 years) from Melbourne about their experiences of living at

home. In general, the themes that arose were that young people often did not have a voice at home and home was regarded as a place of restricted autonomy where the view of parents would often prevail. Often the desire to move out of the parental home was overshadowed by financial difficulties and in particular, those young people who were studying were likely to be dependent on their parents even if they had some income. Although young people acknowledged the benefits of being cared for and nurtured by their parents, they also indicated a need for the recognition of their adult status and a desire for independence.

The study by Vassallo, Smart and Price-Robertson (2009) based on the previously described Australian Temperament Project highlights how parents may inadvertently encourage the dependence of young adult offspring who still live at home. As part of this project the authors examined the perceived roles played by the parents ( $N = 968$ ) of young adults (23-24 years) who were still living at home and those who had moved away. Of the parents who responded to the questionnaire, 89% were mothers. Parents of those young adults still living at home were more likely to expect their role to involve providing material aid (e.g., a car) as well as guidance and support. The amount of financial assistance provided by these parents was also higher. The authors argued that young adults still living at home may be more likely to have study obligations and financial difficulties which may extend the period of their dependence on their parents. Parents may therefore find themselves in a role where they feel it is necessary to provide continued emotional and material support to their young adult children and consequently the move to a more equal relationship is slower and the process of separating and becoming autonomous is delayed for these individuals.

#### **1.4 Trends in Partner Relationships**

The progression from adolescence to adulthood involves increased independence from family, but although relationships with parents are maintained, new relationships are formed, including romantic relationships (Dalton, Frick-Hornbury & Kitzman, 2006). Establishment of romantic relationships usually begins in adolescence and progress over time (Young, Furman & Laursen, 2010). These relationships involve factors such as physical intimacy, sexual attraction, thoughts of love and the potential of marriage (R.A. Baron & Byrne, 2003). In particular, emerging adults often have to consider cohabitation and marriage as major life decisions (Young et al. 2010). Within these romantic relationships, particularly during emerging adulthood, there is the quest to build a relationship that is stable, satisfying and where closeness between the partners is achieved (Conger, Cui & Lorenz, 2010).

Achieving love and romance can improve life and can provide a long-term positive connection with another (Maner & Miller, 2010). The benefits of being in adult romantic relationships that have been reported have included emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Collins, Cooper, Albino & Allard, 2002; Mastekassa, 2006). Zimmer-Gembeck and Gallaty (2006) found that at age 20, those females who spent more time with their romantic partners (romantic affiliation) reported higher psychological well-being and lower negative affect and loneliness. At age 23, romantic support from a partner was linked to a higher psychological well-being (Zimmer-Gembeck & Gallaty, 2006). Individuals who are married or living with a partner have access to a greater level of emotional and practical support and report less psychological distress than those individuals who do not have such relationships (Mastekassa, 2006). There has however been considerable change in the relationship

patterns of young adults. As highlighted by Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2010), within western culture the search for a partner has become quite prolonged, with marriage often being delayed until the late 20s and early 30s.

A study by Carroll et al. (2009) investigated the criteria used by a sample of American emerging adults (mean age 20 years,  $N = 788$ ) to judge readiness for marriage. While primarily participants endorsed interpersonal competencies such as the capacity to make lifelong commitments and to care for others, there was also an acknowledgement by some participants of the need for compliance with adult social norms and to have achieved recognized markers of adulthood including completion of education and financial independence. Almost two thirds of participants indicated that they were not ready to get married; one third felt they were partially ready and less than 10% felt ready for marriage.

The results from this study together with the finding from previous studies that emerging adults place less importance on marriage as a criterion for adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Nelson & Barry, 2005) suggest that different criteria are now being used for becoming an adult and marriage readiness, perhaps providing some explanation for the increasing average age for marriage.

In Australia the proportion of adults of any age living with a partner has reduced over the last 20 years from 65% in 1986 to 61% in 2006 (ABS, 2009). It has been suggested that partnering at a later age, increased financial and social independence of women and easier access to divorce are all factors that have contributed to this reduction (ABS, 2009). The rates of registered marriages have also fallen for adults of any age (62% in 1986 to 52% in 2006) and there has been a rise in the number of defacto relationships (4% to 9%).

Data specific to young adults shows that in the period from 1971-2001, the proportion of Australians aged from 25-29 years that was not married increased from 26 per cent to 69 per cent for males and from 12 per cent to 54 per cent for females (Qu & Soriano, 2004). Based on interviews conducted in 2003 by the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), a large proportion of young people (85% of men and 73% of women) aged 18-24 years of age had never been married and were not cohabiting (Headey, Warren & Harding, 2006). According to recent figures from the ABS (ABS, 2009), from 1986 to 2006 there was a reduction in the proportion (25% to 16%) of young adults (aged 18-24 years) that were in a couple relationship (defined as those who either live with their partner in a defacto relationship or in a registered marriage). Of young adults in this age group, defacto relationships were more common (11% of young adults) than marriage (5% of young adults) in the year 2006 compared to 1986 when marriage (18% of young adults) was more predominant than defacto relationships (7% of young adults). These figures show that in the last two decades while marriage rates have declined the proportion of young adults in defacto couple relationships has increased but overall there has been a decline in the proportion of young adults in cohabiting couple relationships (in a defacto relationship or in a registered marriage) from 25% to 16%.

Recent published longitudinal data from the previously cited Australian Temperament Project (Smart & Vassallo, 2008) have provided more details regarding the relationship status of young adults. Although an exact number of participants was not specified among this cohort of 23-24 year olds, 31% were not seeing/dating anyone, 28% were in a committed relationship but not cohabitating, 26% were cohabiting, 7% were married, 7 % were dating casually and 1% reported their relationship status as “other”.

It has been suggested that broader social and economic changes might be influencing the changing patterns of developing relationships (Qu & Soriano, 2004). With a decline in the number of well paid low-skilled jobs there has been increased pressure on young people to obtain tertiary education and concentrate on their careers. Roisman et al. (2004) have noted that the focus of adulthood being more on education and later marriages may explain the move in importance of things such as work and romantic relationships to later in adulthood.

Potential difficulties faced by young people in developing well-functioning partner relationships (Collins et al., 2002) have been recognized in local research. A large survey ( $N = 580$ ) of young adults (20-29 year olds) conducted in 1998 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies assessed participants' views on having a partner. Three quarters of respondents who were not in a relationship indicated that they found it difficult to find a partner (Qu & Soriano, 2004). Explanations provided by participants included being "choosy" (36% of men, 33% of women), lacking trust (11% of men, 16% of women), time restrictions (13% of men, 7% of women), a lack of suitable meeting places (16% of men, 13% of women), location constraints (4% of men, 3% of women), changing social attitudes (11% of men, 11% of women) and being a single parent (0% of men, 7% of women). A number of respondents indicated that they did not know why they found it difficult to find a suitable partner (10% of men, 12% of women) (Qu & Soriano, 2004).

As previously described for many young people the pursuit of higher education has led to an extended period of dependence on parents that often involves continuing to live in the parental home during early adulthood. While still living at home young people are not fully responsible for themselves and in comparison to their counterparts who are living out of the parental home, may be less able to achieve

individualistic qualities that help define adulthood (Kins & Beyers, 2010). The practical and financial benefits of living at home arrangements may have masked any developmental implications such as the effect on the development of partner relationships. In particular it is possible that living at home during early adulthood may restrict the development of autonomy and therefore delay development of partner relationships.

### **1.5 Leaving Home and the Development of Partner Relationships**

In her extensive research Seiffge-Krenke has investigated the links between leaving home and partner relationships in the period of emerging adulthood. Reports from the previously described longitudinal study of German young people leaving home (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006, 2010) demonstrated that across all the time points (ages 21-25) participants who had left home “on time” (based on the mean of the sample,  $M = 20.5$  years for females,  $M = 21$  years for males) reported a higher rate of established partnerships than those who still lived at home. The proportion of young adults that had a romantic partner and were still living at home increased from ages 21 to 25 years, but at age 25 the percentage was still lower than the percentage for those who had a relationship and had left home on time (45% vs 77%) (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Romantic activity during adolescence of those who left home on time was higher than those who left home late and those still living at home (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006, 2010), suggesting that romantic activity may act as a catalyst for leaving home in young adulthood.

In terms of support received, those young adults who left home on time had received decreasing levels of parental support throughout their adolescence, whereas those that were still living at home had received a constant level of support from their parents in adolescence. The support from friends increased over time for participants



although this did not have an impact on the participants' patterns of leaving home. It was argued that the shift of support from parents to friends and romantic partners is a normal transition and may facilitate the development of an individual's autonomy (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). In summary, those 25 years old who were still living at home had experienced higher parental support in adolescence and were less likely to be romantically involved with a partner.

Kins and Beyers (2010) conducted a longitudinal study with 224 emerging adults (mean age = 22 years, 10 months at the commencement of the study) measuring achievement of adulthood criteria and well being for individuals living at home and those living independently. In the sample, 58% were living with their parents and 42% were living independently (that is, not living at home). Based on additional information collected, three categories of living situation, "independent", "co-residing with parents" and "semi-independent" which included those who returned every weekend to stay over at their parents were established at time one. Measures were administered at time one and time two (over a one year period) with living situation being categorized according to whether the individuals had remained stable ("stable with parents", "stable independent", "stable semi-independent"), had progressed to more independent living, or had regressed to less independent living. Regarding the criteria of being committed to a long-term love relationship, those participants who remained in the "stable with parents" category were less committed to this criterion compared to the other groups. Those that were in the "stable independent group" were better able to establish an equal relationship with their parents than the "stable with parents" group. Well-being was found to be correlated with the achievement of criteria such as independence (e.g., "establishing an equal relationship with parents") and interdependence (e.g., "committed to a long-term love

relationship”). It was concluded that those young adults living independently were more successful in achieving adulthood status, whereas those living with their parents achieved less of the criteria for adulthood status suggesting a delay in achieving certain criteria due to co-residing with parents. Those who moved to more independent living overtime made the most gains on a number of aspects, including relationship status. This study provides evidence for a link between living situation and the achievement of adulthood criteria such as a committed relationship.

A study conducted in Finland (Kajantie et al., 2008) involving participants (mean age 22.3 years) who had been born with a very low birth weight (VLBW) but who had otherwise experienced normal development, also found support for the link between living at home and having a romantic partner. The authors found that compared to those in the control group ( $n = 162$ ) the participants with a history of very low birth weight ( $n = 188$ ) were not only less likely to have left their parental home, but were less likely to have commenced an intimate partner relationship. The authors discussed a number of possible reasons for their results including differences in personality and temperament, but given the potential vulnerability of the VLBW participants in childhood another explanation could be that they may have experienced overprotective parenting. This link between living at home and a lack of an intimate relationship may also be evident in “normal” young adults who still live at home and have had similar experiences of overprotective parenting.

### **1.6 Past Relationship with Parents**

There is considerable evidence that the capacity to form effective relationships in adulthood is affected by past events and experiences, particularly those occurring in the context of the parent-child relationship (Boles, 1999; Collins & Read, 1990; Gittleman et al., 1998). Past experiences in the parent-child relationship influence

beliefs about the self, emotions regarding the development of relationships and the individual's behaviour within relationships (Collins, 1996; Mazor & Tal, 1996). The theoretical frameworks of social learning and attachment theories provide some explanations for this link. Social learning theory states that early experiences within the family influence later functioning in relationships (including romantic relationships) through the process of modeling (Stocker & Richmond, 2007). For example, young adults tend to adopt behaviours that they have seen their parents demonstrate in their own romantic relationship and then apply these behaviours in the context of their own romantic relationship (Conger, Cui, Bryant & Elder, 2000).

Support for social learning theory was demonstrated in a study (Stocker & Richmond, 2007), which found that hostility in parental relationships was linked to later hostility in adolescent's romantic relationships. Furman and Shomaker's (2008) study with adolescents (14-16 years) found that their communication skills and off-task behaviour (task avoidance and problem solving), as measured during observations of them with romantic partners, were associated with communication skills and off-task behaviour with their mothers and friends. These studies show how experiences within the family may have a direct influence on adolescents' and young adults' behaviour in their later romantic relationships via a modeling process.

Using data from a prospective, longitudinal investigation initiated when participants were in 7<sup>th</sup> Grade, Conger et al. (2000) reported on the romantic relationships in early adulthood of 193 young adults (mean age 20.7 years) from the original cohort of 451 families. The study used structural equation analysis to test competing theories (including observational learning, sibling socialisation and parental socialisation) and results showed that only the parental socialisation hypothesis was supported. The authors noted that although an attachment perspective

was not specifically tested, the findings from the study were “not inconsistent with that approach in as much as the behaviors of parents toward the child were the best predictors of later development” (p. 233).

A further finding was that the association between the quality of young adult’s relationships with their romantic partners and the parenting they had received was mediated by the young adults’ competence in interactions with the romantic partner (Conger et al., 2000). In particular, results showed that adolescents who had experienced families that were nurturing and supportive were less hostile and more supportive in their relationship with their romantic partners in early adulthood (mean age 20.7 years). A later study by Donnellan, Larsen-Rife and Conger, (2005) found similar results, but extended the original findings to apply to young people aged 23 and 25 years of age. Although the above studies provide some support for social learning theory, the study by Conger et al. (2000) also alludes to the importance of an attachment perspective.

Bowlby’s (1969, 1973, 1980) seminal work on attachment introduced the concept of internal working models or internal representations that are derived from early relationships that then influence subsequent attachments that are made throughout life. According to Bowlby (1980), the earliest relationship between mother and infant forms the basis for an internal working model that is then used as a template for the security within relationships throughout childhood and later life. A number of early studies examined the continuity of attachment patterns from parents to children (Benoit & Parker, 1994; George & Solomon, 1996; Main, Kaplan & Cassidy, 1985; Slade, Aber, Belsky & Phelps, 1999) using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and the Strange Situation to measure attachment in adulthood and infancy respectively; there is now well established evidence of a link between

parents' attachment representations and the security of the relationship a child has with parents (R.A Thompson, 1999; van Ijzendoorn, 1995). In a meta-analysis van Ijzendoorn (1995) demonstrated that parenting (beginning in infancy with sensitive responding) is the mechanism through which the link between parent's attachment representations and the child's security occurs.

Other studies have provided support for such links by examining associations between current attachment style and retrospective reports of childhood experiences with parents. For example, an Australian study (Feeney & Noller, 1990) found that undergraduate students (aged 17-58 years) who reported early positive experiences of the family using Adjective Checklists (a measure of general personal adjustment) tended to be classified as secure in attachment style (trusting in relationships and high in self confidence) according to a self-report questionnaire. However, those participants classified as anxious-ambivalent (insecure attachment) indicated that they had lacked paternal support, desired commitment in relationships, and also expressed dependence. Those who had an avoidant attachment style (also insecure) reported having experienced separation from their mother in childhood and were mistrustful and distant.

Gittleman et al. (1998) conducted a study with pregnant women and their spouses/partners (530 women and 492 partners) who were part of a larger scale longitudinal study investigating work and parenting. The couples had their first assessment in their fifth month of pregnancy, and the fourth assessment one year after the birth of their child. Using a dimensional measure of parental behavior, the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI; Parker Tupling & Brown, 1979), the authors found that retrospective reports in pregnancy of higher parental care in childhood were associated with secure adult attachment styles. In contrast, reports of past parenting

characterized by high levels of maternal control or overprotectiveness were found to be related to preoccupied and fearful (insecure) attachment styles but only for males. A more recent study provided further support for parenting as the mechanism for intergenerational transmission of attachment by demonstrating that a mother's interactions with her infant were significantly related to the quality of the childhood relationship that she had experienced with her own mother as reported in interview (Mantymaa, et al., 2006).

Using an attachment theory perspective the above studies have demonstrated the continuity of working models of early parental relationships and consequently attachment in adult relationships, with the parenting received from early infancy identified as the mechanism through which the development of attachment style occurs. While the studies described have focused on the link to parent-child relationships in adulthood there is a growing body of research that has looked at how early experiences with parents influence adult romantic relationships.

### **1.7 Past Relationships with Parents and Romantic Relationships**

Hazan and Shaver (1987) argued that romantic love for a partner is also an attachment process and that the individual differences that occur in adult romantic attachment style depend on the history of past attachments made in early childhood. In an early study Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that current adult attachment style was related to past experiences with parents and to the mental models individuals had constructed of relationships. The individual's attachment style influenced their beliefs about romantic love, the trustworthiness and availability of romantic partners, and their own perceived love worthiness.

Collins and Read (1990) in three studies based on undergraduate samples examined adult attachment, internal working models and links with current

relationships for dating couples. They found that those undergraduate students who retrospectively viewed their parents as having been warm and responsive had positive views of self and others, while those reporting that they had experienced inconsistent or unresponsive relationships with their parents had an image of themselves and others that was negative. Furthermore, while perceptions of both parents influenced current attachment patterns, within dating couples the opposite sex parent had more influence on young people's expectations regarding romantic relationships. The authors concluded that their findings were consistent with Bowlby's views on continuity in attachment patterns across the life span.

More recently, Apostolidou (2006) investigated whether adult romantic attachment styles were related to early attachments with parents as measured by the PBI. Thirty five graduate students (24 females, 11 males) with a mean age of 28.8 years (ranging from 22 to 52 years) completed the PBI and the Experience in Close relationships questionnaire which assessed both attachment anxiety and avoidance. No mean scores were reported for the respective scales. It was found that males who reported experiences of an overprotective mother indicated more anxiety in their intimate relationships. The females were split into two groups (29 years of age or less and 25 years of age or less) with results indicating that for both groups the experience of a caring father was linked to more anxiety in adult relationships. This correlation was higher for the younger group. For participants who scored high on avoidance in romantic relationships, a perception of parenting by a controlling father was associated with avoidance in their adult relationships.

The author argued that males who have experienced an overprotective mother may have developed a negative and insecure attachment representation that then affects other relationships including romantic relationships. The link between a

caring father and anxiety in intimate relationships for females may be explained by the care and affection these women have received from their fathers, in that such females may project their representation of their attachment experience with their father into their romantic relationships. Women with this positive representation of their father may as a result have high expectations regarding their romantic relationship and may be preoccupied with difficulties in finding a partner who matches the attributes of their father. The association between paternal control and avoidance in romantic relationships may be explained by the individual's fear that they may experience this same control in their romantic relationship. Therefore as young adults they may become anxious when another individual wants to become more intimate, and struggle with trusting and depending on their partner due to a fear of this control.

The quality of romantic relationships has also been examined and been found to be related to an individual's retrospective reports of parenting. A study by Dalton et al. (2006) of undergraduate students ( $N = 75$ ) aged between 18-27 years found that those who provided more positive retrospective reports of the past parenting they had received (as measured by the Descriptions of Parental Caregiving Style questionnaire) also had better quality current relationships with parents and with a romantic partner. Importantly those young adults who reported positive perceptions of the parenting they had received expressed greater confidence in their capacity to form secure and close relationships (Dalton et al., 2006). As noted by R.A Thompson (1999), a secure attachment in infancy can allow an individual greater success in entering into intimate relationships later in life.

Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman and Klessinger (2001) investigated factors in adolescence (including relationship with parents) that may influence young adult



romantic relationships (including the quality of those romantic relationships).

Participants were a subsample of individuals who were participating in a larger longitudinal study. Seventy-two participants completed three surveys annually during adolescence and then after three years (mean age 20.1 years). Sixty four participants reported having a romantic partner at 20 years of age and those participants were the focus of the analysis. Two of the study findings are relevant to this thesis. Firstly, the quality of the relationship with parents in adolescence (ages 14, 15 and 17) was associated with the quality of romantic relationships at age 20. Secondly, at age 20 higher levels of “reliable alliance” (defined as an indicator of closeness and trust as measured by the Network Relationships Inventory (NRI)) with parents was found for those young adults without a romantic partner in adolescence compared to those who had reported having a romantic partner at 15 years of age and at 17 years of age. So although a lack of initiation of relationships in adolescence seems to have been linked to a closer relationship with parents at age 20, the effects were not found to be detrimental to the quality of their romantic relationship at age 20.

In a recent study Madsen and Collins (2011) used a prospective longitudinal design to investigate links between dating experiences in adolescence and later romantic relationships (at age 20 to 21 years) with participants drawn from a larger longitudinal study, the Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Resilience. Fewer dating partners in adolescence and dating relationships of better quality in adolescence (16 years) were linked to better relationship processes in young adulthood. The authors noted that while a composite measure of early experiences with parents did not make a significant contribution in the final model, after accounting for the influence of adolescent dating experiences, parent-child processes

in adolescence (as measured by videotaped interactions with a primary caregiver at 13 years of age) also contributed to the quality of later romantic relationships.

Using data from a 26 year longitudinal study, the Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Resilience, Roisman and colleagues have published a number of papers that have examined the associations between attachment to parents (according to observations of parent and child in infancy or early adolescence and/or retrospective reports through the AAI conducted in late adolescence) and romantic relationships (including the quality of relationships based on observed interactions with partners). A study published in 2001 (Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe & Collins, 2001) reported on data from a subset ( $n = 61$ ) of young adults from the original cohort ( $N = 170$ ) of the longitudinal study. All participants within this subset had data that included the observation of child-caregiver interactions at 13 years of age, the AAI at 19 years of age and observed interactions with their romantic partners at ages 20-21 years. Results showed that the quality of observed parent-child interactions at age 13 was associated with interactions with romantic partners eight and nine years later. Participants' working models as measured by the AAI were found to mediate the relationship between parent-child behaviours at age 13 and romantic interactions as a young adult, suggesting that these earlier experiences are internalized and brought forward into adult relationships.

A later paper (Roisman, Collins, Sroufe & Egeland, 2005), using data from the same 26 year longitudinal study cited above, was based on a subset of participants ( $n = 73$ , aged 20-21 years) who were romantically involved. To be included in this subset participants had to have completed at least one of the following attachment related measures, the AAI (at 19 years) and the Strange Situation (behavioural observations of the quality of their relationship to their caregivers in infancy at 12

and/or 18 months of age). In addition for this study, participants completed the Current Relationship Interview (CRI), which assesses a person's current state of mind (secure, dismissing or preoccupied) concerning experiences with their romantic partner. To obtain these categories (secure, dismissing or preoccupied) the focus of coding of the CRI was "on the coherence with which an individual talks about his or her experiences with a romantic partner, not merely the emotional valence of the events he or she describes" (Roisman, et al., 2005, p. 106). Completion of a relationships perception battery consisting of eight self report scales which assessed participants' views of their romantic relationships and current observations of videotaped interactions of the young adult and romantic partner were used to assess the quality of the romantic relationship. Participants classified as secure on the CRI had higher romantic relationship quality as rated from the couple observations. The authors highlighted the main conclusions that could be derived from this study. Secure attachment in infancy preceded not only a higher quality romantic relationship but also a secure state of mind regarding an individual's current romantic relationship, suggesting that attachment experiences in childhood have been brought forward into adulthood as demonstrated by the perceptions of participants regarding their romantic relationships.

