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**PERCEIVED CHILD-REARING PRACTICES AS  
PREDICTORS OF RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION OF  
FOURTH-YEAR UNIVERSITY HOSTEL RESIDENTS**

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of  
Humanities, University of the Free State,  
Bloemfontein, in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Masters in

Counselling Psychology

2005

Supervisor: Mr E. du Plessis

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted by me for the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA (Counselling) Psychology at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I further more cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Free State.

Charrisse Lowe \_\_\_\_\_

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2005

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## **ABSTRACT**

The focus of this research was to determine the effects that perceived child-rearing practices (as defined by sex education, perceived parenting styles and family structure) have on the relationship satisfaction of fourth-year hostel residents of the University of the Free State. The literature suggests child-rearing practices play an important role in later relationship satisfaction. Despite its importance, this is a concept that has not been explored in depth. Consequently, the South African research that is available on this topic is limited.

All the hostels housing fourth-year residents on the University of the Free State's Bloemfontein campus were involved in this study. The sample consisted of 364 fourth-year students. Questionnaires were sent to all the residents, 170 of which were returned.

The data were analysed by means of a hierarchical regression analysis. The results indicated that sex education has an effect on relationship satisfaction, specifically on the liberated beliefs of sexual roles. Similarly, it was found that perceived parenting styles have an effect on the relationship satisfaction of students, but in this case on assertive conflict resolution/communication, independence, and intimacy. Although encouraging, the results of this study should be considered in light of the limitations of the study.

*Die fokus van die navorsing was om die moontlike gevolge van waargenome kinderopvoedingspraktyke (in terme van seksopvoeding, waargenome ouerskapstyle en gesinsstruktuur) op die verhoudingstevredenheid van vierdejaar-koshuisinwoners van die Universiteit van die Vrystaat te bepaal. Bestaande literatuur in hierdie verband suggereer dat die kinderopvoedingspraktyke 'n belangrike rol speel in hulle latere verhoudingstevredenheid as volwassenes. Ten spyte van die belangrikheid van hierdie aangeleentheid, is die geldigheid van die siening nog nie in diepte ondersoek nie. Gevolglik is die beskikbare Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur oor hierdie onderwerp beperk.*

*Al die koshuise op die Universiteit van die Vrystaat se Bloemfontein kampus, waarin vierdejaarstudente woonagtig is, is by die onderhewige ondersoek betrek. Vraelyste is aan die geïdentifiseerde steekproefgroep van 364 vierdejaarstudente gestuur, waarvan 170 terugontvang is.*

*Die data is met behulp van hiërargiese regressie-ontledings geanaliseer. Die resultate dui daarop dat seksopvoeding wel 'n effek op latere verhoudingstevredenheid het, spesifiek soos dit tot uitdrukking kom in meer verligte houdings ten opsigte van geslagsrolle. Eweneens dui bevindinge daarop dat waargenome ouerskapstyle 'n invloed op die verhoudingstevredenheid van studente het. In hierdie geval spesifiek op assertiewe konflikoplossing/kommunikasie, onafhanklikheid, en intimiteit binne verhoudings. Alhoewel die resultate bestaande aannames bevestig, moet dit egter na waarde geskat word teen die agtergrond van die beperkings van die onderhewige ondersoek.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Relationship satisfaction in South Africa is not as high as it could be. This is demonstrated by the high divorce rate in our country. In 2002, there were 526 divorces per 100 000 married couples recorded in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2005). Although divorce can be initiated by a number of various factors, there seems to be a link between low relationship satisfaction and the potential for divorce (Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002). For the purposes of this study, relationship satisfaction is defined as consisting of independence, equality of decision-making, intimacy, liberated beliefs of sexual roles, assertive conflict resolution/communication and romance (Stevens & Stevens, 1994).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A growing body of literature suggests that relationship satisfaction amongst young adults is important, as the capacity to form romantic, or intimate, relationships is a key aspect of social adaptation in young adulthood (Dresner & Grolnick, 1996) (for the purposes of this study, the term intimate relationships is used to draw the distinction between romantic relationships, and friendships and family relations). Erikson's (1968) theory reiterates this, by defining the psychosocial stage for young adults (aged 20 – 40 years) as the intimacy versus isolation stage where young adults want to form a shared identity with another person but may fear intimacy and therefore experience loneliness and isolation.

Research suggests that child-rearing practices might play a role in later adult relationship satisfaction (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996; Dresner & Grolnick, 1996; Gabardi & Rosèn, 1992; Hepworth, Ryder & Dreyer, 1984; Lauer & Lauer, 1991; Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001 and Spruijt, 1995). Child-rearing practices can refer to any number of factors. For the purposes of this study, they refer to sex education, perceived parenting styles and family structure.

South Africans appear to be conservative and to have a tendency to avoid the subject of sexuality, which may have an impact on relationship satisfaction. Similarly, parents

appear to have a more influential role in their offspring's relationships than they realise. Children learn behaviour based on the parenting they receive, and subsequently, this behaviour may influence the satisfaction they experience in the relationships they engage in. As children model behaviour learnt at home, the presence of only one parent implies that children never learn how their parents communicate or relate to each other. Similarly, children raised in a divorced home may have different views on conflict management than those raised in homes that did not experience divorce. These views on conflict management may influence the relationship satisfaction that these children experience in their adult relationships. Similarly, children who were raised in a married family may have more traditional role beliefs and different views on conflict management, which in turn may influence the satisfaction that they experience within their adult relationships.

Each of these three child-rearing practices will subsequently be discussed.

### **Sex Education and Sources of Sex Education**

Sexuality forms an integral part of being human (Strong, De Vault & Sayad, 1998). Through our sexual nature we are able to connect with people on the most intimate levels, not only revealing ourselves but creating strong bonds and relationships. On the other hand, sexuality can also be negative in that it can lead to guilt and confusion, and also be a means of exploitation and aggression (Strong et al., 1998). It is only by investigating aspects of sexuality that we can come to understand our own sexuality as well as that of others, therefore providing the basis for enriching our relationships and improving relationship satisfaction (Strong et al., 1998).

Sex has been described as one of the major causes of potential conflict within relationships (Cahn, 1992). This correlates with the fact that sexual dysfunction is known to produce relational discord (Sager, 1994). Dailey (1997) has stated that sex education has not fulfilled its potential to decrease human hurt while increasing human pleasure. This implies that sex education is an untapped resource that can be used to enhance relationship satisfaction. Sex education includes norms and values regarding both

sexuality, and interpersonal relationships where sexuality plays a role, as well as the norms and values regarding behaviour, attitudes and conduct pertaining to an individual's sexuality (Aldrich, Le Roux & Le Roux, 1994).

During adolescence, young people become increasingly concerned about their sexuality (Strong et al., 1998). They are often too embarrassed or distrustful to ask their parents about their concerns, while at the same time most parents are ambivalent about the developing sexual nature of their children (Strong et al., 1998). This concern regarding their sexuality is explained by Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion where adolescents want to establish their social, cultural, sexual and vocational identities. Even though people of all ages have experienced relationship dissatisfaction resulting from inaccurate information, this has not motivated any members of the adult population to protect their children from these same negative experiences by providing them with accurate sex education (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996).

Although biology textbooks consist of all the mechanical and anatomical aspects of sex, they say nothing about the emotional and ethical aspects of it. A well-rounded, adequate sex education involves all of these aspects and more (Renshaw, 1991). Broadening sexual knowledge should aim to contribute to the minimising of negative experiences within relationships and the enhancement of positive ones (Dailey, 1997).

Students studying to be teachers have been found to