Findings from the above studies demonstrate the importance of positive retrospective reports of parenting and positive interactions with parents in predicting better quality romantic relationships. Those participants with a secure attachment representation based on experiences in infancy were also found to have better quality romantic relationships in young adulthood, as were those who experienced a close and trusting relationship with parents in adolescence. Collectively, these studies further

support the important influence of parents on aspects of later romantic relationships, particularly the quality of these romantic relationships.

While there is strong evidence that the quality of early parent child attachments has a continuing effect on subsequent relationships, it is important to mention that changes in attachment security were also envisaged by Bowlby (1973) and such changes have been demonstrated by later researchers (e. g. Weinfield, Sroufe & Egeland, 2000). As highlighted by R.A Thompson (1999), the nature of the parent-child relationship may change over time. Normal transitional changes occur in the parent-child relationship related to the developing abilities of the child, which place new pressures on parents as they are required to learn new skills. Life changes such as more children, work and relationship changes also occur which may affect a parent's sensitive responsiveness to their child (R.A Thompson, 1999).

In a study by Weinfield et al. (2000) using the at risk sample of the previously described Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Resilience (Madsen & Collins, 2011; Roisman et al., 2001; Roisman et al., 2005), infants were observed at 12 months and at 18 months using the Ainsworth Strange Situation and when aged 19 years they completed the AAI. Based on the results of these two assessments four groups were established: infant insecure-adult insecure, infant secure-adult secure, infant insecure-adult secure and infant secure-adult insecure. Between infancy and adulthood mothers of participants were given various measures assessing stressful life experiences, evidence of maltreatment, maternal depression and family functioning. No significant continuity in attachment was found from infancy to adulthood with many participants becoming insecure. However it was suggested that as it was a high-risk sample, participants may have had a less stable and secure environment to facilitate continuity. It was found that young adults who had moved from being insecurely

attached in infancy to securely attached in young adulthood had experienced better family functioning (as measured by the observed quality of parent-child interactions at age 13) than those participants who continued as insecure. In contrast, compared to those who remained secure in their attachment, those participants who had moved from being secure in infancy to insecure in adulthood were more likely to have mothers who had reported clinically significant depressive symptoms (assessed when their child was 49 months, 16 years, and 17.5 years as well as at both second grade and third grade interviews). One reason that was suggested for this change was that the maternal depression may have influenced parenting and consequently led to insecurity in the parent-child relationship. This important longitudinal study has demonstrated that while the parenting received and the nature of the family environment had a significant impact on later attachment security, for some individuals there were changes in attachment security over time.

A later paper by Roisman, Padron, Sroufe and Egeland (2002) using the at risk sample of the previously described Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Resilience (Madsen & Collins, 2011; Roisman et al., 2001, 2005; Weinfield et al., 2000) further explored the changes in attachment security and how such changes might affect adult romantic relationships. Some infants in the sample who had been classified as having insecure attachments associated with sub-optimal parenting, as adults completed the AAI and were rated as securely attached. Such changes in attachment security were seen to occur as a consequence of life experiences post infancy and these resilient individuals who had overcome negative early childhood experiences were classified as “earned secures”. In contrast, individuals who were classified as having secure attachment both in infancy and by ratings of the AAI in adulthood were regarded as “continuous secure”. While most previous research had

classified earned secures retrospectively solely on the basis of their AAI interviews, Roisman, et al. (2002) were able to use infant attachment data from the previously described longitudinal study and identify a “prospective earned secure” group (adverse experiences and insecurely attached in infancy but securely attached based on AAI ratings at age 19). Results indicated that based on observation those defined as “earned secures” (retrospectively and prospectively) had higher quality romantic relationships at 20 and 21 years of age, than those who were insecurely attached, and their relationships were of a comparable quality to those classed as “continuous secure”. These results provide further support for the notion that attachment style is related to the quality of romantic relationships in young adults and that attachment style is not entirely dependent on attachment formed in infancy.

Authors who have written on the topic of emerging adulthood and the development of partner relationships have highlighted the importance of the present and past relationships with parents. However, there has only been limited attention to how the developmental tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood might influence the development of adult partner relationships (Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek & Vermulst, 2010). One of these developmental tasks is that of separation-individuation.

### **1.8 Separation- Individuation**

The adjustment of an individual is facilitated by psychological separation from parents and the acquisition of an individual identity (Hoffman, 1984). In a Western society, there is a transition from dependence on parents for care with gradually increasing independence until adulthood (Banner, Mackie & Hill, 1996). All children are dependent on their parents (or other adults) but over time achieve increasing independence via maturity and processes of separation-individuation. It is during adolescence that the second stage of separation-individuation occurs (following an

earlier process during the second year of life) and facilitates the formation of mature adult relationships (Blos, 1967). An infant who has a secure attachment with their caregiver is encouraged to explore their environment, and similarly an adolescent who has a healthy relationship with a parent is able to develop autonomy, explore their world and move away from home (Sherrod, 1996).

Separation-individuation has been considered to be a central developmental task of adolescence and young adulthood (Blos, 1967; Scharf & Mayseless, 2007). The process of separation-individuation is associated with increasing independence and less reliance on parents for guidance and support and importantly is facilitated by parents. The study by O'Conner, Allen, Bell and Hauser (1996) found that a difficulty in separating from parents in young adulthood (25 years) was predicted by the lack of the establishment of autonomy and relatedness (as observed in family interactions) in adolescence (14-16 years). A recent study by Lamborn and Groh (2009) with American college students investigated factors involved with autonomy in emerging adulthood. The authors reported that 56% of the sample lived alone while the remainder of the sample lived with their parents. Communication with the author confirmed that the category "living alone" comprised students living away from home in various living situations. Of particular note was the association between separation (as measured by a modified Emotional Autonomy Scale that includes assessments of the adolescent's recognition that their parents can make mistakes, perceptions of not relying markedly on parents for support, not imitating their parents and a declaration of their own privacy) and self esteem which was moderated by self-reliance. This result suggests that separation from parents was difficult for participants who did not feel self-reliant (a sense of control over events, ability to make independent

decisions). However, participants' living situation ("living alone" vs "living with parents") was not related to any of the study variables including separation.

Considering multiple aspects of autonomy, Zimmer-Gembeck, Madsen and Hanisch (2011) investigated parental and partner relationships in an Australian sample of students (mean age = 18,  $N = 206$ ). Three main measures were, emotional autonomy from parents "defined as individuation from parents, deidealization of parents, and non-dependency on parents" (p.10), "voice", "defined as the perceived ability to engage in authentic self-expression with another" (p.10) and cognitive autonomy, "defined as attitudinal, socioemotional and functional autonomy" (pp. 10-11). The main findings were that greater emotional autonomy from parents was associated with less capacity for self-expression with their parents and also lower cognitive autonomy. Also a lower emotional autonomy from parents, higher capacity for self-expression and a greater confidence in making their own choices was linked to a warmer relationship with parents. Having more controlling parents was associated with less emotional autonomy as well as less capacity for self-expression. Romantic partner support was related to greater emotional autonomy and higher capacity for self-expression in participants' relationships with parents. In conclusion, the authors argued that parental warmth is related to maintaining a connection with parents, the perception of greater capacity for self-expression and increased cognitive autonomy. A connection is maintained with controlling parents, however this may be through dependence which serves to undermine the individual's capacity for self-expression.

Boundaries in the family have been found to be related to the separation-individuation process. Clear boundaries generally reflect the authoritative roles of parents, permit the closeness between parents and children, and at the same time



encourage the development, separateness and individuation of the children. However not all families experience clear boundaries. Longitudinal research that has been conducted in Israel has examined separation-individuation in adolescent girls who after completing high school are required to leave school and enter compulsory military service.

A study by Mayseless and Scharf (2009) looked at the different aspects of separation-individuation in 120 Israeli adolescent girls in their transition from high school to military service through examining different constellations of inadequate boundaries. The participants were assessed during the second semester of their final year at high school, again approximately six months later, and finally six to nine months later when they were located at their permanent military base. The authors found that all the constellations of inadequate boundaries were associated with problems with separation-individuation during late adolescence and emerging adulthood. In particular, these constellations were linked to lower levels of “conflictual independence” as measured by the Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI) (e.g., “I feel like I am constantly at war with my mother/father”) and higher separation anxiety. These adolescents were worried about conflict with their parents, feared separation and felt anxious. In contrast, problems with “separation-individuation of the over-independent type” (p.198) (e.g., as measured by higher engulfment anxiety and dependency denial) were associated with parental guilt induction and psychological control. When participants were divided into groups, those who formed the guilt-psychological control by parent group (rejection and non-validation of the child’s autonomy) were found to have the lowest levels of separation-individuation, and the lowest levels in terms of coping and adjusting to the transition from high school to military service. This study highlights how the

relationship the parent has with the young adult, particularly their levels of control, can influence the important developmental task of separation-individuation.

Sher-Censor and Oppenheim (2010) recently conducted a study with adolescent girls and their mothers with data collected when the girls were 16 ( $N = 71$ ) and then two years later ( $n = 49$ ) when they were leaving home for mandatory military service. The aim of the study was to examine the influence of earlier individuation on later adjustment to military service. Higher connectedness (measured during a recorded conversation between mother and daughter and defined as being sensitive and respectful to another person's ideas, feelings and beliefs and being open and responsive to another's ideas) at time one was correlated with mothers' perceptions of supporting their daughter's autonomy and psychological distress of the adolescents at time two. Adolescents who perceived more maternal support of their autonomy at time two were found to have less negative expectations regarding their military service. Higher individuality at time one (defined as expressing views different from others and awareness of your own point of view with the ability to communicate it clearly) was associated with lower connectedness and higher negative expectations of military service at time two. For these Israeli females connectedness with mothers, together with encouragement of the achievement of their own autonomy, facilitated the process of separation-individuation and was related to positive expectations of military service.

The separation-individuation process is also relevant to other aspects associated with adulthood. The previously described study by Seiffge-Krenke (2006) examined factors associated with the age of leaving home. Compared to those young people who left home within the expected time-frame, participants who were still living at home and those who left later reported that they experienced a lower level of

encouragement of independence from parents. This low level of encouragement may demonstrate the indirect facilitation of dependence by parents; as a result their children may not have felt they had the capability or the skills necessary to live away from the parental home.

The study by Dubas and Petersen (1996) highlighted the possible link between living at home and a lack of separation-individuation. The aim of the study was to investigate the links between geographical living situation and adjustment in adolescence and young adulthood. Participants were drawn from a larger longitudinal sample of adolescents and consisted of 335 adolescents who completed questionnaires twice a year in sixth, seventh and eighth grades, once during twelfth grade ( $n = 169$ ) and when they were 21 ( $n = 246$ ). The young adults were grouped according to their geographical living situation in relation to the parental home, those who lived the furthest away from home (were close enough to visit their parents on the weekend, or in another area of the country), those living at home, and participants who lived within an hour's drive of their parents. Results indicated those participants living furthest away from their parents reported a closer relationship with their parents and indicated that the expected timing of achieving certain adulthood criteria (e.g., starting a job, paying for their own home, get married) was similar to other college aged samples. Those participants who lived within less than an hour of their parents reported a poorer relationship with their parents, but had begun the process of transitioning to adulthood as indicated by their reported expected age of transition to adult roles. However, those living at home indicated low closeness with their family and the most depressed affect compared to the other groups. It was expected that those in this latter group would be the last to achieve the transition to adulthood. The authors suggested that this group may be "enmeshed in their families, having

difficulty separating and being autonomous” (p. 14), and that leaving the parental home may in fact support the process of individuation.

The separation-individuation process has also been regarded as important for healthy psychological functioning. L.C. Milne and Lancaster (2001) found that less-resolved separation-individuation was related to interpersonal and self-critical concerns as well as the frequency of symptoms of depression for female adolescents aged 14-16 years. While this Australian study reported on younger female adolescents there is evidence from overseas studies using samples of young adults that there are gender differences in the process of separation-individuation.

### **1.9 Gender Differences and Separation-Individuation**

An early study conducted by Kenny (1987) with first year residential college students asked both males and females to describe their current relationships with their parents. In general it was found that parents were supportive of independence while remaining as a source of support for these students. Interestingly, males indicated that they were more likely to deal with their problems on their own, and would seek assistance from their parents only moderately in contrast to females who reported that they would turn to their parents more frequently (Kenny, 1987). In another study, the PSI was administered to college students (mean age of 20.26 years) to assess their perceptions of psychological separation from their parents (Lucas, 1997). Results showed that compared to men, women required more emotional support, closeness and approval from their parents and saw themselves as less able to manage personal affairs without the assistance of their parents (Lucas, 1997).

Despite the findings for females reported above there is some evidence that family support declines as the young person moves through adolescence. Seiffge-Krenke (1999) found that both parents and adolescents reported that from when the

adolescent was 13 years of age till approximately 17 years of age, family cohesiveness, expressiveness and support (as measured by the Family Environment Scale) all decreased. Consistent with results from previous studies scores on these aspects of family functioning were higher for families with daughters rather than sons suggesting that families with sons had more distant relationships, whereas families with females had closer and more cohesive relationships. There was no evidence that daughters were subject to more control than sons, and female adolescents were offered the same opportunities for personal growth within the family (as measured by items on the FES) as their male counterparts. Therefore the authors argued that as sons develop autonomy, their distance from their family increases, whereas for females, their autonomy development runs parallel to connectedness with the family.

A later study (Geuzaine, Debry & Liesens, 2000) with Belgian students (18-22 years) had similar findings with females reporting more dependence on their parents compared to males. In this study “conflictual independence” (defined as the individual being free of feelings of anger, mistrust, guilt, inhibition or responsibility in relation to their parents) and “emotional independence” (defined as a lack of excessively needing emotional support from parents) were measured. There was no significant difference between males and females on the measure of “conflictual independence”. Females required more emotional support from their mothers compared to males and tended to express this need more to their mothers than their fathers. Emotional dependence on fathers was similar for both males and females. The pattern of responses for females was found to reflect ambivalence between the dependency reported and the need for autonomy. Interestingly, for males “conflictual dependence” in relation to one parent was associated with emotional dependence on the other. For example, if males felt emotionally close to their fathers, they reported

experiencing negative feelings (guilt, mistrust etc.) when separating from their mothers and vice versa. The authors claimed that within western society, the role of autonomy is often afforded to males whereas dependency is associated with being female. They further argued that this need to meet social standards leads males to present themselves as being independent while females are expected to be close to their parents.

The above findings demonstrate that the process of separating from parents is complex and includes gender differences in that compared to males, females may have negotiated separation from their parents to a lesser degree and as a result may be more dependent on their parents. Clearly parents play a critical role in the normal separation-individuation processes (Lopez & Gover, 1993) and healthy adolescents' attachment to parents and peers is associated with separation-individuation (L.C. Milne & Lancaster, 2001). Separation-individuation is a two-way process involving both parents and the young adult with parents facilitating separation and promoting independence. Early recognition (Hoffman, 1984; Stierlin, 1974) that the developmental task of separation-individuation is associated with the establishment of romantic relationships has been reinforced in a recent study (Regalia, Lanz, Tagliabue & Manzi, 2010).

### **1.10 Separation- Individuation and Romantic Relationships**

Part of the move towards independence and autonomy for young adults is having the capacity to develop and maintain a partner relationship outside the family of origin (Stierlin, 1974). In this early paper Steirlin (1974) noted that high parental closeness throughout adolescence may facilitate a strong bond between the parent and adolescent but that this bond may hinder their attempts as young adults to begin romantic relationships. However as highlighted by Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2010), there

is only limited information on the developmental roots of an individual's capability to establish and successfully sustain a committed and lasting relationship with a romantic partner.

An early study by Hoffman (1984) demonstrated the important role independence from parents plays in a young adult's capacity for romantic relationships. Undergraduate students aged between 18-22 years completed the PSI, the Adjective Check List and two adjustment related questions. The PSI measured four components of psychological separation which included "conflictual independence". Love relationships were assessed by participants rating the global statement "I have problems with my love relationships" on a 5 point Likert scale of (0) *not at all true* and (5) *very true*. Results showed that greater "conflictual independence" from parents (that is, less feelings of anger, mistrust etc. towards parents) was associated with love relationships that had fewer problems for both males and females, and better personal adjustment for females. The authors suggested that if an individual had a conflictual relationship with their parents (which would be demonstrated by having low "conflictual independence") this may set in motion mistrustful feelings and feelings of insecurities for the individual in their love relationships.

In a later study Scharf and Mayseless (2001) found that where parents of 17 year old Israeli males accepted and encouraged the independence of their child, this assisted with improved self competence and then either directly or indirectly supported these individuals having a greater capacity for intimacy in romantic relationships.

Seiffge-Krenke (2006) has argued that an individual's internal working model may determine their perceived competence regarding independent living and the

challenges that young adulthood presents. For example, differences in individuals' attachment representations or internal working models may therefore explain the variation in the age at which a young person leaves the parental home. Results from this study of young German adults showed that more than two-thirds of the "on-time" leavers had secure attachment representations, whereas those still at home or those with non-normative leaving patterns were more likely to be insecurely attached (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). The author suggested that those individuals who had secure attachment representations may have felt more capable of living independently and more ready to form romantic partnerships.

In their previously described paper Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2010) reported results in regard to changes in parent-child relationships during adolescence and the influence of the parent-child relationship on romantic outcomes in emerging adulthood. The total sample consisted of 228 participants and data were collected at 6 time points across adolescence, from 14-17 years and then into emerging adulthood (21 and 23 years) with romantic outcomes measured for a sub sample of 145 participants. Participants were split into three groups according to the trajectories of mother-child relationships based on participants' scores on the Networks of Relationships Inventory (NRI). The NRI measured the reported levels of support-closeness in the adolescents' relationships with their mothers and the experience of negative affect. The three groups were: a) normative support-closeness and low levels of negativity, b) below average support-closeness and increasing levels of negativity and c) below average support-closeness and decreasing levels of negativity, with the majority of the sample falling into the normative group ( $n=138$ ). Irrespective of the varying baselines of support-closeness and negative affect, all groups were characterized by declining levels of support-closeness across the four year time



period. With regard to fathers, a majority of the sample also fell into the normative group ( $n = 167$ ), however the third group was characterized by participants who reported that they had experienced below average support- closeness, but a low level of negativity across adolescence rather than the decreasing levels of negativity which was found for relationships with mothers. Within the sub-sample ( $n = 145$ ) the same groups emerged as in the larger sample with the majority of participants being in the normative groups ( $n = 82$  for mother-child,  $n = 110$  for father-child).

Regarding the romantic outcome (which was only measured for the sub-sample), it was found that those participants who had mother-child trajectories that were seen as decreasing in negativity (characterized by qualities of conflict and punishment) across adolescence demonstrated higher levels of connectedness in their romantic relationships in emerging adulthood. An experience of a normative mother child trajectory by participants was associated with connection and sexual attraction in the later romantic relationships. With regard to the effect of relationships with fathers it was found that those who experienced below average support-closeness and low levels of negativity had higher anxious love scores. However, most of the variance in the quality of romantic relationships was explained by the duration of the relationship.

It was concluded that the romantic outcomes of participants benefited from parent-child relationships that had a reduction in closeness and parental support across adolescence and a medium level of negativity. This reduced closeness and support may have reflected the process of separation-individuation. The authors argued that their findings support the link between separation-individuation from the family and the development of romantic interest.

In a recent chapter on family differentiation in emerging adulthood, Regalia et al. (2010) described a longitudinal study conducted in Italy with emerging adults ( $N = 63$ , mean age = 25) in which they found that the quality of the romantic relationship influenced emerging adults' perceptions of their current relationship with their parents. On the basis of their results the authors hypothesised that the establishment of a romantic relationship enabled the renegotiation of the parent-child relationship to facilitate separation from the family.

In another recent study Arseth, Kroger, Martinussen and Bakken (2009) demonstrated how the separation-individuation process facilitates psychological independence while also making possible the establishment of intimate relationships outside the family. One hundred female students from Norway aged 18-29 years completed a number of questionnaires on intimacy, attachment, separation-individuation and identity status. The authors found that those participants classed as "pseudointimates" (those who were involved in an exclusive relationship but the relationships lacked depth and commitment) and "mergers" (those who whether or not they were in an exclusive relationship demonstrated enmeshment, dependency and idealized perceptions of partners) had more difficulties with the process of separation-individuation than those classed as "intimates" (those involved in a mutually satisfactory and stable sexual relationship). Overall the authors concluded that those women classed as "intimates" not only had a more secure attachment in relationships but had more successfully negotiated the adolescent separation-individuation process. These findings although limited to females demonstrate an association between separation-individuation and a satisfying and stable romantic relationship.

### **1.11 Intimacy and Romantic Relationships**

A crucial part of a relationship is intimacy (Bagarozzi, 1997) and the capacity to enter into and maintain intimate partner relationships has been regarded as a major component of adult adjustment (Feldman, Gowen & Fisher, 1998). Arnett (2000) has argued that romantic relationships that develop in emerging adulthood tend to be more intimate compared to those occurring in adolescence. The formation of identity and the development of a capacity for romantic intimacy have been regarded as major tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006).

The first stage of the separation-individuation process which begins in infancy is believed to be the beginning of identity formation (Mahler & McDevitt, 1989). In adolescence the individual's clearer sense of self or who they are as a person influences their choice of the type of person they would like as a partner (Arnett, 2000). The idea that successful romantic relationships in adolescence may require a degree of autonomy has received some support. A study with adolescents (mean age 15.28 years) found that romantic autonomy was positively correlated with romantic intimacy, indicating that adolescents who were experiencing trusting, supportive and communicative romantic relationships were more likely to establish boundaries and convey their individual differences in their romantic relationships (Taradash, Connolly, Pepler, Craig & Costa, 2001). These findings are consistent with the suggestion that the capacity to be intimate tends to be dependent on the achievement of separation-individuation and the attainment of a clear sense of self and identity (Alperin, 2006). This link between identity and intimate relationships was first proposed in early developmental theories.

Erikson (1968) proposed a theory of lifespan development consisting of eight stages. Associated with each stage is a crisis that needs to be resolved before the individual can progress to the next stage. Of particular interest in the current research are stages five and six which focus on adolescence and young adulthood. Stage five which is termed Identity vs Role Confusion involves the individual attempting to understand themselves, roles they may play in adulthood and how they will fit into society. Eventually a sense of identity and an idea of life direction are achieved by most individuals. Individuals develop close friendships as well as romantic and sexual relationships and stage six, labeled Intimacy vs Isolation, focuses on the development of intimate relationships with others. Erikson argued that once an individual had developed a sense of identity they were ready for intimacy and a long term commitment to a romantic partner.

A recent study by Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2010) investigated Erikson's theory of development and whether a sense of identity was in fact a precursor to intimacy for adolescents and then emerging adults. Results, based on a sample of 93 German participants who were part of a longitudinal study (data collected at mean age 15.3 years and at 24.1 years), indicated that Erikson's theory was still applicable. Those participants followed for 10 years were a sample depicted by progress in the development of both identity and intimacy with intimacy development following identity development. The authors argued that the development of identity and intimacy is facilitated by parents and other significant adults who act as models.

Calarusso (1992) had earlier claimed that the origin of a capacity for intimacy is the quality of early parent-child relationships. In support, Cassidy (2001) argued that those who have experienced a secure attachment in childhood have an increased likelihood for a capacity for intimacy later in life as their secure attachment is based

on the positive experiences these individuals had while seeking care from others. These experiences then facilitate a capacity for intimacy, as the individual is calm and assured with regard to looking for care in others because their internal representations/working models reflect the idea that individuals are caring and they feel that they themselves are deserving of care (Cassidy, 2001).

There has been some empirical support for the idea that the family is crucial for the individual in learning about intimacy or the abilities that are the foundations for intimacy in adolescence and young adulthood. Feldman et al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the links between family relationships and romantic intimacy with data collected from participants at two time points, adolescence (13 to 18 years,  $N = 242$ ) and young adulthood (19 to 25 years,  $n = 122$ ). Family relationships and the parents' marital satisfaction were assessed at time one. At time two, three dimensions of romantic intimacy, romantic attachment style, a subjective evaluation of happiness in intimacy, and self-reported problems in intimacy were assessed in the young adults. Those young adults with secure romantic attachments styles reported that they were happier in love than those who had insecure romantic attachment styles and had fewer problems in intimacy than those with a detached romantic attachment style (a type of insecure attachment style). In relation to family factors, ratings in adolescence of family cohesiveness (emotional connection experienced by the family member and the emotional bonds members of the family have with each other) and flexible control (the flexibility of relationships, roles and rules) predicted happiness in love in young adulthood. Flexible control also predicted romantic attachment style (especially secure romantic attachment style). Mothers' marital satisfaction during their child's adolescence predicted romantic intimacy during young adulthood. Interestingly, the relationship between the family variables

measured at time 1 and young adults' intimacy at time 2 was stronger for females. The family's respect for the privacy of the young person also positively influenced intimacy for female participants.

Cassidy (2001) discussed four abilities that are required in order to achieve a capacity for intimacy. These were the ability to pursue care from others, provide care to others, feeling comfortable with one's own autonomy and the negotiating of closeness in a partner relationship. In describing the qualities of intimate relationships Arseth et al. (2009) also noted the need for "a balance between emotional closeness and separateness" (p. 698). Other authors have suggested that intimacy is a process that develops over time and involves trust, self-disclosure, sharing feelings, personal validation, and love and affection within a relationship (Bagarozzi, 1997; Feldman et al., 1998; Hook et al., 2003), but it is multidimensional in nature and its meaning can vary depending on the individual (Hook et al., 2003).

Intimacy is believed to be related to both the physical and psychological well-being of an individual (Arseth et al., 2009; Hook et al., 2003). An absence of intimacy can lead to difficulties with emotions, interpersonal interactions and physical problems (Hook et al., 2003). The study by Zimmer-Gembeck and Petherick (2006) using a sample of unmarried Australian University students ( $N = 242$ , mean age = 19 years) highlighted the importance of intimacy in romantic relationships as those participants with higher intimacy dating goals (as measured by the Social Dating Goals Scale, including items such as, "in my dating relationships I try to share my most intimate thoughts and feelings") had higher relationship satisfaction.

Sternberg (1986) proposed a "triangular theory of love" for application across several types of close relationships. According to this theory the three interacting components of love were intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. Sternberg

(1997) described intimacy as an aspect of love that referred to “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships” (p. 315). In this paper Sternberg reported results from two studies designed to empirically validate this theory and a newly developed measurement instrument (the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale) in relation to different types of relationships (mother, father, sibling closest in age, lover/spouse, best friend of the same sex, and ideal lover/spouse). Results relevant to this thesis showed that participants rated intimacy most highly in regard to importance (or what was valued in relationships), particularly for romantic relationships. Notably the importance ratings for intimacy made by participants were not reflective of the actual characteristics of their relationships, instead there was a discrepancy between what participants wanted in their romantic relationships and what they actually experienced in those relationships. The three components (intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment) showed strong associations with satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Although various authors (for example, Hook et al., 2003) have emphasized the importance of intimacy in romantic relationships and the consequences of a lack of intimacy, there has been less attention to factors that may interfere with the achievement of intimacy in relationships. Erikson (1982) highlighted the importance of the basic task of an individual learning how to preserve their own identity while at the same time engaging in an intimate relationship with another, with Hatfield (1984) emphasizing the necessity of achieving independence in order to be capable of being intimate with a romantic partner. Both separation-individuation and the development of a capacity for romantic intimacy have been identified as being major tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968; Scharf & Mayseless, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006) and there has been empirical

support for a link between these developmental tasks. Given the importance of intimacy in relationships there has been little attention given to exploring potential barriers to intimate relationships.

### **1.12 Fear of Intimacy**

Almost three decades ago Hatfield (1984) first discussed the concept of a fear of intimacy and outlined the aspects underlying the fear of intimacy that exist in everyone to some degree. She argued that the underlying reasons for the fear of intimacy were fear of exposure, fear of abandonment, fear of angry attacks, fear of loss of control, fear of one's own destructive impulses and a fear of losing one's individuality or of being engulfed. A fear of exposure relates to the information a partner will discover about another individual, which may include things that they may be embarrassed about. A fear of abandonment is the worry that a partner will leave once they have gotten to know too much about the person. A fear of angry attacks is the reluctance on the part of the individual to reveal information in a relationship, in case it may be used against them. The risk of being intimate can be too great if it involves a fear of losing control for the individual. A fear of one's own destructive impulses relates to a fear of being in touch with what they are feeling, "that if they ever got in touch with what they are feeling, they would begin to cry....or kill" (p. 212). Finally, a fear of losing one's individuality or of being engulfed is the fear of losing themselves in another, or being completely "engulfed by another" (p. 212).

In a later book Hatfield and Rapson (1993) noted that in western society despite the apparent value placed on intimacy in romantic relationships there are individual differences in both the level of intimacy desired by individuals in their intimate relationships and their capacity to maintain intimate relationships.



Gender differences in intimacy have also been noted by Hatfield (1984). She suggests that women find it easier to achieve closeness with other individuals whereas men find it easier to attain an independent identity. Culture also plays a part as within western societies, expression of feelings by women is expected and supported, whereas with men the focus is on avoiding feelings and signs of weakness.

Ridley (1993) noted that in regard to intimacy, women tend to favour love and affection as well as the expression of warm feelings whereas for men the emphasis is on physical proximity and sexual activity. Hook et al. (2003) also demonstrated differences between males and females in regard to intimacy. When measuring four factors/measures of intimacy (self-disclosure, love and affection, personal validation, trust), females scored higher than men on love and affection and personal validation (Hook et al., 2003). These results suggest that females desired and were more comfortable with tenderness than males and more strongly accepted who they were across a variety of areas (intellectual, sexual and social situations) (Hook et al., 2003). In addition, the authors highlighted the support for Ridley's (1993) argument of the importance for women of love, affection and communicating warm feelings. There were no differences between males and females on the measure of self-disclosure, indicating that males and females were no different in revealing personal information to partners and on the measure of trust, identifying that they were comfortable with both the emotional support provided to them and the emotional support they provided (Hook et al., 2003).

In 1991 Descutner and Thelen defined fear of intimacy as "the inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued" (p. 219) and developed The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) as a way of measuring this concept.

Results from this study showed that for a sample of college psychology students ( $N = 129$ , mean age 19.21 years) a higher fear of intimacy was linked to various aspects of self-report data which included considering themselves less easy to get to know, lower satisfaction with the quality of their dating relationship, less satisfaction with expectations regarding long term relationships and having shorter relationships. Higher FIS scores were present for those participants who considered themselves “not in an exclusive relationship” in comparison to those “dating someone exclusively”. A second study was conducted ( $n = 94$ ) as a follow-up of participants from the first study with results mainly replicating the findings of the first study.

A considerable number of studies have investigated the concept of a fear of intimacy, with a Psycinfo search on the term “fear of intimacy” resulting in over 500 results. A search of the term “predictors fear of intimacy” resulted in 24 results comprised of eight published articles and 16 dissertation abstracts. Of the eight published articles, one did not use the FIS (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Three other studies examined fear of intimacy (using the FIS) respectively as a predictor of mental and physical quality of life (Eddington, Mullins, Fedeles, Ryan & Junghans, 2010), weight loss, quality of life and mental health (Canetti, Berry, & Elizur, 2009), and shame proneness (Lutwak, Razzino, & Ferrari, 1998). Another article examined the relationship between male gender role conflict and fear of intimacy (Good et al., 1995).

Three published articles explored predictors of fear of intimacy using the FIS. Witt, Poulin, Ingersoll and Deng (2011) found that levels of trust, mental health stigma, family support and friend support were significant predictors of fear of intimacy in older Chinese adults. Attachment (as measured by the Revised Adult Attachment Scale) was found to be a strong predictor of fear of intimacy in inpatients

receiving treatment for substance abuse (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Davis, Petretic-Jackson and Ting (2001) examined trauma symptomology, childhood sexual and physical abuse and psychological maltreatment as predictors of fear of intimacy in those who had been physically and/or sexually abused as children. These factors were found to be related to a greater fear of intimacy (Davis et al., 2001). In terms of the dissertation abstracts, six were relevant and used the FIS however all of these studies utilized samples of male and female college students, mostly from America.

Doi and Thelen (1993) examined the validity of the FIS with a sample of middle aged participants (35 to 55 years) who were all employees of a state psychiatric facility. The results provided support for previously reported psychometric properties (construct validity and high internal consistency) with the mean FIS score 79.58 ( $SD = 21.57$ ) similar to that obtained ( $M = 78.75$ ,  $SD = 21.82$ ) in the earlier study (Descutner & Thelen, 1991) conducted with a younger sample. Significant correlations were found between the FIS and dimensions of attachment (confidence in others, dependability and comfort with closeness as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale). There was no relationship found between quantity and quality of relationships suggesting that fear of intimacy co-exists with people's need to be a part of a relationship.

Sherman and Thelen (1996) validated the FIS with an adolescent student population (mean age 15.7 years) using a dating version and a version for friendships. Results indicated that females reported a higher fear of intimacy for dating relationships compared to friendships, whereas the opposite was true for males (total mean score = 84.63,  $SD = 19.42$ ). Those participants who had a dating partner were found to have a lower fear of intimacy than those who were not dating. Furthermore, those participants who indicated having had at least one dating relationship had a

lower fear of intimacy than those who had never had an “exclusive dating relationship”. No correlation was found between the number of people a participant had dated for at least 2 months and a fear of intimacy in dating relationships. The authors suggested it may be the quality of previous relationships and anticipated relationships that have more of an impact on fear of intimacy than the number of relationships.

The FIS has been used to compare fear of intimacy in control groups with samples from specific populations including sex offenders (Bumby & Hansen, 1997), those with drug addiction and/or alcoholism (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006), women who experienced physical and/or sexual abuse (Davis et al., 2001), women with bulimia (Pruitt, Kappius & Gorman, 1992), heavy smokers (Lyvers, Thorberg, Huang & Reginald, 2008), veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Riggs, Byrne, Weathers & Litz, 1998), and most recently college students with asthma (Eddington et al., 2010) and childhood cancer survivors (A.L Thompson, 2007).

Bumby and Hansen (1997) included 20 male psychology college students (mean age 28.2 years) as a control group for a forensic population of child molesters, rapists, and non-sexually offending prisoners ( $n = 71$ ). Child molesters had a significantly higher fear of intimacy (mean score 108.8) than the other groups including the control group (mean score 72.4) (Bumby & Hansen, 1997). An Australian sample of people with addiction problems ( $n = 99$ , mean age 36 years) was found to have a significantly higher fear of intimacy (mean score 99.48) than the control group ( $n = 59$ , mean age 36.3 years, mean score 84.20) (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006). The authors also reported a higher level of insecure attachment in the addiction group compared to the control group (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006). In a later study (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010) of inpatients receiving treatment for substance abuse (and

no control group), attachment (as measured by the Revised Adult Attachment Scale) was found to be a strong predictor of fear of intimacy (mean score 100.77). Davis et al (2001) found that the fear of intimacy for female university students (mean age 19.82) who had experienced child sexual abuse (mean score 78.81), child physical abuse (mean score 75.46) or both child sexual and physical abuse (mean score 95.32) had a higher fear of intimacy than those participants who had not experienced abuse (mean score 72.18).

When women who met the DSM-III criteria for bulimia ( $n = 17$ , mean age 27.59 years) were compared to a control group of women ( $n = 21$ , mean age 22.14 years), a higher fear of intimacy was found for those with bulimia (mean scores 93.2 vs 71.7) (Pruitt et al., 1992). Heavy smokers ( $n = 96$ ) and non-smokers ( $n = 123$ ) with a mean age of 28.11 years were compared on the FIS (Lyvers et al., 2008). Heavy smokers had a slightly higher fear of intimacy ( $M = 86.54$ ) than non-smokers ( $M = 80.16$ ) (Lyvers et al., 2008).

Fear of intimacy has also been shown to be associated with the quality of romantic relationships. Riggs et al. (1998) conducted a study with couples ( $n = 50$ ) where the veteran either had PTSD or did not and compared the couples on a number of measures (Riggs et al., 1998). Those couples where the partner had PTSD scored higher on the measure of relationship distress and fear of intimacy (males with PTSD mean score of 104.0 versus 76.0 for non-PTSD, and females with a PTSD partner, mean score of 76.5 versus 63.9 for non-PTSD partners). Men had significantly higher fear of intimacy scores than women, and those women who had partners with PTSD had significantly higher fear of intimacy scores than women with partners without PTSD. Although it was suggested by the authors that those women who have partners with PTSD may have a higher fear of intimacy due to problematic early interactions

with their partner, it was also argued that it could be due to people being attracted to others who have a similar fear of intimacy resulting in congruence between partners regarding demands for intimacy in the relationship.

Fear of intimacy has also been examined in individuals with chronic health problems. College students with asthma ( $n = 52$ , mean age 20.13) and those without any reported history of a chronic illness ( $n = 52$ , mean age 20.23) were investigated regarding their dating anxiety and fear of intimacy (Eddington et al., 2010). No difference was found between the two groups on these measures (no fear of intimacy mean scores were provided for the sample). However, in the control group, fear of intimacy was found to be a significant predictor of mental health related quality of life, with the authors suggesting that a fear of intimacy may play a part in a lower quality of life.

Using a sample of male and female emerging adults (18-25 years) A.L. Thompson (2007) investigated the friendships and romantic relationships (including a fear of intimacy in these relationships) of childhood cancer survivors (mean age = 21.61 years,  $n = 60$ ) and controls (mean age = 20.05 years,  $n = 60$ ). No difference was found on levels of fear of intimacy in romantic relationships (as measured by the FIS) between survivors (mean = 80.00) and controls (mean = 76.37). However, for the survivor group, risk factors such as high trait anxiety, age at diagnosis and male gender was linked to a number of relationship difficulties including a higher fear of intimacy.

A number of studies utilizing samples of psychology students have highlighted the part fear of intimacy plays in romantic relationships. Terrell, Terrell and Von Drashek (2000) found that those participants (male and female psychology students, 18-21 years) who were taught by their parents in childhood not to trust

strangers showed a greater fear of intimacy in opposite sex dating relationships as measured by the FIS.

Thelen, Vander Wal, Thomas and Harmon (2000) found that those dating couples (male and female psychology students, mean age of 19.77 years and 19.41 years respectively) who had higher fear of intimacy scores (also measured by the FIS) indicated that they desired and had less intimacy in their current partner relationship. Results showed FIS scores were correlated within couples suggesting that the partners had a similar fear of intimacy. Duration of relationships also seemed to be influenced by the level of fear of intimacy. Female participants who indicated that they had a high fear of intimacy were less likely to be in their relationship at the six month follow-up. These women also had higher fear of intimacy scores than those women who had remained in their relationships beyond six months. Overall FIS scores for males ( $M = 70.77$ ) were higher than for females ( $M = 65.51$ ).

While Hatfield (1984) has highlighted the part played by the other partner regarding intimacy within a relationship, and Thelen et al. (2000) reported an association between the level of fear of intimacy of each partner, Sherman and Thelen (1996) argue that a “fear of intimacy focuses on the psychological processes within one individual” (p. 508). Any barriers that exist in influencing the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood are of particular importance. However there has been limited research that has examined the psychological factors or processes that predict or contribute to the fear of intimacy, particularly during the stage of emerging adulthood.

## **2 Rationale and Aims of the Present Study**

### **2.1 Rationale**

Statistics suggest that more Australian young people in their 20s are staying in the parental home, and a large proportion of young adults are not in relationships. An increase in the number of those young people living at home with parents has also been demonstrated in a number of other countries across the globe (Cordon, 1997; Goldscheider, 1997; Kins & Beyers, 2010), and within Western culture there is an extended search for a romantic partner, with the average age of marriage in some countries now in the late twenties and early thirties (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Research on young adults has found that both moving out of home and establishing a romantic relationship are important criteria of adulthood (Arnett, 2001; Barry et al., 2001; Nelson & Barry, 2005) and although these studies have generally been conducted with samples of American college students, emerging adults in other countries, such as Belgium (Kins & Beyers, 2010) have also been studied. Generalizability of these results to the Australian population is limited because of cultural differences including the non-residential nature of tertiary study in Australia. Groundbreaking research addressing factors associated with the living situation, relationship status, romantic outcomes, parental support and attachment representation of young adults has been conducted by Seiffge-Krenke and her group of researchers (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006; 2010; Seiffge-Krenke et al. 2010). The studies conducted with young adults in Germany have demonstrated links between these factors using longitudinal designs and while the generalizability of the results is unknown, these researchers have led the way in addressing these important interrelated factors in young adulthood. Australian studies have investigated young



people's living situation and relationship status (Smart & Vassallo, 2008) and young adults' views on relationships and living at home (White, 2002). One Australian empirical study has focused on early experiences within the family and the link with individual's later attachment style (Feeney & Noller, 1990) and shown that past parenting is related to later functioning in romantic relationships. Another Australian empirical study investigated intimacy dating goals and relationship satisfaction in a sample of university students (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006) and in a very recent study Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2011) focused on various aspects of autonomy in the parent and partner relationships of young Australian adults. The only published Australian study that has examined the separation-individuation process was based on a sample of young female adolescents and had a focus on depressive symptoms (L.C. Milne & Lancaster, 2001).

Kins and Beyers (2010) concluded that continuing to live in the parental home may inhibit the process of achieving criteria for adulthood and Dubas and Petersen (1996) suggested that those young adults living at home may have difficulty separating from their parents. However, there is limited specific evidence as to whether the separation-individuation process differs according to a young person's living situation. In addition, although past relationship with parents and the quality of romantic relationships have been a focus of research (e.g., Conger et al., 2000; Dalton et al., 2006; Roisman et al., 2001; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2001) fear of intimacy in partner relationships has received very little research attention. An unresolved separation-individuation process linked to the parenting experienced may influence an individual's fear of intimacy in a romantic partner relationship or may delay the establishment of such relationships. To date, there has only been limited research that has focused on the psychological processes that may impact on fear of intimacy in

romantic relationships. Further understanding of the link between parent-child relationships and later partner relationships is needed. In particular, more research is needed to examine the role of past parenting and the separation-individuation process in relation to young adults' fear of intimacy in partner relationships.

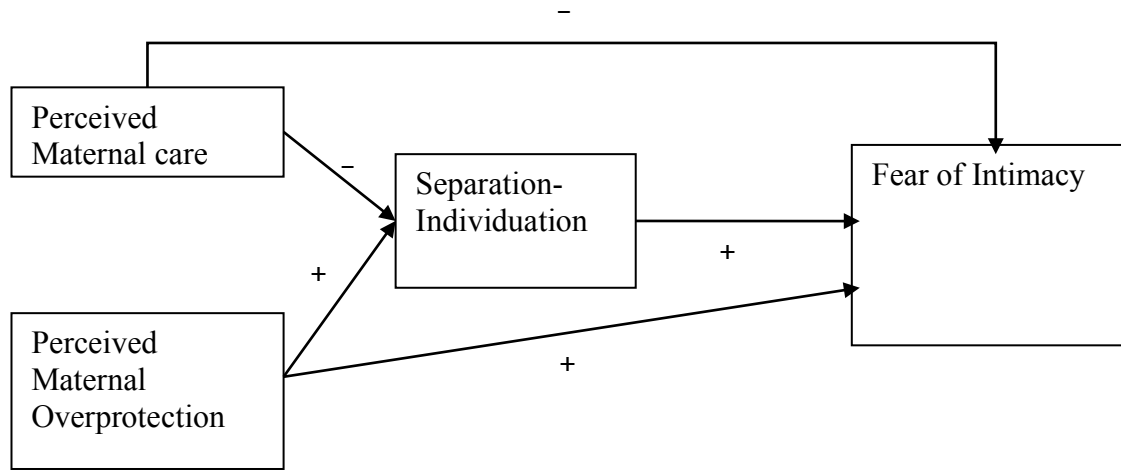
## **2.2 Aims**

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the influence of past parenting (perceived maternal care and overprotection), and separation-individuation on young adults' fear of intimacy regarding heterosexual partner relationships. A further aim was to examine whether there were differences in separation-individuation according to living situation and partnership status.

## **2.3 Proposed Model**

A model was developed to explain the fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships in young adults (See Figure 1 below). Based on previous research it was expected that perceptions of past parenting (maternal care and maternal overprotection) would influence fear of intimacy regarding heterosexual partner relationships during the period of emerging adulthood. In particular that, the more care received, the lower the fear of intimacy and the higher overprotection experienced in childhood, the higher the fear of intimacy. Separation-individuation was also expected to influence a fear of intimacy regarding heterosexual partner relationships, with a delay or disturbance in this process being associated with a higher fear of intimacy. Further, it was expected that perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection would also contribute to the separation-individuation process, with higher perceived care promoting more resolved

separation-individuation and higher perceived overprotection facilitating less resolved separation-individuation.



*Figure 1.* Proposed model explaining fear of intimacy in partner relationships of emerging adults.

## 2.4 Hypotheses

### 2.4.1 Direct pathways.

The following hypotheses were generated from the model above.

1. Perceived maternal care will be negatively associated with fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships (as demonstrated by a high score on the PBI care and a low score on the FIS).
2. Perceived maternal overprotection will be positively associated with fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships (as demonstrated by a high score on both the PBI overprotection scale and the FIS).
3. Separation-individuation will be positively associated with fear of intimacy

in heterosexual partner relationships (as demonstrated by a low score on both the separation and individuation process inventory (S-IPI) and the FIS).

4. Perceived maternal care will be negatively associated with separation-individuation (with more resolved separation-individuation demonstrated by a low score on the S-IPI).

5. Perceived maternal overprotection will be positively associated with separation-individuation (with less resolved separation-individuation demonstrated by a high score on the S-IPI).

#### **2.4.2 Indirect pathways.**

A further set of hypotheses were proposed to test the following potential indirect pathways.

6. Separation-individuation will mediate the association between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships.

7. Separation-individuation will mediate the association between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships.

#### **2.4.3. Additional hypotheses.**

Additional hypotheses were proposed in regard to the living situation and partner status of participants.

8. Compared to young adults living at home there will be a higher proportion of young adults living away from home who are in a relationship.

9. Young adults living away from home will have a more resolved level of separation-individuation than young adults living at home.

10. Young adults who are in a relationship will have a more resolved level of separation-individuation than young adults who are not in a relationship.

### 3 Method

#### 3.1 Participants

Participants in this study ( $N=134$ ) were males ( $n = 43$ ) and females ( $n = 91$ ) from the general population of Melbourne recruited by both convenience and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria were based on age (21-25 years), relationship status (unmarried) and sexual orientation (heterosexual). Only one partner in a relationship was eligible to participate due to the data analysis requiring independence.

#### 3.2 Measures

All participants were provided with an information statement (see Appendix A) and a questionnaire booklet which contained the following questionnaires.

##### 3.2.1 Background and Demographic Questionnaire (see Appendix B).

A questionnaire was developed to provide the following information: age, educational background, living situation (“living with parents”, “living with a partner”, “sharing a house or flat with other young people”, “living alone” and “other”), partner status (“not seeing/dating anyone”, “in a committed relationship but not living with partner”, “living with partner”, “dating casually” and “other”), history and length of heterosexual relationships, and parent information (one or two parent family for first 16 years).

##### 3.2.2 Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) (Parker et al., 1979) (see Appendix C).

This 25 item self-report questionnaire measures the perceived care and overprotection received from parents up until the age of 16 years. A score for parental

care (12 items) and parental overprotection (13 items) is obtained for each parent. An example of a parental care item is, my mother/father “spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice”. An example of a parental overprotection item is, my mother/father “let me do things I liked doing”. While separate versions of the PBI are available for mothers and fathers only a limited number of variables could be examined within the scope of this student project. As most research has either focussed on maternal parenting (e.g. Andreassen, 2009; Gotlib, Mount, Cordy & Whiffen, 1988) or has reported stronger findings for maternal vs paternal parenting (e.g. Birtchnell, 1988; Enns, Cox & Clara, 2002) it was decided to use only the mother version of the PBI for this study. Participants are asked to rate each item according to a 4-point scale from *very like* to *very unlike*, based on their experiences of the parenting they received in childhood. A higher score on the parental care scale indicates that higher perceived care and warmth was experienced. A higher score on the parental overprotection items indicates that there was higher perceived protection, intrusiveness and control.

The PBI is one of the most widely used measures of retrospective parental experiences (Enns et al., 2002). Retrospective reports such as the PBI have been criticised for not being reliable in their measurement of the actual parenting received (McLeod, Wood & Weisz, 2007) because of the normal limits of memory, which can be flawed and unreliable (Brewin, Andrews & Gotlib, 1993) and inaccuracies related to psychopathology (Lewinsohn & Rosenbaum, 1987). Noting the possibility of biased recollections of parenting associated with psychopathology such as mood disorders Lewinsohn and Rosenbaum, (1987) concluded that “retrospective parenting should probably never be construed to represent what really occurred” (p. 618).

In light of these potential limitations of retrospective reporting it is important to note that the PBI was designed to measure “perceived parenting” rather than

“actual parenting”, with the authors arguing that it is the perception the child has of the past parenting received that is more influential than the actual parenting provided (Parker, 2010) thereby not relying just on memory, but on the individual’s perception or representation of the parenting experienced. As Safford, Alloy and Pieracci (2007) argue, a significant contributor to a child’s psychological development is the parent-child relationship, but also importantly the child’s own perceptions of this relationship. In support, Lewinsohn and Rosenbaum (1987) argue that what is of clinical importance is how individuals “construe their past, not really how it was” (p.618).

The PBI has been assessed for long-term reliability and perceptions of parental care and parental overprotection over a 20 year period (Wilhelm, Niven, Parker & Hazdi-Pavlovic, 2005). Scores were found to be stable over time further supporting the validity of the PBI as a measure (Wilhelm et al., 2005). Safford et al. (2007) concluded that compared to a similar measure (Children’s Report of Parental Behaviour Inventory (CRPBI) the “PBI might be a more useful instrument than the CRPBI in assessing children’s perceptions of parental behaviour” (p.383) due to its shorter length as well as its demonstrated stability over time.

It has also been recognised that 16 years is a long period of time to base responses on, with variations in parenting likely across the phases of adolescence and childhood (Parker, 2010). However the assumption was made that the scales represent a result of a number of experiences across time (Parker et al., 1979). For example, although overprotective parents may exhibit different overprotective parenting behaviours that correspond with their child’s stage of development, in general they have a pattern of overprotectiveness in their parenting (Parker, 2010).



Research using the PBI has taken the focus of perceived parenting. In their study with Australian adolescents, Rigby, Slee and Martin (2007) found poor mental health to be related to inadequate parental bonding as measured by “perceived low parental care and high parental control” (p.809) as well as levels of peer victimization that was reported by participants. Apostolidou (2006) using the PBI as a measure of “parental styles as perceived by the child” (p.72) with undergraduate students (aged 22 – 52 years) found that for males, their perceptions of maternal overprotection was linked to increased anxiety in intimate relationships. For females, perceptions of a caring father were associated with increased anxiety in adult relationships.

The reliability and the validity of the PBI have been demonstrated to be acceptable (Parker et al., 1979). Pearson correlation coefficient of .76 was found for the parental care items and .63 for the parental overprotection items. Split-half reliability for the parental care and the parental overprotection scales have been reported as .88 and .74 respectively (Parker et al., 1979). In the current study the Cronbach’s alpha was .91 for the parental care scale and .87 for the parental overprotection scale.

### **3.2.3 Separation-Individuation Process Inventory (S-IPI) (Christenson & Wilson, 1985) (see Appendix D).**

This self-report questionnaire contains 39 items rated on a scale from 1 (*not characteristic of me*) to 10 (*very characteristic of me*). A high score reflects difficulties with the separation-individuation process or unresolved separation-individuation. An example of an item is “In my experience I almost always consult my mother before making an important decision”. The S-IPI has been found to have excellent reliability and has been shown to have known-groups validity with scores differentiating a sample of university employees considered “normal” from a sample

of people with a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder (Christenson & Wilson, 1985). A version of the S-IPI using a dichotomous response (true-false) was found to be reliable (Cronbach's alpha of .93) with a sample of Australian adolescents (Aiello & Lancaster, 2007). In the current study using the original likert scale the Cronbach's alpha was .90.

### **3.2.4 Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) (Descutner & Thelen, 1991) (see Appendix E).**

In the current study the FIS was used to measure an individual's fear of intimacy in romantic relationships. This 35-item self-report questionnaire is rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). Items were based on the definition that fear of intimacy is the "inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety, to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued" (Descutner & Thelen, 1991 p. 219). A total score is produced from the sum of all the items with a higher score reflecting a higher fear of intimacy. Participants are asked to imagine that they were in a close dating relationship when answering the items but for the current study wording was modified slightly so that participants who had a partner were asked to answer all items in regard to an existing partner. An example of an item is "I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings to my partner". The FIS was found to have good construct validity, excellent internal consistency (alpha of .93) and stability was demonstrated with a one-month test-retest correlation of .89 (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). In the current study the Cronbach's alpha was .89.

### 3.3 Procedure

Approval to conduct the study was received from the Human Ethics committee of Victoria University. Participants were recruited from the Melbourne metropolitan area via convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The sample was non-random and acquaintances of the student researcher helped to distribute questionnaires to individuals if they were heterosexual, unmarried and between the ages of 21 and 25 years. The sample was essentially made up of people who were willing and available to participate and met the basic inclusion criteria. Current participants (that is, those that chose to fill out the questionnaire) also referred/identified other potential participants. Flyers (see Appendix F) were strategically placed at various locations within the community advertising the study and inviting potential participants to contact the student researcher to obtain a copy of the questionnaire booklet. All potential participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study. If they wished to be involved in the study participants filled out the questionnaire booklet anonymously and posted it in the stamped self addressed envelope provided. As participants were anonymous return of the completed questionnaire booklet constituted consent.

### 3.4 Design and Statistical Analysis

A cross sectional design was used to examine factors thought to be important in young adult relationships. An a-priori power analysis was conducted using the free on-line program G-power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Power at a level of 0.95, detecting correlation coefficients at an alpha level of .05 and a medium effect size ( $f^2$ ) of .15 was selected. For a test of multiple regression with three predictor variables, the number of participants required was calculated at 119. For power at a level of .80, J. Cohen (1992) recommends a minimum sample size of 76 for three

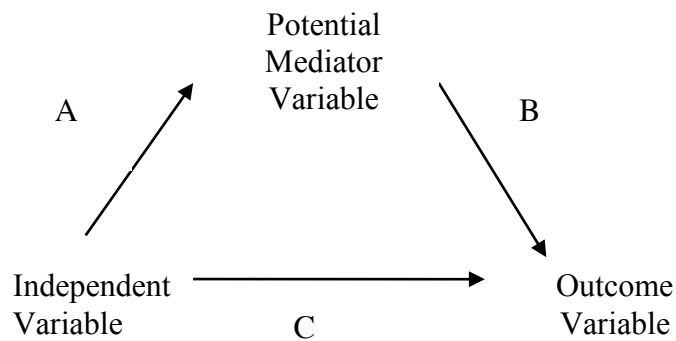
predictors, an alpha level of .05 and a medium effect size of ( $f^2$ ) of .15. Power was therefore adequate for the  $N=134$  sample size. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 17 (SPSS) (SPSS for Windows, 2008) was used to conduct all data analyses. Pearson Bivariate correlations were calculated to test hypotheses one to five. In order to test the proposed model, hierarchical multiple regression was used to determine how much of the variance in fear of intimacy could be explained by the combined predictor variables and the unique contribution made by each of the individual predictor variables.

The potential indirect pathways were tested using R.M. Baron and Kenny's (1986) four step process. Full or partially mediated pathways between the predictor variables and the outcome variable were identified using a series of regression analyses to determine whether the four conditions for mediation noted by R.M. Baron and Kenny (1986) had been satisfied:

1. The predictor variable has to be significantly related to the outcome variable (pathway C, see Figure 2);
2. The predictor variable has to be significantly related to the potential mediator variable (pathway A, see Figure 2);
3. The mediator variable has to be significantly related to the outcome variable (pathway B, see Figure 2); and
4. When the mediator variable is included in the model the relationship between the predictor variable and the outcome variable is reduced.

For full mediation to be supported, the relationship between the predictor variable and the outcome variable (pathway C) is no longer significant with the inclusion of the mediator variable. In contrast, support for partial mediation is when

the predictor variable and outcome variable still have a significant but reduced relationship. Figure 2 depicts the relationship between the variables for mediation where pathway C is mediated by the potential mediator variable.



*Figure 2.* Diagram illustrating the mediation process.  
(adapted from R.M. Baron & Kenny (1986) p. 1176 ).

Independent sample t-tests were used to test hypotheses eight to ten. One-way between –groups ANOVAs and chi-square tests of independence were used for post-hoc analyses.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Data Screening and Preliminary Analyses

Prior to the main data analyses, the data were examined to identify any potential errors or missing data. There was no missing data and examination of descriptive statistics did not reveal any out of range values in the data. Inspection of histograms and box plots indicated the presence of univariate outliers for the following variables: perceived maternal care ( $n = 3$  cases), perceived maternal overprotection ( $n = 2$  cases) and separation-individuation ( $n = 3$  cases). There was no overlap between variables and the individual cases. In accordance with guidelines provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) calculation of z scores for these variables showed that none of the values exceeded 3.29 ( $p < .001$ , two tailed test) and therefore these outliers could be included untransformed. Inspection of the 5% trimmed mean values (Pallant, 2007) for the variables of perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation showed that they were not very different from the actual means obtained (see Table 1) indicating that the influence of the outliers was likely to have been minimal. As inspection of the variable scores in the individual case summaries of the outliers revealed no errors or patterns of responses it appeared that the outliers were from the population in question and so these cases were included in the analyses.

Table 1

*Comparison of the Actual Means and Trimmed Means*  
( $N = 134$ )

Variable	<i>M</i>	
	Actual	Trimmed
Perceived Maternal Care	28.20	28.73
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	13.20	12.86
Separation-Individuation	139.67	137.86

The four main continuous variables (perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection, separation-individuation, fear of intimacy) were assessed for normality using the Kolmogorow-Smirnov test. According to this test fear of intimacy was normally distributed ( $p = .20$ ) but perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation were skewed towards the functional end of their respective scales. The data was not transformed due to the difficulties associated with interpretation of transformed data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

#### 4.2 Sample Characteristics

Two hundred questionnaire booklets were distributed. A total of  $N = 152$  (76 %) questionnaire booklets were returned but a number of those received ( $n = 18$ ) were excluded on the basis that they had been completed by respondents who were younger or older than the specified age group ( $n = 9$ ), had missed a whole questionnaire ( $n = 1$ ) or they were not eligible because they had ticked the box that stated their partner had participated in the study ( $n = 8$ ). The final sample consisted of 134 participants, 43 males and 91 females, with a mean age of 23.10 years ( $SD = 1.57$ , Range = 21-

25). Across the sample, 117 participants (87.3%) were born in Australia and 17 (12.7%) were born elsewhere. Twenty- two (16.4%) participants reported that their parents had divorced within the first 16 years of their life. Four participants (3%) had a parent pass away in their first 16 years. Educational characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 2.

Almost half of the sample (44.8%) reported their highest level of education achieved as university, with a further 30% indicating that they had achieved Tertiary education at the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) level. In terms of employment status, the majority (73.8%) of the participants were currently employed in either full- time (52.2%) or part-time (21.6%) jobs. Most of the remaining participants identified themselves as current students (14.2%) while others were students who were also working full-time (1.5%) or part-time (6.7%). The two categories of student working full-time and student working part-time were added in later after it was discovered that contrary to instructions a number of participants had ticked two boxes (e.g., student and working full-time).



Table 2

*Educational Attainment and Employment Status (N = 134)*

Characteristic	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Highest Educational Level Achieved		
Secondary	20.9%	28
TAFE	29.9%	40
University	44.8%	60
Other	4.5%	6
Employment Status		
Unemployed	3.7%	5
Part-time employment	21.6%	29
Full-time employment	52.2%	70
Current student	14.2%	19
Student working full time	1.5%	2
Student working part-time	6.7%	9

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The mean and standard deviation for the outcome variable fear of intimacy was obtained ( $M = 80.14$ ,  $SD = 18.56$ ). This was slightly higher than college psychology students in Descutner & Thelen's (1991) study (mean age 19.21 years, mean score = 78.75). Table 3 shows the mean, standard deviation and sample size for

the three predictor variables, perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Predictor Variables in the Model*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Perceived Maternal Care	28.20	7.04	3-36
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	13.20	7.23	2-36
Separation-Individuation	139.69	42.34	56-280

Note:  $N = 134$  for all the above variables.

The above means obtained with the current sample of participants were examined for consistency with means reported from previous studies. An Australian normative study (Parker et al., 1979) reported mean scores of 26.8 for the perceived maternal care scale and 14.7 for the perceived maternal overprotection scale for their sample which included medical students, psychiatric nurses, college students and parents of children at the local school. An additional study conducted by the same authors used a sample of patients who attended general practitioners and found a mean score of 26.9 for perceived maternal care and 13.3 for perceived maternal overprotection. The means in the current study were lower (perceived maternal overprotection  $M = 13.20$ ) or slightly higher (perceived maternal care  $M = 28.20$ ) than those obtained in these two previous studies. In a recent unpublished study (Andreassen, 2009) conducted in Melbourne with  $N = 106$  young women aged 18-25 years ( $M = 21.24$  years) the means and standard deviations for perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection in the total sample were 28.25 (7.27) and 13.6 (8.65). However the mean perceived maternal overprotection score for a sub-sample of young women with a diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes ( $n = 42$ ) was 15.17

(9.19) in contrast to the mean score of 11.84 (8.09) for the young women without this diagnosis ( $n = 64$ ) (Andreassen, 2009).

The mean for separation-individuation, 139.69, obtained in the current study was higher than the mean score of 120.6 reported by Christenson and Wilson (1987) for their sample of university employees and the mean score of 127.59 (49.87) reported by Andreassen (2009) in the study of young women cited above.

Analyses were conducted to identify demographic factors that may be related to the outcome variable, fear of intimacy, and therefore would need to be included in the analyses for the model. Table 4 shows the mean for the outcome variable fear of intimacy for the various educational levels achieved by participants.

Table 4

*Fear of Intimacy according to Educational Level (N = 134)*

Educational Level	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Range</i>
Secondary	81.82	18.33	28	54-123
TAFE	78.90	19.26	40	44-123
University	82.23	18.01	60	52-114
Other	65.17	15.84	6	38-84

A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to establish if there were any significant differences in the outcome variable of fear of intimacy between the different categories of highest educational level achieved. There was no significant difference in mean FIS scores across educational levels,  $F(3,130) = 1.83, p > .05$ .

The various employment statuses of participants were also examined to see if it was necessary to control for this variable in testing the proposed model. Table 5 shows the means for the outcome variable for each of the employment categories.

Table 5

*Fear of Intimacy according to Employment Status (N = 134)*

Employment Status	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Range</i>
Unemployed	89.60	21.43	5	60-113
Part-time Employment	88.17	19.67	29	61-123
Full-time Employment	77.29	17.98	70	38-113
Current Student	78.68	15.58	19	52-111
Student Working Full Time	54.00	2.83	2	52-56
Student Working Part-Time	80.11	16.44	9	57-109

A one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to establish if there were any significant differences between the different categories of employment status on the outcome variable fear of intimacy. While there was a significant difference in the mean scores on the FIS across the employment status categories,  $F(5,128) = 2.65$ ,  $p < .05$  the actual difference between the means was quite small (effect size = 0.09).

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test did not identify any significant differences between the groups. Given this, and the small  $n$  for some of the categories employment status was not included as a variable in the final model.

The outcome variable was also examined for potential gender differences that may need to be accounted for in the final model. An independent sample t-test indicated that in the current sample the mean score on the FIS for males ( $M = 87.05$ ,  $SD = 19.71$ ) was significantly different from the mean score for females, ( $M = 76.88$ ,  $SD = 17.15$ ;  $t(132) = -3.05$ ,  $p < .05$  (two tailed) indicating higher fear of intimacy in males. Gender was therefore included as a covariate in the analysis to test the model. Due to this difference, the independent variables were investigated for any gender

differences but no other differences were found. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for the three predictor variables.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Predictor Variables according to Gender*

Variable	Males ( <i>n</i> = 43)			Females ( <i>n</i> = 91)		
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Perceived Maternal Care <sup>1</sup>	28.02	6.11	13-36	28.29	7.47	3-36
Perceived Maternal Overprotection <sup>2</sup>	12.90	7.94	2-32	13.34	6.91	2-36
Separation-Individuation <sup>3</sup>	149.12	49.24	68-280	135.23	38.14	56-246

<sup>1</sup> $t(132) = 0.20, p > .05$  (two tailed)

<sup>2</sup> $t(132) = 0.32, p > .05$  (two tailed)

<sup>3</sup> $t(132) = -1.79, p > .05$  (two tailed)

A Pearson Bivariate Correlation analysis was conducted with the continuous variables perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection, separation-individuation and fear of intimacy. Gender was also included due to the decision to add it to the final model. The scatterplots obtained demonstrated linear relationships between the variables, with the strength of these variables demonstrated by the two tailed correlations reported in Table 7. Multicollinearity (demonstrated by a correlation of above .9 (Pallant, 2007) between the variables was not evident. Guidelines suggested by J.W Cohen (1988) have been used to interpret the size of correlation coefficients in the significant relationships between variables. J.W Cohen (1988) considered that a small size correlation was less than .30, a medium size correlation was between .30 and .50, and a large size correlation was .50 or above.

Table 7

*Intercorrelations between Variables entered into the Model*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender	-				
2. Perceived Maternal Care	-.02	-			
3. Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.03	-.45**	-		
4. Separation-Individuation	.15	-.25**	.23**	-	
5. Fear of Intimacy	.26**	-.18*	-.01	.54**	-

\*  $p < .05$ , two tailed.\*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed

As can be seen in Table 7, fear of intimacy had a large positive association with separation-individuation and a small negative association with perceived maternal care. There was a medium size negative association between perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection and a small, negative association between perceived maternal care and separation-individuation. Perceived maternal overprotection showed a small positive correlation with separation-individuation. All the aforementioned significant associations were in the direction predicted by the hypotheses. Gender was significantly correlated with fear of intimacy. The correlation between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy was non-significant.

#### 4.4 Testing the Model

##### 4.4.1 Hierarchical multiple regression.

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of the predictor variables perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection, and separation-individuation to predict fear of intimacy (as measured by the FIS). Gender was also included in the analysis. The Mahalanobis distance statistic was used to check for the presence of multivariate outliers. Only one case had a value (22.42) that exceeded the critical value of 16.27 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). As calculation of Cook's distance statistic indicated that no case values were larger than 1 (maximum value = .052) it was decided to include this case in the final analyses.

Fear of intimacy was the outcome variable in the hierarchical regression with the predictor variables entered in the following order: Gender (Step 1); perceived maternal care (Step 2); perceived maternal overprotection (Step 3); and separation-individuation (Step 4). See Table 8 for  $R^2$  change statistics, unstandardised  $B$  coefficients, standard errors of the unstandardised  $B$  coefficients, standardised  $\beta$  coefficients, and  $F$  change statistics associated with testing of the Model.

Table 8

*Summary of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Fear of Intimacy (N = 134).*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> change	<i>F</i> change <sup>a</sup>
Step 1				.07	9.32**
Gender	10.17	3.33	.26**		
Step 2				.03	4.41*
Gender	10.05	3.29	.25**		
Perceived Maternal Care	- .46	.22	-.17*	-	-
Step 3				.01	1.15
Gender	9.90	3.29	.25**		
Perceived Maternal Care	- .58	.25	-.22*	-	-
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	- .26	.24	-.22	-	-
Step 4				.25	48.97***
Gender	6.68	2.85	.17*		
Perceived Maternal Care	-.34	.21	-.13	-	-
				-	-
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.47	.21	-.18*		
Separation Individuation	.23	.03	.52***	-	-

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Degrees of freedom, step 1 (1, 132), step 2 (1, 131), step 3 (1, 130), step 4 (1, 129)



The inclusion of gender in Step 1 explained 7% of the variance in the outcome variable fear of intimacy. The entry of perceived maternal care in Step 2 explained an additional 3% of the variance in fear of intimacy. Inspection of the standardised  $\beta$  coefficient for perceived maternal care ( $\beta = -.13$ ) indicated that as perceived maternal care increased, fear of intimacy was lower which was in accordance with the hypothesis. Perceived maternal overprotection entered in Step 3 explained an additional 1% of the variance but this was not a significant contribution. Separation-individuation entered in Step 4 reliably improved prediction of fear of intimacy and explained an additional 25% of the variance. The standardized  $\beta$  coefficient of .52 indicated that as hypothesised the higher the score on the S-IPI (indicating less resolved separation/individuation), the higher fear of intimacy. This result was significant ( $p < .05$ ). Perceived maternal overprotection was significant in the final model with a standardized  $\beta$  coefficient of -.18. This result indicated that as perceived maternal overprotection increased, fear of intimacy was lower which was contrary to the hypothesis. In contrast once considered with all other variables the contribution of perceived maternal care was no longer significant.

The full model with all variables included accounted for 35.1 % of the variance in fear of intimacy ( $F(3,130) = 48.97, p < .05$ ). Part correlations were examined and squared in order to give the unique variance in the outcome variable fear of intimacy explained by each independent variable (see Table 9). In the full model the variable separation-individuation accounted for the most unique variance (25%) in the outcome variable fear of intimacy, with gender and perceived maternal overprotection accounting for 2.9% and 2.6% of the variance respectively.

Table 9

*Part Correlations of the Independent Variables*

Variable	Part correlations	Unique variance (%)
Gender	.17	2.9
Perceived Maternal Care	-.11	1.2
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.16	2.6
Separation-Individuation	.50	25.0

**4.4.2 Suppressor effects.**

When perceived maternal care was entered in Step 2 it made a significant contribution to fear of intimacy ( $p < .05$ ). The inclusion of perceived maternal overprotection at Step 3 did not make a significant contribution perhaps because of the strong association (see Table 7) with perceived maternal care which remained significant ( $p < .05$ ). However, with the entry of separation-individuation at Step 4 the contribution of perceived maternal care was no longer significant ( $p > .05$ ). In contrast, perceived maternal overprotection did not make a significant contribution to fear of intimacy when entered at Step 3 ( $p > .05$ ), but in Step 4 when considered with gender, perceived maternal care and separation-individuation, perceived maternal overprotection made a significant contribution ( $p < .05$ ). It appears that the addition of both perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation suppressed the effects of perceived maternal care so it no longer offered a significant contribution to the overall model when all variables were included.

The partial correlations were examined to provide more information on the interrelationship between the variables. There was a small negative partial correlation between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy, controlling for perceived

maternal overprotection,  $r = -.20, p < .05$  with higher levels of care being associated with a lower fear of intimacy.

There was also a small negative partial correlation between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy, controlling for perceived maternal care, however this was not significant,  $r = -.10, p > .05$ . When separation-individuation was controlled there were no significant partial correlations between perceived maternal care,  $r = -.06, p > .05$  and fear of intimacy and perceived maternal overprotection,  $r = -.16, p > .05$  and fear of intimacy.

These results indicate that perceived maternal overprotection is influencing the relationship between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy. Given that both perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection no longer had significant partial correlations with fear of intimacy when separation-individuation was controlled, it seems that separation-individuation influences the relationship between these variables and fear of intimacy. This finding supports the results of the hierarchical regression and suggests that there is a complex interaction between the variables perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation.

A revised model based on the significant direct pathways is depicted below in Figure 3.

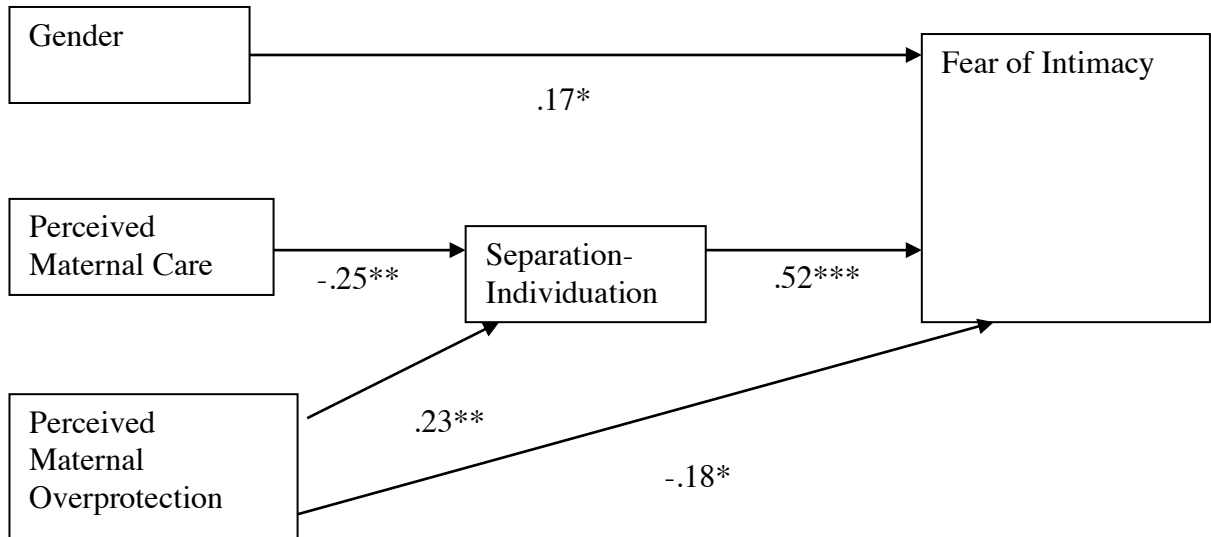


Figure 3. Revised model explaining fear of intimacy in partner relationships of emerging adults.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

#### 4.4.3 Indirect pathways.

Potential indirect pathways were examined using R.M. Baron and Kenny's (1986) four step process (see section 3.4). The Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) was used to establish the significance of the partial mediation. The appropriate  $\beta$  coefficients and standard error coefficients were entered into a free on-line program (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2006) to determine a  $p$ -value.

Regression analyses were conducted to determine if separation-individuation mediated the effect of perceived maternal care on the outcome variable fear of intimacy. Condition one was satisfied with perceived maternal care being significantly associated with fear of intimacy,  $F(1, 132) = 4.36, p < .05$ . Perceived maternal care was significantly associated with the mediator variable separation-individuation,  $F(1, 132) = 8.50, p < .05$  and therefore the second condition was satisfied. Examination of the  $\beta$  coefficient suggested that the higher the perceived

maternal care, the more resolved separation-individuation and therefore a lower score on the S-IPI ( $\beta = -.25, p < .05$ ).

The mediator variable separation-individuation was significantly associated with the outcome variable fear of intimacy,  $F(1, 132) = 54.24, p < .05$ ) satisfying condition three. The  $\beta$  coefficient ( $\beta = .54, p < .05$ ) suggested that the less resolved separation-individuation (as demonstrated by a higher score on the S-IPI) the higher the fear of intimacy.

For full mediation to be present there should be no significant association between the independent variable of perceived maternal care and the outcome variable of fear of intimacy when the mediator variable separation-individuation is entered into the model. A significant but reduced effect,  $F(2, 133) = 27.21, p < .05$ ) was found which indicated that separation-individuation partially mediated the association between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy. Figure 4 shows the  $\beta$  weights for each of the pathways. Separation individuation as a mediator of the association between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy was significant at the .05 level according to the Sobel test ( $p = .05$ ).

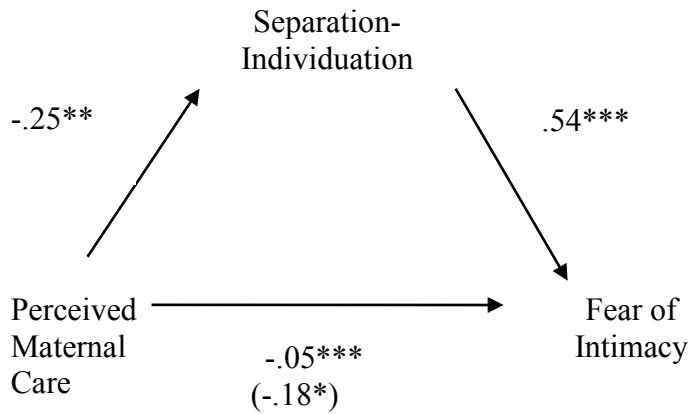


Figure 4. Separation-individuation as a mediator of the association between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Note: Contained within parenthesis is the standardized  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct pathway between the independent variable and the outcome variable.

In line with the hypotheses, it was planned to conduct a series of regression analyses to investigate whether separation-individuation mediated the association between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy. As previously shown (refer to Table 7), the correlation between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy was not significant. Furthermore the first regression analysis conducted indicated that condition one was not met as perceived maternal overprotection was not significantly associated with the outcome variable of fear of intimacy  $F(1, 133) = .007, p > .05$ . As the first condition was not satisfied, no further testing was conducted.

Based on the above hierarchical regression and mediational analyses, a parsimonious final model is presented as a revision of the original proposed model (See Figure 1). This revised model (Figure 5) consists of significant direct pathways from separation-individuation, gender and perceived maternal overprotection to fear

of intimacy. There is an indirect pathway from perceived maternal care to fear of intimacy partially mediated by separation-individuation.

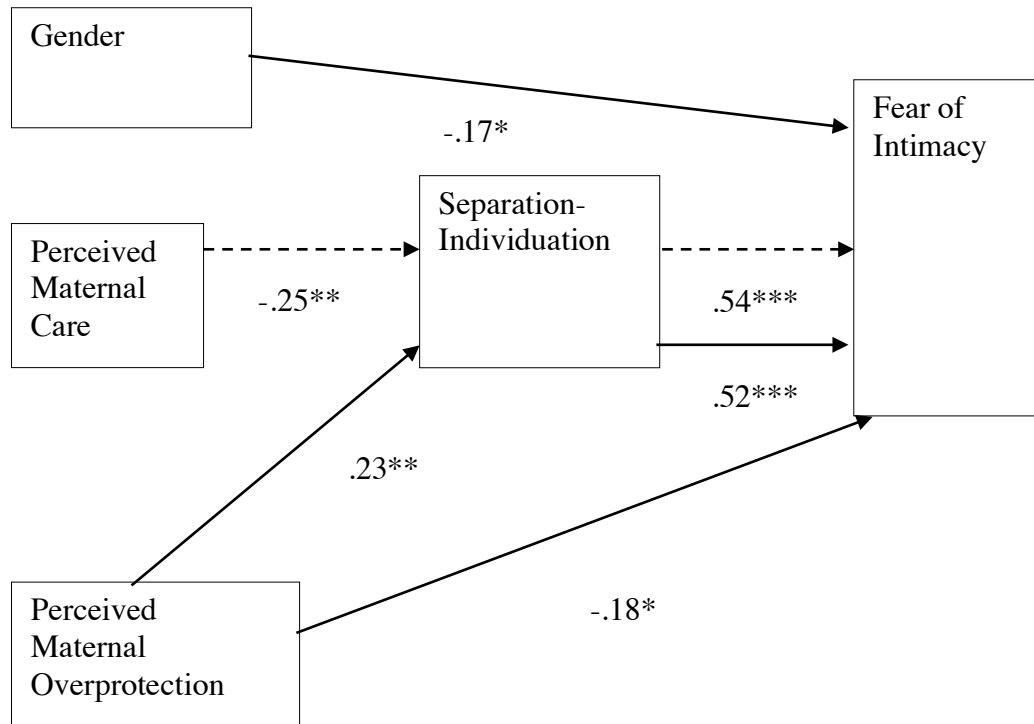


Figure 5. Final revised model depicting the factors influencing fear of intimacy via direct and indirect pathways.

Indirect Pathways ..... \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

#### 4.4.4 Post-Hoc analyses relating to the model.

As the results of the t-test showed that males had a significantly different fear of intimacy mean score from females, it was decided to test whether gender was acting as a moderating variable. Testing of moderation is conducted through the use of regression analysis using three predictors: the independent variable, the moderator variable, and the interaction or product term between the independent and moderator variable. Each variable is centered or coded (if a categorical variable such as gender) and they are multiplied to create the product or interaction term. The centering of the variables reduces issues associated with multicollinearity. A significant interaction

term in the final model indicates a moderating relationship. In the current study, gender was dummy coded (0 = males, 1 = females) and the variables of perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation were centered and multiplied with gender to obtain the relevant interaction terms.

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with the entry of gender and the centered independent variables at step 1 (perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection, separation-individuation) and the entry of the relevant product terms at step 2. See Table 10 for  $R^2$  *change* statistics, unstandardised  $B$  coefficients, standard errors of the unstandardised  $B$  coefficients, standardised  $\beta$  coefficients, and  $F$  *change* statistics associated with testing of moderation.



Table 10

*Summary of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis Assessing Gender as a Moderator between the Independent Variables Perceived Maternal Care, Perceived Maternal Overprotection and Separation-Individuation and the Outcome Variable Fear of Intimacy (N = 134).*

Variable	B	SE <sub>B</sub>	β	R <sup>2</sup> change	F change <sup>a</sup>
Step 1				.35	17.42***
Gender	6.68	2.85	.17*		
Perceived Maternal Care	-.34	.21	-.13		
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.47	.21	-.18*		
Separation Individuation	.23	.03	.52***		
Step 2				.00	.84
Gender	6.58	2.89	.16*		
Perceived Maternal Care	-.38	.24	-.15		
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.53	.25	-.21*		
Separation Individuation	.21	.04	.47***		
Gender X Perceived Maternal Care	.18	.57	.03		
Gender X Perceived Maternal Overprotection	.19	.48	.05		
Gender X Separation Individuation	.05	.07	.07		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Degrees of freedom, step 1 (4, 129), step 2 (3, 126)

In step 2 with the addition of the product terms the  $R^2$  change statistic was not significant ( $F(3,126) = 0.84, p > .05$ ) indicating that the interaction terms (gender x perceived maternal care, gender x perceived maternal overprotection, gender x separation-individuation) explained no additional variance in fear of intimacy. As the analysis has shown that gender was not acting as a moderator no further analyses (establishing the direction of the significant moderating relationship) were conducted.

Despite gender not being a significant moderating variable the results still showed that males had a significantly different fear of intimacy mean score from females. Therefore it seemed possible that the proposed model may not provide an appropriate fit for both sexes. Although in the current study there was no significant difference between males and females on separation-individuation previous research has reported gender differences relating to separation from parents (Kenny, 1987; Lucas, 1997). As reported previously, there was a significant difference in the mean scores for fear of intimacy between males and females so it was decided to conduct separate hierarchical regressions for males and females.

Two post-hoc power analyses were conducted using the free on-line program G-power (Faul et al., 2009) and the separate effect size for males and females respectively. Effect sizes were calculated by a free on-line calculator utilising the  $R^2$  (Soper, 2012). To compute achieved power for a test of multiple regression, the number of predictor variables was entered (three), the alpha was set to .05 and the respective effect sizes for males ( $f^2 = .64$ ) and females ( $f^2 = .35$ ) were entered into the program. Power was as at a level of .99 for both males and females which was adequate.

In each of these separate regressions fear of intimacy was entered as the outcome variable in a hierarchical regression with the predictor variables entered in

the following order: perceived maternal care (Step 1), perceived maternal overprotection (Step 2) and separation-individuation (Step 3). Tables 11 and 13 show the  $R^2$  change statistics, unstandardised  $B$  coefficients, standard errors of the unstandardised  $B$  coefficients, standardised  $\beta$  coefficients, and  $F$  change statistics for the separate hierarchical regressions conducted for males and females.

Table 11

*Summary of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Fear of Intimacy for Males ( $n = 43$ )*

Variable	$B$	$SE_B$	$\beta$	$R^2$ change	$F$ change <sup>a</sup>
Step 1				.02	.84
Perceived Maternal Care	-.46	.50	-.14	-	-
Step 2				.00	.00
Perceived Maternal Care	-.43	.67	-.13	-	-
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	.03	.52	.01	-	-
Step 3				.37	23.64***
Perceived Maternal Care	-.20	.54	-.06	-	-
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.34	.42	-.14	-	-
Separation-Individuation	.26	.05	.64***	-	-

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Degrees of freedom, step 1 (1, 41), step 2 (1, 40), step 3 (1, 39)

The inclusion of perceived maternal care in Step 1 explained 2% of the variance of the outcome variable fear of intimacy for males but this contribution was not significant. The entry of perceived maternal overprotection in Step 2 did not explain any additional variance in fear of intimacy for males. Separation-individuation entered in Step 3 reliably improved prediction of fear of intimacy for males and explained 37% of the variance with a standardized  $\beta$  coefficient of .64. This indicated that the higher the score on the S-IPI (indicating less resolved separation/individuation), the higher the fear of intimacy. This result was significant ( $p < .05$ ). Neither perceived maternal care nor perceived maternal overprotection provided a significant contribution ( $p > .05$ ) when considered with separation-individuation at Step 3.

The full model with all variables included accounted for 39% of the variance in fear of intimacy ( $F(3,39) = 8.31, p < .05$ ). Part correlations were examined and squared in order to give the unique variance in the outcome variable fear of intimacy explained by each independent variable (see Table 12). In the full model the variable separation-individuation accounted for the most unique variance (37.2%) in the outcome variable fear of intimacy.

Table 12

*Part Correlations of the Independent Variables for Males*

Variable	Part correlations	Unique variance (%)
Perceived Maternal Care	-.05	.3
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.10	1.0
Separation-Individuation	.61	37.2

The same hierarchical regression was conducted for females.

Table 13

*Summary of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Fear of Intimacy for Females (n = 91)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE<sub>B</sub></i>	$\beta$	<i>R<sup>2</sup> change</i>	<i>F change<sup>a</sup></i>
Step 1				.04	3.72
Perceived Maternal Care	-.46	.24	-.20	-	-
Step 2				.02	2.06
Perceived Maternal Care	-.60	.26	-.26*	-	-
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.40	.28	-.16	-	-
Step 3				.20	23.23***
Perceived Maternal Care	-.38	.23	-.17	-	-
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.53	.25	-.21*	-	-
Separation-Individuation	.21	.04	.46***	-	-

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

<sup>a</sup>Degrees of freedom, step 1 (1, 89), step 2 (1, 88), step 3 (1, 87)

The inclusion of perceived maternal care in Step 1 explained 4% of the variance in the outcome variable fear of intimacy for females but this contribution was not significant. The entry of perceived maternal overprotection in Step 2 explained an additional 2% of the variance in fear of intimacy in females but did not reliably improve prediction of the outcome variable fear of intimacy as its contribution was also not significant.

Separation-individuation entered in Step 3 reliably improved prediction of fear of intimacy for females and explained 20% of the variance with a standardized  $\beta$  coefficient of .46. This result indicated that the higher the score on the S-IPI (indicating less resolved separation/individuation), the higher the fear of intimacy. This result was significant ( $p < .05$ ). Perceived maternal overprotection was significant in the final model with a standardized  $\beta$  coefficient of -.21. This result indicated that as perceived maternal overprotection increased, fear of intimacy was lower which was contrary to the hypothesis. In contrast perceived maternal care made a significant contribution in Step 2 when considered with perceived maternal overprotection but was no longer significant in Step 3 when all variables had been entered.

The full model with all variables included accounted for 26 % of the variance in fear of intimacy ( $F(3,87) = 10.18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Part correlations were examined and squared in order to give the unique variance in the outcome variable fear of intimacy explained by each independent variable (see Table 14). In the full model the variable separation-individuation accounted for the most unique variance (20.3%) in the outcome variable fear of intimacy with perceived maternal overprotection accounting for 4% of the variance.

Table 14

*Part Correlations of the Independent Variables for Females*

Variable	Part correlations	Unique variance (%)
Perceived Maternal Care	-.17	2.3
Perceived Maternal Overprotection	-.20	4.0
Separation-Individuation	.45	20.3

Overall these regressions indicated that as with the original hierarchical regression conducted to test the model (see Table 8), the variable separation-individuation offered a significant contribution to the model when males and females were considered separately. Interestingly the variable of perceived maternal overprotection when considered with perceived maternal care and separation-individuation only made a significant contribution to the model for females and the direction of the association was contrary to the original hypothesis.

#### **4.5 Living Situation**

A central issue for the current thesis was participants' living situation (Table 14). There was a similar proportion of participants living with partners (13.4%) and living in shared households with other young people (14.2%), while more than half (59.7%) of the sample was still living at home with their parents. Those that cited "other" as their living situation specified other relatives they were living with. Participants who were living at home ( $n = 80$ ) cited the following reasons as to why they were still living at home: "Financial reasons" (38.8%), "saving money" (26.3%), "comfortable at home" (22.5%), and "not ready to leave" (7.5%). The categories "accepted cultural/religious practices" and "other" were each endorsed by 2.5% of participants.

Table 15

*Participants' Living Situation*

Living Situation	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Living with parents	59.7%	80
Sharing house/flat	13.4%	18
Living with partner	17.2%	23
Living alone	6.7%	9
Other	3.0%	4

The means for each of the continuous variables based on living situation are shown in Table 16.

Table 16

*Mean Scores for Perceived Maternal Care, Perceived Maternal Overprotection, Separation-Individuation and Fear of Intimacy according to Living Situation.*

Living Situation	Variable	Mean	Range
Living with parents <sup>1</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	29.54	13-36
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	12.64	3-25
	Separation-Individuation	138.69	56-280
	Fear of Intimacy	81.09	48-123
Sharing house/flat <sup>2</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	25.78	3-35
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	11.78	2-24
	Separation-Individuation	160.94	76-246
	Fear of Intimacy	91.28	56-123
Living with partner <sup>3</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	28.13	10-36
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	12.78	2-34
	Separation-Individuation	127.91	70-169
	Fear of Intimacy	67.96	38-89



Living alone <sup>4</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	24.56	9-35
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	18.44	9-36
	Separation-Individuation	136.33	81-232
	Fear of Intimacy	83.78	61-109
Other <sup>5</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	21.00	13-35
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	21.50	4-32
	Separation-Individuation	139.25	111-176
	Fear of Intimacy	73.00	60-78

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<sup>1</sup>*n* = 80, <sup>2</sup>*n* = 18, <sup>3</sup>*n* = 23, <sup>4</sup>*n* = 9, <sup>5</sup>*n* = 4

In order to test the hypothesis that participants who lived away from home would have a more resolved level of separation-individuation than those living at home with their parents, participants were categorized into two groups according to living situation category (1 = “living at home”, 2 = “not living at home”). An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if there was a difference in the mean separation-individuation scores of these two groups.

Results indicated that there was no significant difference in separation-individuation scores between those living with their parents ( $M = 138.69$ ,  $SD = 45.12$ ) and those not living with their parents, ( $M = 141.17$ ,  $SD = 38.21$ ;  $t(132) = -.331$ ,  $p > .05$  (two tailed). However inspection of Table 16 shows some differences in the mean scores of the four continuous variables for the various living situations so post-hoc analyses were conducted.

A series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to establish if there were any significant differences in mean scores of the four continuous variables across the different categories of living situations (“living with parents”, “living with partner”, “sharing house/flat with other young people”, “living alone”,

“other”). There was no statistical significant difference in mean separation individuation scores across the living situation categories,  $F(4,129) = 1.64, p > .05$ , but there was a significant difference in the mean scores for fear of intimacy:  $F(4,129) = 4.90, p < .05$ . The effect size calculated using eta squared, was 0.13 indicating that the actual difference between the mean scores was quite large. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean fear of intimacy score of participants living with their parents ( $M = 81.09, SD = 18.34$ ) was significantly different from the mean fear of intimacy score of participants living with a partner ( $M = 67.96, SD = 14.30$ ). The mean fear of intimacy score for those living with a partner was also significantly different from the fear of intimacy score of those sharing a house/flat with other young people ( $M = 91.28, SD = 20.38$ ). There were no other differences found. When splitting the sample into those who were living at home and those who were living away from home, the independent sample t-test revealed no significant difference in fear of intimacy between these two groups,  $t(132), = 0.72, p > .05$  (two tailed).

The mean perceived maternal overprotection scores were also found to be significantly different across the living situation categories,  $F(4,129) = 2.98, p < .05$ . The effect size calculated using eta squared, was 0.08 indicating that the actual difference between the mean scores was quite small. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test did not identify any significant differences between the various living situations. There was also a significant difference in the mean scores for perceived maternal care,  $F(4,129) = 3.09, p < .05$  but the actual difference between the mean scores was also quite small (effect size = 0.09). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test did not identify any significant differences between the different groups.

#### 4.6 Relationship Status

In the current sample, 46 participants reported that they were not seeing or dating anyone and 19 participants were dating casually. Forty-four participants were in a committed relationship but not living with their partner and 23 participants were living with their partner. Two participants classified themselves in a partner status as “other”. The mean length of relationships for those who reported their relationship status as living with their partner or in a committed relationship and not living with their partner ( $n = 67$ ) was 2 years and 7 months ( $SD = 2.26$ ) with the duration of relationships ranging from 1 month to 9 years. No significant correlation was found between the length of the relationship and fear of intimacy,  $r = -.20$ ,  $n = 67$ ,  $p > .05$ . No other significant correlations were found between length of relationship and the predictor variables (perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation).

The mean number of past relationships of at least three months duration reported by participants was 1.9 relationships. No significant correlation was found between the number of past relationships and the outcome variable fear of intimacy,  $r = .11$ ,  $p > .05$ . No other significant correlations were found between number of past relationships and the predictor variables (perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation).

Table 17 shows the proportion of participants for each relationship status and Table 18 shows the mean scores for each of the continuous variables based on relationship status.

Table 17

*Participants' Relationship Status*

Relationship Status	Percentage	<i>n</i>
Not seeing/dating anyone	34.3%	46
In a committed relationship	32.8%	44
Dating casually	14.2%	19
Other	1.5%	2

Table 18

*Mean Scores for each Variable according to Relationship Status (N = 134)*

Relationship Status	Variable	Mean	Range
Not seeing/dating anyone <sup>1</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	28.43	9-36
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	13.11	3-32
	Separation-Individuation	135.63	77-229
	Fear of Intimacy	85.74	48-123
In a committed relationship <sup>2</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	27.80	3-36
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	14.46	2-36
	Separation-Individuation	143.93	57-280
	Fear of Intimacy	74.61	50-110
Living with partner <sup>3</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	28.13	10-36
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	12.78	2-34
	Separation-Individuation	127.91	70-169
	Fear of Intimacy	67.96	38-89
Dating casually <sup>4</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	29.11	17-36
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	11.11	3-23
	Separation-Individuation	152.63	56-249
	Fear of Intimacy	90.79	57-113

Other <sup>5</sup>	Perceived Maternal Care	24.00	21-27
	Perceived Maternal Overprotection	12.50	2-23
	Separation-Individuation	152.00	115-189
	Fear of Intimacy	112.00	110-114

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<sup>1</sup>*n* = 46, <sup>2</sup>*n* = 44, <sup>3</sup>*n* = 23, <sup>4</sup>*n* = 19, <sup>5</sup>*n* = 2

To test the hypothesis that participants who were in a relationship would have more resolved separation-individuation than participants who were not in a relationship, participants were categorized into two groups according to partner status category (1 = “not in a relationship”, 2 = “in a relationship”). Those that selected “living with partner”, or “in a committed relationship but not living with partner” were considered to be “in a relationship” (*n* = 67). Those that selected “not seeing/dating anyone” or “dating casually” were considered to be “not in a relationship” (*n* = 65). Those participants (*n* = 2) who endorsed the item “other” were excluded as no information was provided to indicate what this response specifically meant.

An independent samples t-test conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the mean separation-individuation scores of these two groups showed that there was no significant difference in separation-individuation scores between those participants not in a relationship (*M* = 140.60, *SD* = 42.20) and those in a relationship (*M* = 138.43, *SD* = 42.85); *t*(130) = .293, *p* > .05 (two tailed).

However inspection of Table 18 shows some differences in the mean scores of the four continuous variables for the various categories of partner status. A series of one way between-groups ANOVAs were conducted to establish if there were any significant differences between the different categories of partner status (“not seeing/dating anyone”, “in a committed relationship but not living with partner”,

“living with partner”, “dating casually”) for the mean scores of the four continuous variables. There was no statistical significance in separation individuation scores,  $F(3,128) = 1.49, p > .05$ , perceived maternal overprotection,  $F(3,128) = 1.02, p > .05$ , and perceived maternal care  $F(3,128) = 0.16, p > .05$  across the various categories of partner status.

There was a significant difference in the mean scores for fear of intimacy across the partner status categories,  $F(3,128) = 10.03, p < .05$ . The effect size calculated using eta squared, was 0.19 indicating that the actual difference between the mean scores was large. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean fear of intimacy score for those not seeing/ dating anyone ( $M = 85.74, SD = 16.89$ ) was significantly different at the .05 level from the mean fear of intimacy score of those living with a partner ( $M = 67.96, SD = 14.30$ ). Participants who were in a committed relationship and not living with their partner ( $M = 74.61, SD = 16.99$ ) had a significantly different mean fear of intimacy score at the .05 level from the mean fear of intimacy score of those not seeing/dating anyone ( $M = 85.74, SD = 16.89$ ) and those dating casually ( $M = 90.79, SD = 17.72$ ). The mean fear of intimacy score of those living with their partner ( $M = 67.96, SD = 14.30$ ) was also significantly different at the .05 level from the mean fear of intimacy score of those dating casually ( $M = 90.79, SD = 17.72$ ). Overall, when splitting the sample into those who were in a relationship and those who were not, an independent samples t-test also indicated there was a significant difference in fear of intimacy scores,  $t(130), 5.11, p < .05$  (two-tailed) between these two groups.

The hypothesis that in comparison to young adults living at home there would be a higher proportion of young adults living away from home who are in a relationship was tested using Chi square test of independence based on the categories

described above: living situation category (1 = “living at home”, 2 = “not living at home”) and partner status category (1 = “not in a relationship”, 2 = “in a relationship”). Again those who classed their relationship status as “other” were excluded from this analysis. Results indicated that a higher proportion of young people living at home ( $n = 79$ ) were not in a relationship (58.2%) compared to those who were not living at home ( $n = 53$ ) but were also not in a relationship (35.8%). More young people not living at home ( $n = 53$ ) were in a relationship (64.2%) compared to those that were living at home ( $n = 79$ ) and in a relationship (41.3%). The Chi square test of independence indicated a significant association between living situation and partner status,  $\chi^2 (1, n = 132) = 6.36, p < .05, \phi = .22$ . A phi score of .22 indicates a small effect size according to J.W Cohen (1988).

Given the significant association between living situation and partner status identified by the chi square analysis, a possible association between gender and living situation was tested using a post-hoc chi square test of independence based on the categories of gender (male and female) and living situation (“living with parents”, “sharing house/flat with other young people”, “living with partner”, “living alone”, “other”). For females ( $n = 91$ ), 59.3% lived with their parents, 11% shared a house/flat with other young people, 18.7% were living with their partner, 7.7% were living alone and 3.3% selected “other” as their living situation. For males ( $n = 43$ ), 60.5% lived with their parents, 18.6% shared a house/flat with other young people, 14% were living with their partner, 4.7% were living alone and 2.3% selected “other” as their living situation. The percentages indicate that a similar proportion of males and females were living at home with their parents, however slightly more females were living with a partner than males and more males than females were living in a shared household with other young people. However the chi square test of

independence indicated no significant association between gender and living situation,  $\chi^2 (4, N = 134) = 2.14, p > .05, \phi = .71$ .

A post hoc chi square test of independence was also conducted based on the categories of gender and partner status (“not seeing/dating anyone”, “in a committed relationship but not living with partner”, “living with partner” and “dating casually”). Again, those participants who endorsed “other” as their relationship status were removed from this analysis, which was conducted with the remaining participants ( $n = 132$ ). For females ( $n = 90$ ) 30% were not seeing/dating anyone, 36.7% were in a committed relationship but not living with their partner, 18.9% were living with their partner and 14.4% were dating casually. For males ( $n = 42$ ) 45.2% were not seeing/dating anyone, 26.2% were in a committed relationship but not living with their partner, 14.3% were living with their partner and 14.3% were dating casually. A higher percentage of males were not seeing/dating anyone, and a higher percentage of females were either in a committed relationship but not living with their partner or living with their partner, compared to their male counterparts. A similar proportion of males and females were dating casually. However the chi square test of independence indicated no significant association between gender and partner status,  $\chi^2 (3, n = 132) = 3.20, p > .05, \phi = .14$ .



## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Overview of Aims and Hypotheses**

The aim of this study was to investigate the contribution of past parenting and separation-individuation to young adults' fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships. Participants in the study were aged between 21 and 25 years and so could be considered as part of the period of emerging adulthood. This stage of development is known as emerging as it involves a period whereby the individual is still exploring various life options. In particular during this time there is movement away from dependence on parents and more of a focus on greater autonomy in functioning. Part of this move towards autonomy and independence is moving out of home and the establishment of romantic relationships.

In recent times, it has become evident that in Australian culture an increased number of young people (or emerging adults) are living at home and there is a decline in the number of young people who are involved in romantic relationships. Questions arose around whether there was an association between these two societal changes and the possibility that other psychological factors may be involved. One of these potential factors was fear of intimacy, with intimacy deemed a crucial aspect of romantic relationships and a lack of such intimacy being linked to negative outcomes for the individual. A young person's past relationship with their parents (specifically perceived maternal care and overprotection) was thought to be relevant to fear of intimacy as well as to the developmental task of separation-individuation. The overall impact of all these variables on an individual's fear of intimacy was of primary interest. Based on information from past research, a model was developed incorporating the variables of perceived maternal care, perceived maternal

overprotection and separation-individuation to examine their contribution to fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships.

## **5.2 Summary of Results**

Hypotheses related to associations between a fear of intimacy and the following variables: perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection and separation-individuation were all supported. The hypothesized relationship between perceived maternal overprotection and a fear of intimacy was not supported. Further hypotheses related to associations between separation-individuation and the following variables: perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection were also supported.

The hypotheses that there would be a difference in separation-individuation based on living situation and relationship status respectively were not supported. There was no difference in separation individuation between those living at home, and those living away from home and similarly there was no difference in separation-individuation between young people in a relationship, and those not in a relationship.

As hypothesized there was a significantly higher proportion of young adults who were living at home and not in a relationship, compared to those who were not living at home and not in a relationship. Furthermore, there was a significantly higher proportion of young adults who were not living at home and in a relationship, than those who were living at home and in a relationship.

### **5.2.1 Proposed model.**

The study tested a model proposed to explain fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships during emerging adulthood (see Figure 1) and examined the relative contribution of perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection

and separation-individuation. Gender was included as a covariate in the model as preliminary analyses had shown a difference in the fear of intimacy between males and females. The proposed model explained 35.1% of the variance in fear of intimacy. Separation-individuation accounted for the most unique amount of variance, followed by gender and perceived maternal overprotection (although to a much lesser extent). In the last step of the hierarchical regression the addition of separation-individuation to the existing model variables, perceived maternal overprotection and perceived maternal care, suppressed the effect of perceived maternal care so it no longer offered a significant contribution to the model. There appeared to be a complex interaction between the variables, particularly between perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection. On the basis of the variance explained, other unexamined variables are influencing fear of intimacy in young adults.

### **5.2.2 Indirect pathways.**

The hypothesis, that separation-individuation would mediate the association between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships, was supported. Separation-individuation was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy. However, contrary to the hypothesis separation-individuation did not mediate the association between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy in heterosexual partner relationships.

These findings may suggest that other unknown/unexplored factors are involved in mediating the relationship between perceived maternal care and maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy. These could be factors such as the individual's past relationship with their fathers, whether they had siblings or were an only child, birth order and the actual quality of the relationship between the individual and their

mother and father. Despite this, there is some evidence that indicates interrelationships between separation-individuation, perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy.

### **5.2.3 Post-Hoc Analyses.**

As there was a sex difference in the outcome variable, fear of intimacy, it was decided to test the model separately for males and females. Results showed that separation-individuation accounted for the most unique variance in fear of intimacy when males and females were considered separately and for females, perceived maternal overprotection also made a significant unique contribution.

## **5.3 Fear of Intimacy**

In the current study the mean fear of intimacy score was 80.14 (males = 87.05, females = 76.88) with a significant difference between males and females (discussed in detail in section 5.14). The level of fear of intimacy in participants in the current study is largely consistent with that reported by Descutner and Thelen's (1991) from their study with college psychology students (mean age 19.21 years, mean score = 78.75) and Doi and Thelen's (1993) study with middle aged participants (30-55 years, mean score 79.58). The current mean fear of intimacy score was similar to that reported for non-smokers (80.16) in a study comparing heavy smokers with non-smokers, (mean age 28.11 years) but lower than the mean for smokers (86.54). Valid comparisons with this study are difficult however as no information on cigarette smoking was obtained for participants in the current study.

The fear of intimacy score in the current study was higher than those reported by Terrell et al.'s (2000) study with psychology students (18-21 years, mean score males = 70.77, mean score females = 65.51) and the male control group (mean age

28.2 years, mean score = 72.4) of a study with sex offenders (where the current study's score was lower than the forensic population, mean score = 108.8) (Bumby & Hansen, 1997). The score was also higher than the mean fear of intimacy score reported for both male (70.77) and female (65.51) college students (Thelen et al., 2000). It was also higher than the control group (mean score 71.7, mean age 22.14) in the study of women with bulimia and lower than those who were diagnosed with bulimia (mean score = 93.2) (Pruitt et al. 1992). However the mean fear of intimacy score obtained in the current study was lower than that for community adolescents tested on this measure (mean age 15.7 years, mean score = 84.63) (Sherman & Thelen, 1996). When comparing the current study to veterans with and without PTSD and their partners, the current score was lower than males with PTSD (mean score = 104.0) but higher than those males without PTSD (mean score = 76.0), females with a PTSD partner (mean score = 76.5) and females without a PTSD partner (mean score = 63.9) (Riggs et al., 1998). The variation in scores between the current study and past research may be attributable to the differences in characteristics of these samples. In a recent study of cancer survivors and a control group of young adults without cancer (18-25 years) (A.L Thompson, 2007), the mean fear of intimacy score for survivors was similar to that obtained in the current study. However the mean score obtained for the controls (76.37) was lower than the mean for the current study. It is unclear why the current sample was similar to survivors and not to the controls as would have been expected.

#### **5.4 Factors Influencing Fear of Intimacy**

Separation-individuation accounted for the most unique variance in the outcome variable fear of intimacy, with the direction of the association indicating that

more resolved separation-individuation was linked to a lower fear of intimacy. Future studies may want to investigate whether less resolved separation-individuation is a barrier to the achievement of intimacy within a romantic relationship. Past research has highlighted the importance of separation-individuation and the capacity for intimacy in a romantic relationship as major developmental tasks (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968; Scharf & Mayseless, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). The current study did not measure intimacy in romantic relationships, but one of the factors identified by Hatfield (1984) as an underlying reason for a fear of intimacy was a fear of being engulfed, that is, losing one's individuality or losing themselves in another. As results from the current study indicate that separation-individuation is linked to fear of intimacy it is possible that separation-individuation may influence the development of capacity for intimacy via fear of intimacy. If an individual has not resolved their separation-individuation with their parents, they may be engulfed in their relationship with them and lack a sense of individualism. It then does not seem surprising that the individual may fear being engulfed in another close relationship such as one with a romantic partner. This concept of engulfment could be investigated in future research.

As noted above in the summary of results higher perceived maternal care was associated with a lower fear of intimacy. Past research has found that perceptions of high care during childhood are linked to a secure attachment style whereas perceptions of high overprotection in childhood are linked to an insecure attachment style (Gittleman et al., 1998). Similarly the presence of nurturing and supportive families in adolescence has been linked to supportiveness and less hostility in young adult romantic relationships (Conger et al., 2000), young adults' views of parents as warm and responsive were associated with them having positive views of self and

others (Collins & Read, 1990), and those who had more positive reports of past parenting had better quality relationships with both parents and a romantic partner (Dalton et al., 2006). Most recently, Madsen and Collins (2011) found that positive parent-child processes were associated with better romantic relationship processes in young adulthood. The capacity for intimacy is believed to be linked to early parent-child relationships (Calarusso, 1992), with the origin of a secure attachment being linked to positive experiences that an individual has when seeking care from others (Cassidy, 2001). While this past research did not use the same measure as the current study (that is, the fear of intimacy scale) the studies highlight the positive link between parental care and romantic relationships. The finding in the current study that high perceived maternal care was linked to a lower fear of intimacy in romantic relationships is not inconsistent with the links reported in the cited previous studies.

Both perceived maternal care and perceived maternal overprotection were associated with separation-individuation providing some evidence for the influence of maternal parenting, on separation-individuation. Those participants who had a perception of high maternal care in childhood had more resolved separation-individuation. It is possible that the perceived care and warmth received from the mothers of the participants in the current study may be linked to the supporting of their child's needs, including their need for independence, thereby supporting the negotiation of the separation-individuation process between parent and child.

Separation-individuation was less resolved for those who had an experience of high overprotection in the parenting they received from their mothers. This finding is consistent with past research that has suggested that high overprotective or controlling parenting does not facilitate the development of autonomy and independence. O'Conner et al. (1996) demonstrated a link between separation from parents in

adulthood, and family interactions in adolescence that lacked the establishment of autonomy and relatedness.

While as noted in the summary of results the bivariate association between perceived maternal overprotection and fear of intimacy was not significant, results from the hierarchical regression analysis showed that perceived maternal overprotection made a small but significant unique contribution to fear of intimacy after controlling for the other independent variables. The direction of the association indicated that higher perceived maternal overprotection was linked to a lower fear of intimacy which was in contrast to the direction hypothesised in the proposed model.

It is possible that participants who had experienced higher overprotection (which involves a level of control) would be somewhat accustomed to intimacy, facilitated by a presumably close, controlling and protective relationship with a caregiver. It would be useful for future studies to examine the nature of a romantic relationship for those who appear to have experienced high maternal overprotection but demonstrate a low fear of intimacy. Arseth et al. (2009) identified a category of female participants within their study known as “mergers” (those having a tendency for enmeshment, dependency and idealized perceptions of partners) who had difficulties with the process of separation-individuation. It is possible that the attributes or quality of the relationship may be affected by higher perceived maternal overprotection and could perhaps involve some of the factors identified by Arseth et al. (2009). Presumably, a highly overprotective relationship would promote dependency and a degree of enmeshment with the caregiver which may then extend to a romantic relationship, facilitated by a process of social learning and/or attachment related mechanisms.



### 5.5 Past Parenting

The mean score for past maternal care (28.20) in the current study was slightly higher than the Australian normative study (mean score 26.8) and the additional study conducted by these authors with patients who saw general practitioners (mean score 26.9) (Parker et al., 1979). Scores in the current sample were more similar to young Australian women of a similar age (18-25 years, mean age 21.24 years) with or without Type 1 diabetes (mean score for the total sample = 28.25, control group mean score = 28.05) (Andreassen, 2009). Gittleman et al. (1998) reported some of the means for their sample which was split into groups according to attachment style. The following maternal care scores were provided: secure women = 28.4, fearful women = 22.8, secure men = 30.1 and fearful men = 25.7). The scores for secure women and secure men were similar to the current mean. Overall the mean score for maternal care obtained in the current study was fairly consistent with previous research.

Regarding perceived maternal overprotection, the mean score (13.20) in the current study was slightly lower than that reported for the first study (mean score = 14.7) in Parker et al.'s (1979) paper but nearly identical to the mean score (13.3) reported for the additional study within the same paper. In comparison to Andreassen's (2009) study, when looking at those young women without Type 1 diabetes (mean score maternal overprotection = 11.84), the mean score for the current study was higher. Gittleman et al. (1998) reported maternal overprotection scores of 11.1, 11.6, 16.1 and 18.1 for secure men, dismissive men, fearful men and preoccupied men respectively. The overall mean score from the current study (13.20) and the mean score for males (12.90) appear to be a little higher than those reported for the secure and dismissive men. When considering the past studies together, it seems as though the mean maternal overprotection score for the current study is

higher overall. It is unclear as to why the current mean overprotection score would be higher, but may be attributable to differences in the type of samples used.

Andreassen's (2009) study included an all female sample and Gittleman et al. (1998) utilized pregnant women and their partners, with the women ranging in age from 20 to 43 and the men ranging from 21 to 52 years of age.

### **5.6 Relationship status of participants**

According to self-report, 32.8 % of the sample defined themselves as being in a committed relationship but not living with their partner ( $n = 44$ ). A much smaller proportion of the sample (17.2%) reported that they were living with their partner; in comparison the ABS (2009) reported that 16% of young adults aged 18 to 24 years were either married or in a defacto relationship. However it is difficult to make a complete comparison with these national statistics as married people were not included in the current study.

Results were similar to those from an Australian study of 23 to 24 year old adults (Smart & Vassallo, 2008) which reported 31% of participants, compared to 34.3% in the current study, were not seeing, dating anyone. Regarding those in a committed relationship but not living with their partner, Smart and Vassallo (2008) reported 28% of participants in this situation versus 32.8% in the current study. A smaller proportion of those participants in the current study were living with their partner and a larger proportion was dating casually (17.2 % and 14.2 % respectively) compared to the earlier study (26% and 7% respectively).

There are a number of possible reasons as to why fewer young people appear to be in committed romantic relationships. As highlighted earlier (Roisman et al., 2004) the increasing pressure to obtain tertiary education and concentration on careers may have led young people to focus less on committing themselves to a serious

romantic relationship. There has been a shift in the workforce with people working longer hours, therefore allowing less time to invest in developing romantic relationships. The rise in on-line dating websites has encouraged the activity of “dating” and in today’s society there is much more access to nightlife as well as it being more socially acceptable to engage in “one night stands”.

In addition, there has also been the recent development of social networking websites. Social media may have disguised the need for dyadic relationships and inadvertently encouraged the avoidance of intimacy as relationships take place via a computer rather than with individuals face to face. This new phenomenon may account for the lower number of young people in romantic relationships as more social connections are made via social media rather than in person, decreasing their romantic opportunities and facilitating a lack of intimacy with others.

The past research by Arnett (2001) indicated that only 10% of emerging adults endorsed the item “committed to a long term love relationship” as a signifier of reaching adulthood. Although such signifiers were not measured in the current study, this ambivalence on the part of emerging adults to committed romantic relationships may also assist in explaining why fewer young people are involved in romantic relationships.

It is possible that participants in a committed relationship but not living with their partner, may still be establishing themselves financially as perhaps due to higher education, they may have taken longer to save money due to not having been in the workforce as long as others who had not participated in higher education. Therefore they cannot afford to move out of home and live with a partner. An individual’s romantic partner’s work/financial situation may play a part also, as if they have not been in the workforce long, this may make it harder to live together. The rising cost of

housing in Australia, whether buying or renting, may make it difficult for couples to live together in their own place of residence. In addition, generation factors and young people's expectations are likely to play a part. For example, previous generations would move out with the bare minimum in terms of furniture and household goods, whereas nowadays it appears that we are a very consumer driven society, with young people wanting a new LCD TV and the latest computer before they move out of the parental home.

A potential difficulty in interpreting the results of the current study is possible variations among participants as to what constitutes a relationship. The length of relationships for participants ranged from nine years to just one month. It seems possible that not all those who had been romantically involved with someone for say one month would consider this a relationship. There may have been individuals that had been romantically involved with someone for several months but may have considered this dating. For example, there may have been participants in the category of in a committed relationship but not living with their partner that were more like their counterparts in the category of dating casually and vice versa. The potential blurring between these two categories in the current study may have masked any differences between those young adults who were in a relationship and those who were not. This may explain why the length of the relationship (for those participants considered in a relationship) was not significantly related to any of the continuous variables (including fear of intimacy and separation-individuation) and why there was no difference in separation-individuation between those in a relationship and those not in a relationship (discussed further in section 5.10).

### 5.7 Living Situation

An issue of interest in this thesis was whether young people were still living in the parental home. The majority (59.7%) of the participants in this sample was living at home and there was no difference according to gender with 60.5% of males living at home and 59.3% of females living at home. This result was a little higher than the ABS reported statistics from 2006-2007 which indicated that 49% of males and 45% of females aged 18 to 24 years were still living at home (ABS, 2008). Numbers were also higher in the current study than those reported for participants in the Australian Temperament Project (Smart & Vassallo, 2008) (38% of participants living at home at 23- 24 years of age) and much higher than reported results from studies of young German adults published in 2006 (14% living at home, ranging in age from 21-25 years of age) (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006) and in 2010 (17%, living home at home, ranging in age from 20-25 years of age) (Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). In terms of other countries, the current findings are similar to males (20 to 24 years) living in central and western European countries (61% vs 60.5% in the current study), but higher than the same aged females from these countries (41% vs 59.3%) (Cordon, 1997). However in the current study the proportion of young adults living at home was not as high as the proportions reported for males and females from southern European countries (Cordon, 1997) and Belgium (Kins & Beyers, 2010) . The percentage of both females and males (20 to 24 years) living in the parental home in Belgium was higher than the comparative figures for females and males in the current study (64% vs 59.3% for females and 78% vs 60.5% for males)(Kins & Beyers, 2010). A smaller proportion of young people (20 to 24 years) from the United States were living at home (52% of males and 37% of females) (Goldscheider, 1997). While these reported American statistics are more than ten years old in more recent studies cultural differences in

marriage have been proposed as a reason for the smaller proportion of young people living at home in the United States. Fussell et al. (2007) noted that individuals from the United States enter into marriage earlier than peers in Australia and Canada. Carroll et al. (2009) reported that according to statistics from the United States Bureau of Census for 2005, 25% of women and 14% of men between the ages of 20 and 24 years were married. In contrast, in 2006, of those Australians aged 18 to 24 years, only 5% were in a registered marriage (ABS, 2009).

Differences in the results from the current study compared to past research could be attributable to the sample size of the current study, which was much smaller than that of the cited previous studies. It could also be related to the recruitment method used whereby participants recommended the study and identified other potential participants. This method of sampling may have introduced a bias towards participants having similar living situations. Cultural differences may also explain some of the disparity in results between the current study and the findings from the work of Seiffge-Krenke and colleagues. Within Australian culture it is becoming increasingly common for young adults to remain living in the family home while studying or saving money. Seiffge-Krenke (2006) considered normative time frames of leaving home in Germany to be 23 and 21 for males and females respectively. The most current Australian statistics suggest that nearly half of 18 to 24 year olds are still living at home suggesting major differences in lifestyle, social and cultural expectations. Cherlin et al. (1997) highlight that young people from countries such as Italy, Spain and Greece are staying in the parental home longer.

The most popular reason cited for still living at home in the current sample was financial reasons, closely followed by saving money and then being comfortable at home. These reported reasons were consistent with the findings from the ABS

(2008) where most participants indicated that financial reasons and the enjoyment of living at home were important factors for living in the parental home. Similar views were expressed by young adults living in Melbourne who indicated that financial difficulties largely impeded the move out of the parental home (White, 2002).

The current finding that many participants were living at home because it was comfortable is consistent with the results from an Australian study conducted by Vassallo et al. (2009) in that there was a belief held by parents of young adults living at home that their role involved providing financial assistance, guidance and support. It seems that the benefits young people obtain from staying within the parental home extend beyond purely financial support. Staying at home is perhaps easier and more comfortable than moving out of home where the responsibilities are increased and practical and emotional support may not be as readily available as it is when living at home. Emotional and practical support is higher for those who are married or living with a partner (Mastekassa, 2006), but if parents are taking on the role of providing increased practical and emotional support when young adults remain in the family, there may be a lack of motivation for an individual to seek out a romantic relationship.

According to the ABS (2008) the most common reason young adults gave for leaving the parental home was to gain independence. Other predominant reasons were to study and to reside with a partner or get married. In the current sample, the majority of participants had completed their studies, and of those participants working full-time more than half (54.3 %) were still living at home. This result might suggest that the pursuit of independence was not a primary goal for the current sample and would be consistent with the past research with young people (Arnett, 2001; Barry et al., 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005). While it is possible that young people may need

more guidance and support from their parents it is not clear why the dependence on parents has increased. The high proportion of young people still living at home may also reflect the changing nature of society and the rising cost of living making it easier to save money while still in the parental home. This trend may also relate to the increased affluence of the average family compared to past generations and the increased consumer expectations of their children.

Participants were not asked directly about their achievement of important criteria for adulthood and whether they considered themselves to be adults. However similar to young adults in past research (Arnett, 2001; Barry et al., 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005) it seems likely that many of them are ambivalent about whether they consider themselves to have reached adulthood status.

The criteria of leaving home, being in a committed relationship and becoming less tied to parents were viewed as important factors contributing towards adulthood in previous studies (Arnett, 2001; Barry et al., 2009; Nelson & Barry, 2005). In the current sample, the majority of the sample was still living at home, and half of these participants were not in a relationship. In addition, many participants cited being comfortable at home as the reason why they were still living with their parents. This emphasis on comfort at home may suggest strong ties to parents if the comfort is derived from the availability of emotional support from parents. However it could also reflect the practical comforts of living at home such as having a family member who may cook them meals or do their washing or not having to pay for things such as utilities or food. The priority given to comfort by a large number of participants thus may reflect their emerging adulthood status in that they may not be ready to assume the full responsibilities of adulthood and living independently. Kins and Beyers (2010) identified a group of emerging adults who lived away from home but returned



home every weekend. They labeled this group as “semi-independent” suggesting the possible reluctance of some emerging adults to accept the responsibilities of adulthood.

### **5.8 Separation-Individuation**

In the current study the mean score for separation-individuation was 139.69, which was considerably higher than the mean score of 120.6 for university employees in the early research of Christenson and Wilson (1987). The obtained mean score was also higher than that reported in the recent thesis by Andreassen (2009) who reported a mean score of 127.59 for the total sample of young women with and without Type 1 diabetes (control group mean = 128.83, with mean age = 21.24 years). Differences in the current study compared to past research may be attributable to the differences in the samples used. For instance, the study by Christenson and Wilson (1987) was conducted more than two decades ago and the participants were considerably older (mean age = 36.7 years) than the current sample. It is unclear why the current sample was higher in their scores of separation-individuation compared to the findings of Andreassen (2009).

### **5.9 Separation-individuation and living situation**

As previously noted no difference in level of separation-individuation was found between young adults living at home and those living away from home. When examining levels of separation-individuation according to the various living situations (living with parents, in a shared house/flat with other young people, living with partner, living alone, other) there were also no differences. This was consistent with the findings of Lamborn and Groh (2009) who also found no difference in separation

for participants living with their parents and for those living away from home (in various different living situations).

There are a number of possible explanations as to why living situation was not related to separation-individuation. As demonstrated by the current data there are many different options for living out of home, including living with a partner, living with other young adults or even with a sibling or another family member. These young people may have moved out of home, but it is into a home with another individual or individuals. It does not guarantee that they have resolved separation-individuation from their parents, and if their separation-individuation was less resolved, this may be the reason why they chose to live with others in the first place. For those who had left home, location may also play a part as some individuals who had moved out of home may still be in relatively close physical proximity to their parents and some individuals may be still going back regularly to visit the parental home (Kins & Beyer, 2010), and perhaps to use amenities such as a washing machine. These arrangements may reflect the possible ambivalence about taking on adult responsibilities. Furthermore, there are many reasons as to why some people leave home and choose other living arrangements. For example, some young people may have chosen to move out of the family home/ or been forced to move due to dysfunctional relationships with family members, or for practical reasons such as needing to be closer to a higher education institute or place of employment. The current study did not gather information as to why participants had left the family home. The complexity around the living situation of young adults means that more detailed information needs to be collected and more refined analyses conducted in order to establish if there is a link between living situation and separation-individuation. It is clear that longitudinal studies, commencing with all participants

living at home and then following participants over time, are necessary to properly address this issue.

### **5.10 Separation-Individuation and Relationship Status**

The expectation that young adults who were in a relationship would have a more resolved level of separation-individuation than young adults who were not in a relationship was not supported. It may be that separation-individuation is not related to whether the individual is in a relationship or not and that the issue runs deeper than merely an individual's relationship status and may be related to the quality of the relationship. Steirlin (1974) noted that a very close relationship with parents may hinder romantic relationships in adolescence and therefore the establishment of these relationships in young adulthood. If the young person does manage to establish a romantic relationship, it is possible that the effects of a close relationship with parents may influence the quality of their romantic relationship. The quality may be diminished if the separation-individuation process remains unresolved. Those young adults who have not achieved separation-individuation from their parents, may be in a particular type of romantic relationship. For example, the male or female could be a "mummy's boy" or a "daddy's girl" respectively, constantly visiting, phoning and checking in with their mother or father about every decision they make instead of talking it over with their partner and coming to a decision independently.

### **5.11 Relationship Status and Fear of Intimacy**

Post-hoc analysis identified that across the different partner status categories, those who were considered to be in a relationship (in a committed relationship but not living with a partner, living with a partner) had a significantly different fear of intimacy score from those who were not seeing/dating anyone and those dating

casually. The finding that participants in a relationship had a lower fear of intimacy than those not in a relationship is consistent with past research. Sherman and Thelen (1996) found that adolescents who had a dating partner had a lower fear of intimacy than those who did not have a dating partner. Thelen et al. (2000) using the same measure reported that female participants who had a high fear of intimacy were less likely to be in their relationship six months later and had higher fear of intimacy scores than those women who were still in their relationships.

The current study was cross-sectional and so it was not possible to track relationships over time. The finding that those in relationships have a lower fear of intimacy does not seem to be explained by the length of time in the relationship as no significant correlation was found between length of the relationship and a fear of intimacy. This result is in contrast to findings by Descutner and Thelen (1991) who found that those who had a higher fear of intimacy had shorter relationships. However, it is possible that this lower fear of intimacy for participants in relationships may have been facilitated by the experience of actually being in a relationship particularly as those participants who lived with their partner had a significantly lower fear of intimacy than those who lived at home and those who were sharing a house/flat with other young people. Kins and Beyers (2010) found an association between well-being and the achievement of adulthood criteria such as interdependence (e.g., in a committed romantic relationship). If there is a connection between well-being and being in a committed romantic relationship, this well-being could facilitate a lower fear of intimacy which may help explain why those living with a partner had a lower fear of intimacy. This could be investigated in future research.

Arseth et al. (2009) in their past research identified a category of participant known as “pre-intimate”, those who have the capacity for intimacy but are not yet involved in a romantic relationship. Despite not being in a relationship, individuals with a capacity for intimacy may also have a low fear of intimacy, so it will be important for future research to investigate the association between capacity for intimacy and fear of intimacy.

Intimacy has been regarded as something that everyone strives for in a romantic relationship (whether they have fear or not), and although fear of intimacy may inhibit some people establishing relationships, it will not inhibit others. The effects of fear of intimacy may be more related to the satisfaction or quality of the romantic relationship. Descutner and Thelen (1991) found that a higher fear of intimacy was associated with lower satisfaction in the quality of individual’s dating relationship and less satisfaction with expectations regarding long-term relationships. Riggs et al. (1998) found that couples where one partner had PTSD had higher levels of fear of intimacy and higher levels of relationship distress in comparison to couples with no PTSD, which clearly affected the quality of the relationship. It would be interesting to compare the quality/satisfaction of romantic relationships for young adults with high fear of intimacy and those with low fear of intimacy. For example, a person may have a low fear of intimacy and a higher capacity for intimacy but this may not be reflected in the quality of the relationship. If the individual had unrealistic expectations the quality of the relationship might be poor. There could also be inconsistencies between the two partners related to each other’s fear of intimacy levels. As highlighted by Hatfield and Rapson (1993), individuals vary in the level of intimacy they desire from another.

It is also important to consider how those with a high fear of intimacy become involved in a romantic relationship. Their partner's level of fear of intimacy may play a part in maintaining the relationship for someone with a high fear of intimacy. For example, if someone has a high fear of intimacy this may influence who and what they look for in a partner. People may be attracted to those with a similar fear of intimacy, as highlighted in the study by Riggs et al. (1998). Also, a number of unconscious motivations can govern how two people come together, for example an individual may be looking for someone to provide them parental like care (perhaps if they did not receive it in childhood) and end up forming a romantic relationship with someone who is willing to provide such care.

### **5.12 Living Situation and Fear of Intimacy**

Post-hoc analysis also identified that fear of intimacy differed across the different living situations. More specifically, those participants who were living with their parents had a significantly higher fear of intimacy score when compared to those who were living with a partner. Those sharing a house/flat with other young people had a significantly higher fear of intimacy compared to those living with a partner. Regarding the first finding, there may be some reasons as to why those living at home had a higher fear of intimacy than those living with their partner. Living at home may have inadvertently facilitated a fear of intimacy in these individuals (with a larger number of participants living at home not in relationships as discussed further in section 5.13) and they perhaps may be reluctant to move away from the safety of the home environment. For those participants, living in a house/flat with other young people, they may have a fear of intimacy that is more specific to romantic relationships. The past research of Seiffge-Krenke (2006) found that those young adults who were still living at home and those who had left later had experienced a

lower level of encouragement of independence from parents. This independence is necessary for the achievement of intimacy, which is an important aspect of a relationship (Bagarozzi, 1997). This past research may shed some light on the current findings in that those who were living at home may have received less encouragement of their independence and as such had a higher fear of intimacy.

### **5.13 The Link between Living at Home and not having a Romantic Relationship**

Of those participants who were not in a relationship, a larger proportion of them were still living at home. As hypothesized those participants who were living at home were less likely to be in a relationship than those living away from home. These results are consistent with Seiffge-Krenke's 2006 and 2010 findings that those participants who were living at home were less likely to have romantic partners. Similarly, in their longitudinal study Kins and Beyers (2010) found that those who progressed to more independent living (away from the parental home) made significant gains in achieving adulthood criteria, including being committed to a romantic relationship. While the cross-sectional design of the current study means it is not valid to draw any causal connections the results of the current study add to the increasing evidence of an association between living situation and the development of partner relationships.

Also, living in the parental home may afford less opportunity to establish romantic relationships. For example, there may be certain rules that have to be followed while living at home, and parents may not approve of their child pursuing a romantic relationship, particularly if much of their time is committed to study or establishing themselves in careers. The finding that more participants in a relationship were not living at home lends support to the ideas that those living out of home may have increased opportunities to pursue romantic prospects and establish relationships,

or that they may have left home as they had already developed these romantic relationships.

Some individuals may have had negative experiences with past relationships and may be protecting themselves from further hurt by staying at home. It is also possible that young people who lack confidence in regard to developing romantic relationships may remain in the parental home to protect themselves from perceived failure. Past research (Seiffge-Krenke et al. 2001) has found that for a sample of 20 year old young adults in romantic relationships, those that did not report having a romantic partner at age 15 and 17 years were closer in their relationship with their parents at age 20 than those who did report having had a romantic partner in adolescence. Although the lack of romantic relationship initiation was not found to affect the quality of their romantic relationships at age 20 it suggests that there is a link between closeness with parents and a lack of romantic relationship initiation in adolescence. Future research may wish to investigate this further with those who did not have romantic relationships in adulthood to establish whether there is a link to decreased confidence in establishing romantic relationships.

#### **5.14 Gender Differences**

Although past research has indicated a gender difference in the level of separation from parents with females tending to report more dependence on their parents and requiring more emotional support (Kenny, 1987; Guezaine et al, 2000; Lucas, 1997) this was not directly reflected in the current research results. No significant difference was found on the measure of separation-individuation between males and females.

Differences between the sample for the current study and samples from past research may explain the inconsistent findings. Most of the past studies in this area



have used slightly younger American college students (Kenny, 1987; Lucas, 1997), Belgian college students (Guezaine et al., 2000) and German adolescents (Seiffge-Krenke, 1999). Gender differences in separation-individuation may be more evident with younger student participants, particularly if they have had to leave home to attend college. More than half (52.2 %) of the participants in the current study were working full-time after completing their schooling or higher education and so were not undertaking such a transition. Furthermore, different measures were used in the past studies compared to the current study, which makes accurate comparisons difficult.

However, there was a gender difference in scores on the outcome measure, fear of intimacy. The mean fear of intimacy score for males was significantly higher than the mean fear of intimacy score for females, which led to an investigation of the model separately for both sexes. It is important to note that there was a much smaller sample of males in the current study ( $n = 43$  vs  $n = 91$  for females), which may have contributed to the difference. This gender difference in the current study is in contrast to the findings of Sherman and Thelen (1996) who found that females reported higher fear of intimacy scores for dating relationships and males reported higher fear of intimacy scores for friendships. However, this difference may be accounted for by the sample for the earlier study being substantially younger (mean age 15.7 years) than that for the current sample. The results from the current study however seem to be consistent with the findings of Thelen et al. (2000) who found that males had a higher fear of intimacy than females, although their sample was younger college students (mean age = 19.77 years and 19.41 year for males and females respectively). A.L Thompson (2007) also found that male childhood cancer survivors had higher fear of

intimacy, but comparisons are difficult due to the inherent difference in the populations.

The lower fear of intimacy score for the female participants may be due to the influence of culture in Western Society. Often females are brought up and socialized to take on the role of carer or nurturer (roles that involve intimacy) to other individuals such as friends and family members, with past research highlighting females desired and were comfortable with tenderness with women rating love, affection and the expression of warm feelings as important (Hook et al., 2003; Ridley, 1993). It seems logical that this role may extend in part to their respective romantic relationships. A lower fear of intimacy when compared to males may be the result of this cultural norm. In addition, past research (Montgomery, 2005) has identified gender differences in the development of psychosocial functioning (e.g., identity and intimacy) across adolescence, middle adolescence and emerging adulthood suggesting a different rate of development between males and females. In particular females had higher intimacy than males in emerging adulthood (as measured by the Erikson Psycho-Social Index) (Montgomery, 2005), which may assist in explaining why in the current study, females had a lower fear of intimacy. Erikson's (1968) proposed theory of lifespan development includes a sixth stage named Intimacy vs Isolation (focusing on intimate relationships with others) which involves the mature progression through the previous developmental stages. If males perhaps had not progressed through these earlier stages this may assist in explaining their higher fear of intimacy in romantic relationships. Future research could focus on differences within couples to explore this possibility.

Also, no information was obtained on birth order in the family which may have played a part in fear of intimacy. The number of siblings, the number of boys

and girls in the family, and age intervals between siblings varies as each new child is born into a family, with the family being an individual's first experience of a social environment (F. Milne & Judge, 2009). F. Milne and Judge (2009) suggest that a later born sibling enters into an environment where parental resources are split between two or more children. Arguably this child may encounter an environment that is more stressful and which may impact on attachment processes in ways that are different from a child who is the first born (F. Milne & Judge, 2009). In addition, the personality of an individual has been found to vary according to birth order (Sulloway, 1995) with past research reporting that first born children were more neurotic than the middle child in a family (Sulloway, 1996; F. Milne & Judge, 2009). Relating to romantic relationships, it has been found that within relationships those individuals that shared a birth order (oldest, middle, youngest) were more likely to be in a long-term relationship (romantic or friendship) (Hartshorne, Salem-Hartshorne & Hortshorne, 2009). Obtaining information on the birth order of both partners would be helpful in future research to ascertain whether having the same or different birth order has an impact on their fear of intimacy.

Even though separation-individuation was not a distinguishing factor between males and females, it still served to explain a significant amount of the variance for both the separate male and female models indicating that it does indeed have some relationship with fear of intimacy. Males may be more sensitive to the effects of separation-individuation as even though past research has found that they were more likely to deal with problems on their own (Kenny, 1987) and required less emotional support and closeness from parents (Guezaine et al, 2000; Lucas, 1997), this does not necessarily mean they have negotiated the separation-process to a greater extent. Instead such findings could be a reflection of males conforming to society's norms.

As highlighted in earlier research (Guezaine et al., 2000), the role of autonomy is often placed with males and they may be eager to live up to these expectations which may mask any obvious effects of a lack of separation-individuation from their parents. Differences in separating from the same sex versus the opposite sex parent was also found in Guezaine et al.'s (2000) research whereby for males, if they felt emotionally close to their fathers, negative feelings were experienced when separating from their mothers and vice versa. Although no comparisons can be made to the current study as separation from mothers and fathers was not examined separately, future research may want to further investigate differences in separating from mothers and fathers.

Perceived maternal overprotection was significant in the final model only for females, indicating that as perceived maternal overprotection increased, fear of intimacy was lower. It could be expected that an experience of higher perceived maternal overprotection (a high level of protection and control) may have been related to a higher fear of intimacy. However the direction of the association could be due to differences in the relationship between mothers and daughters and mothers and sons. Within western culture it is common for mothers and daughter to have a close relationship, which although it could have been perceived as protective and controlling by the individual, may have inadvertently become a model for intimacy that is then extended to romantic relationships.

### **5.15 Limitations**

This study has a number of limitations. Participants were recruited to the study via convenience sampling and snowball sampling therefore the sample was not entirely random. These sampling methods limit the comparability and generalizability of the results. Most participants (87.3 %) had been born in Australia and as such were likely to be from Australian/Anglo-Saxon families so the sample did not represent the

ethnic/cultural diversity of the Australian population where a quarter of all Australians have been born overseas (OECD, 2011). Furthermore, a majority of participants (44.8%) were university graduates whereas according to ABS statistics, in 2001 approximately 36% of people in their 20's (20 to 29 years) indicated that the highest qualification they had achieved was a bachelor degree (ABS, 2005).

Some details related to living situations were not collected. As the age at which participants had left the parental home was not recorded it was not possible to know how long they had been living out of home so that some of the participants who were currently not living at home may have only recently moved out of home. Separation-individuation could be influenced by how long an individual had been living out home. If the majority of the sample had not been living out of home for a lengthy period of time, this may explain why there was no difference in their levels of separation-individuation between those living at home and those living out of home. Also the design of the study did not allow for a category of young adults who may be currently living at home after previously leaving home as identified in studies of young German (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006, 2010) and Belgian (Kins & Beyers, 2010) adults. It also did not allow for consideration of the geographical distances of parents from their children for those who had left the parental home as investigated by Dubas and Petersen (1996). Furthermore, the categories of employment status may not accurately represent the group. Participants were asked to tick one box when it came to their employment status, however additional categories (student working full-time, student working part-time) were added when it was discovered some participants had ticked more than one box. Some participants from these categories may have been missed as they may have just ticked one box as instructed.

Questions regarding relationships were not based on a specific length of time in a committed relationship and, no definition of what was considered a committed relationship was provided. Without this clarification individuals responded on the basis of their particular conceptualization of relationships. For example, a participant may have been dating someone for two months and not consider it a relationship whereas another individual might consider it to be so.

The quality of participants' relationships has been identified as an important factor in past research (Dalton et al., 2006; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2001; Roisman et al., 2001; 2005) with the study by Riggs et al. (1998) identifying that with couples where one partner had PTSD, scores on fear of intimacy and relationship distress were higher than couples without PTSD. However the quality of relationships was not assessed in the current study. Quality of a relationship may be an important variable that serves to influence factors such as fear of intimacy in a partner relationship and separation- individuation. If a person is in a romantic relationship of high quality, this may facilitate their capacity for intimacy and as such lower their fear of intimacy and perhaps help facilitate separation-individuation from parents as the individual is part of another secure, safe and happy relationship.

Sample size considerations meant that the number of variables needed to be limited so the current study only considered past relationship with mothers and not fathers. Research has indicated some differences in regard to a young adult's relationship with their fathers (Apostolidou, 2006), so there is a need for more comprehensive models that take into consideration that particular relationship. A caring father has been linked to anxiety in romantic relationships for males and females, and an overprotective mother has been linked to anxiety in intimate

relationships only for males (Apostolidou, 2006). It seems that mothers and fathers may influence their children's romantic relationships in different ways.

Finally in terms of measuring the outcome variable, fear of intimacy, Hatfield (1984) discussed the various aspects of a fear of intimacy (fear of exposure, fear of abandonment, fear of angry attacks, fear of loss of control, fear of one's own destructive impulses, a fear of losing one's individuality and being engulfed) but the questionnaire used (Fear of Intimacy scale, developed by Descutner & Thelen, 1991) may not have captured adequately all of the components of fear of intimacy. No other questionnaires have been developed to measure fear of intimacy.

### **5.16 Future research**

Future research may wish to focus on longitudinal studies with larger samples and of greater cultural diversity. A larger sample size would also allow the use of more sophisticated statistical techniques such as structural equation modelling. Studies that included a focus on the interaction between the sex of the parent and the sex of the child would also make an important contribution. Whether there is a link between having a relationship in adolescence and later romantic relationships and the resulting influence on the variables of separation-individuation and fear of intimacy would be an interesting area to explore as an individual's confidence and experience in romantic relationships may play a significant part in their fear of intimacy regarding romantic relationships. While the current study examined the outcome variable fear of intimacy further exploration could be conducted to determine the influence of variables such as perceived maternal care, perceived maternal overprotection, separation-individuation and fear of intimacy in a partner relationship on the quality of romantic relationships. Further information on the influence of their parents' marital relationship on young adult's fear of intimacy in romantic

relationships is needed. In the current study, 16.4% of participants had parents who had divorced in the first 16 years of their life. Current Australian statistics indicate that of those aged 18-34 years in 2006-2007, one in four reported that their parents had either divorced or permanently separated during their childhood (0-17 years) (ABS, 2010). For those slightly younger (18-24 years), nearly 25% had parents who had divorced or permanently separated during childhood (ABS, 2010). These statistics suggest that the current sample may be more representative of intact families. Also in the current study, 3% of participants reported the death of a parent in the first 16 years of life with current Australian statistics reporting that in 2006-2007, 5% of 18-24 year olds had experienced the death of a parent in childhood (ABS, 2010). Future research may also want to consider the influence on these variables for those individuals who experienced a death of a parent in the first 16 years of life. For example, these individuals may idealise the parent that passed away, or have experienced extreme overprotection from the surviving parent in an attempt to compensate for the loss of a parent.

It would also be interesting to determine the impact on the quality of the romantic relationships for those who report experiencing high maternal overprotection, but have a low fear of intimacy. It could be quite likely that there are effects on the quality of the relationship as a result of this overprotection. Also, a fear of intimacy may mediate the effects of some of these variables on the quality of the romantic relationship. Longitudinal studies to track relationships with parents and the romantic relationships of individuals over time would also make a valuable contribution to this body of knowledge.



### 5.17 Conclusion

The present study highlighted the association between being in a relationship and having a lower fear of intimacy. The association between living with a partner and having a lower fear of intimacy was also identified. This lower fear of intimacy may exist prior to entry into a relationship and/or be facilitated by being in a relationship. Males were found to have a higher fear of intimacy, which may illustrate the effect of societal norms. It was evident that, of those not in a relationship, a higher proportion of them were living at home, and of those in a relationship, a higher number were not living at home. As with previous research, findings from this study highlight the issue that living at home as a young adult may hinder the process of establishing a romantic relationship. The important link between separation-individuation and fear of intimacy was highlighted, with separation-individuation explaining a significant amount of unique variance in fear of intimacy. The fact that separation-individuation partially mediated the relationships between perceived maternal care and fear of intimacy demonstrated its importance as a factor relating to perceived maternal care as well as fear of intimacy. Finally, the study highlighted the association between perceived maternal care and overprotection with separation-individuation, which is consistent with studies (e.g., van Ijzendoorn, 1995) that demonstrated that parenting practices earlier in life have an influence on an individual's ability to successfully negotiate this developmental milestone.

While some of the findings were of modest effect the current study has made a contribution to this area of research. This study is the only study that has explored the concept of fear of intimacy with a community sample of emerging adults. Previous studies have used samples of adolescents, college psychology students, employees of a psychiatric facility, clinical populations, those with drug and/or alcohol addictions,

sex offenders and heavy smokers (Bumby & Hansen, 1997; Descutner & Thelen, 1991; Doi & Thelen, 1993; Pruitt et al., 1992; Riggs et al, 1998; Sherman & Thelen, 1996; Thorberg & Lyvers, 2006, 2010) as well as more recently, samples of participants with a chronic illness (Eddington et al., 2010; A.L Thompson, 2007) with the thesis by A.L Thompson (2007) being the only study that utilized a sample of emerging adults (18- 25 years).

There have been an increasing number of studies examining emerging adulthood, but this study has focused on the developmental and psychological processes of this period and related them to the Australian social context specifically in regard to living situation and partnership status. In particular, the current study examined the influence of past parenting (specifically care and overprotection) and separation-individuation on fear of intimacy in a romantic relationship. This is the first study to examine this combination of variables, as well as the interrelationship between living situation, partnership status and separation-individuation. In addition this study highlights the important contribution of separation-individuation in explaining a young adult's fear of intimacy.

Discussion of the findings from the current study has raised a number of important issues, especially in regard to the need for further exploration of areas such as past relationships with both mothers and fathers, the impact of an individual's perceptions of their parent's relationship (as a couple), and the parents' self-rated marital satisfaction on young adults' fear of intimacy. It has also identified the need for longitudinal studies to shed more light on this area of research. Most importantly in the area of young adults' romantic relationships this study has been one of the few to have focused on developmental processes important to this life stage.

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## **Appendix A: Information Statement**

### **INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH**

#### **You are invited to participate**

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You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “**The perceptions of past parenting and partner relationships of young adults**”.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher Miss Marianne Lloyd as part of a Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) degree at Victoria University under the supervision of Professor Sandra Lancaster from the school of Psychology.

#### **Project explanation**

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The late teens and early twenties is a time of great change for young people. It involves exploration of a number of possibilities including moving out of home and establishing romantic relationships. However there have been a number of social changes in Australia with an increasing number of people in their 20s still living at home and less young people being involved in romantic partner relationships.

Therefore, we are interested in looking at the factors that might influence when you develop partner relationships. This includes living situation, perceptions of past parenting and current partner relationships.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

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Your participation in this study will require you to complete a questionnaire regarding past relationships and current relationships. In the first part of the questionnaire you will be asked some relevant demographic information including current relationship status. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. If you agree to participate please complete the questionnaire and return via the reply-paid envelope provided.

#### **What will I gain from participating?**

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Although there is not direct benefit from participation, you will be contributing to the overall body of knowledge and information on this topic.

#### **How will the information I give be used?**

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The data collected will be used for research purposes only and the completion of a doctoral degree.

#### **What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

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No significant psychological or physical risks are anticipated due to participation in this research. However, completing a questionnaire asking for information on feelings, views and experiences regarding interpersonal relationships may be upsetting for some participants. If this occurs you can call the telephone counselling service Lifeline on 13 11 14.

#### **How will this project be conducted?**

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You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that has been developed to investigate interpersonal relationships. Completion of the questionnaire takes approximately 30 minutes. Completion of this questionnaire is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime should you wish to do so.

#### **Who is conducting the study?**

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Any questions about your participation in this research may be directed to the student researcher Miss Marianne Lloyd on [marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu.au). Alternatively, you can contact the principal researcher Professor Sandra Lancaster. Her contact details are (03) 9919 2397 or [sandra.lancaster@vu.edu.au](mailto:sandra.lancaster@vu.edu.au).

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If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4781.

## Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

### Demographic Information:

1. Gender (Tick one): Female ☐ Male ☐

2. Age (in years): \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

3. Highest level of education completed (Tick one):

Secondary ☐ TAFE ☐ University ☐ Other ☐

4. Current Employment Status (Tick one)

- a) Unemployed ☐
- b) Part-time employment ☐ for .....hours per week, as .....
- c) Full-time employment ☐ as .....
- d) Student: University ☐ TAFE ☐

5. Current living situation (Tick one):

- a) Living with parents ☐
- b) Sharing a house/flat with other young people ☐
- c) Living with partner ☐
- d) Living alone ☐
- e) Other ☐ Please specify .....

6. If living with your parents, what would you specify is the main reason for you living at home? (Tick one)

- a) Financial reasons (e.g can't afford to move out of home) ☐
- b) Saving money ☐
- c) Family caregiver ☐
- d) Accepted cultural/religious practices ☐
- e) Comfortable at home ☐
- f) Not ready to leave ☐
- e) Other ☐ Please specify .....

7. What is your PostCode? .....



**8. In which country were you born?**

- a) Australia ☐
- b) Other ☐ - please specify .....

**9. Current partner status (Tick one):**

- a). Not seeing/dating anyone ☐
- b). In a committed relationship but not living with partner ☐
- c). Living with partner ☐
- d). Dating casually ☐
- e). Other ☐

**10. If you are currently in a relationship, what is the length of this relationship?**

Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

**11. How many past relationships of at least 3 months duration have you been in during the last 5 years? \_\_\_\_\_**

**12. If you currently have a partner, are they participating in this research?**

**Yes / No (please circle)**

**13. Did you live with both parents for all of the first 16 years of your life?**

Yes / No (please circle)

**If Yes go to Question 15.**

**14. Did your parents separate/divorce during the first 16 years of your life?**

Yes / No (please circle)

If Yes

Who did you live with following the separation/divorce?

- a) Mother ☐
- b) Mother and Step-parent/DeFacto ☐
- c) Father ☐
- d) Father and Step-parent/DeFacto ☐
- e) Other ☐ – please specify .....

**15. Did either of your parents pass away in the first 16 years of your life?**

Yes / No (please circle)

If Yes

Who did you live with following the death of your parent

- a) Mother ☐
- b) Mother and Step-parent/DeFacto ☐
- c) Father ☐
- d) Father and Step-parent/DeFacto ☐
- e) Other ☐ – please specify .....

**16. Where did you hear about the study (Tick one):**

- a) Poster ☐
- b) Word of mouth ☐

## Appendix C: Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI)

*This questionnaire lists various attitudes and behaviours of parents. As you remember your **MOTHER** in your first 16 years would you place a tick in the most appropriate box next to each question.*

	Very like	Moderately like	Moderately unlike	Very unlike
1. Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice				
2. Did not help me as much as I needed				
3. Let me do those things I liked doing				
4. Seemed emotionally cold to me				
5. Appeared to understand my problems and worries				
6. Was affectionate to me				
7. Liked me to make my own decisions				
8. Did not want me to grow up				
9. Tried to control everything I did				
10. Invaded my privacy				
11. Enjoyed talking things over with me				
12. Frequently smiled at me				
13. Tended to baby me				
14. Did not seem to understand what I needed or wanted				
15. Let me decide things for myself				

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16. Made me feel I wasn't wanted				
	<b>Very like</b>	<b>Moderately like</b>	<b>Moderately unlike</b>	<b>Very unlike</b>
17. Could make me feel better when I was upset				
18. Did not talk with me very much				
19. Tried to make me feel dependent of her				
20. Felt I could not look after myself unless she was around				
21. Gave me as much freedom as I wanted				
22. Let me go out as often as I wanted				
23. Was overprotective of me				
24. Did not praise me				
25. Let me dress in any way I pleased				

## Appendix D: Separation-Individuation Process Inventory (S-IPI)

*In this section, you are asked to rate how characteristic the following statements are about **people in general**. The rating is on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being not characteristic and 10 being very characteristic. Your rating is your opinion of how people in general feel about themselves and others, so there are no right or wrong answers. Since people's attitudes about themselves and others vary considerably, the questions vary considerably; some questions may seem a little strange or unusual to you. Please answer all the questions as best you can. Answer them fairly quickly without putting a lot of thought into them.*

**1 = Not Characteristic**

**10 = Very Characteristic**

1. When people really care for someone, they often feel worse about themselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. When someone gets too emotionally close to another person, he/she often feels lost.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. When people really get angry at someone, they often feel worthless.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. It is when people start getting emotionally close to someone that they are most likely to get hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. People need to maintain control over others to keep from being harmed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*In this section you are asked to rate whether you think the following statements are characteristic of your feelings about **yourself and other people**. The rating is on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being not characteristic and 10 being very characteristic. Again, these are your opinions so there are no right or wrong answers. As different people often have very different thoughts about themselves and others, the statements vary considerably. Some of them may seem strange or unusual to you, but please answer all of them the best you can. Rate each statement fairly quickly without giving a lot of thought to them.*

**1 = Not Characteristic**

**10 = Very Characteristic**

6. I find that people seem to change whenever I get to know them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. It is easy for me to see both good and bad qualities that I have at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. I find that people either really like me or they hate me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. I find that others often treat me as if I am just there to meet their every wish.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. I find that I really vacillate between really liking myself and really disliking myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. When I am by myself, I feel that something is missing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. I need other people around me to not feel empty.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. I sometimes feel that part of me is lost whenever I agree with someone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14. Like others, whenever I see someone I really respect and to whom I look up, I often feel worse about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. I find it easy to see myself as a distinct individual.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. Whenever I realize how different I am from my parents I feel very uneasy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**1 = Not Characteristic**

**10 = Very Characteristic**

1. In my experience, I almost always consult my mother before making an important decision.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. I find it relatively easy to make and keep commitments to other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. I find that when I get emotionally close to someone, I occasionally feel like hurting myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. I find that either I really like someone or I can't stand them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. I often have dreams about falling that make me feel anxious.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. I find it difficult to form mental pictures of people significant to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. I have on more than one occasion seemed to wake up and find myself in a relationship with someone, and not be sure of how or why I am in the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. I must admit that when I feel lonely, I often feel like getting intoxicated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Whenever I am angry with someone, I feel worthless.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. If I were to tell my deepest thoughts, I would feel empty.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. In my experience, people always seem to hate me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. Whenever I realize how similar I am to my parents, I feel very uneasy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Often, when I am in a close relationship, I find that my sense of who I am gets lost.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**1 = Not Characteristic**

**10 = Very Characteristic**

14. I find it difficult for me to see others as having both good and bad qualities at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. I find that the only way I can be me is to be different from other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. I find that when I get emotionally too close to someone, I sometimes feel that I have lost part of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17. Whenever I am away from family, I feel very uneasy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18. Getting physical affection itself seems more important to me than who gives it to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. I find it difficult to really know another person well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20. I find that it is important for me to have my mother's approval before making a decision.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
21. I must admit that whenever I see someone else's faults, I feel better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
22. I am tempted to try to control other people in order to keep them close to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
23. I must admit that whenever I get emotionally close to someone, I sometimes want to hurt them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



## Appendix E: Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS)

### Part A

*If you are in an existing partner relationship, respond to the following statements in reference to this relationship.*

*If you are not in an existing partner relationship, imagine you are in a close partner relationship. Respond to the following statements as you would if you were in that close relationship.*

*Rate how characteristic each statement is of you on a scale of 1 to 5 as described below, and circle the relevant number.*

	<b>1= Not at all characteristic of me</b> <b>2= Slightly characteristic of me</b> <b>3 = Moderately characteristic of me</b> <b>4 = Very characteristic of me</b> <b>5 = Extremely characteristic of me</b>				
1. I would feel uncomfortable telling my partner about things in the past that I have felt ashamed of.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I would feel uneasy talking with my partner about something that has hurt me deeply.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
4. If my partner were upset I would sometimes be afraid of showing that I care.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I might be afraid to confide my innermost feelings to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I would feel at ease telling my partner that I care about him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I would have a feeling of complete togetherness with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I would be comfortable discussing significant problems with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
9. A part of me would be afraid to make a long-term commitment to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I would feel comfortable telling my experiences, even sad ones, to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I would probably feel nervous showing my partner strong feelings of affection.	1	2	3	4	5

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12. I would find it difficult being open with my partner about my personal thoughts.	1	2	3	4	5
	<b>1= Not at all characteristic of me</b> <b>2= Slightly characteristic of me</b> <b>3 = Moderately characteristic of me</b> <b>4 = Very characteristic of me</b> <b>5 = Extremely characteristic of me</b>				
13. I would feel uneasy with my partner depending on me for emotional support.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I would not be afraid to share with my partner what I dislike about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I would be afraid to take the risk of being hurt in order to establish a closer relationship with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I would feel comfortable keeping very personal information to myself.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I would not be nervous about being spontaneous with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I would feel comfortable telling my partner things that I do not tell other people	1	2	3	4	5
19. I would feel comfortable trusting my partner with my deepest thoughts and feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I would sometimes feel uneasy if my partner told me about very personal matters.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I would be comfortable revealing to my partner what I feel are my shortcomings and handicaps.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I would be comfortable with having a close emotional tie between us.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I would be afraid of sharing my private thoughts with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I would be afraid that I might not always feel close to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I would be comfortable telling my partner what my needs are.	1	2	3	4	5

# FEAR OF INTIMACY IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

26. I would be afraid that my partner would be more invested in the relationship than I would be.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I would feel comfortable about having open and honest communication with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I would sometimes feel uncomfortable listening to my partner's personal problems	1	2	3	4	5
29. I would feel at ease to completely be myself around my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I would feel relaxed being together and talking about our personal goals.	1	2	3	4	5

*Respond to the following statements as they apply to your past relationships. Rate how characteristic each statement is of you on a scale of 1 to 5 as described in the instructions for Part A.*

	<b>1= Not at all characteristic of me</b> <b>2= Slightly characteristic of me</b> <b>3 = Moderately characteristic of me</b> <b>4 = Very characteristic of me</b> <b>5 = Extremely characteristic of me</b>				
31. I have shied away from opportunities to be close to someone.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I have held back my feelings in previous relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
33. There are people who think that I am afraid to get close to them.	1	2	3	4	5
34. There are people who think that I am not an easy person to get to know.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I have done things in previous relationships to keep me from developing closeness.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix F: Flyer



Partner relationships of young adults

Are you aged between 21 and 25 years and unmarried?

We are conducting a study exploring the partner relationships of heterosexual young adults. We require participants to fill out a 30 minute questionnaire on past relationships and current relationships.

If you would like to participate, please contact the student researcher Marianne Lloyd on [marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu.au) and a questionnaire will be sent out to you.

Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu	Relationships Questionnaire: Marianne.lloyd@live.vu.edu
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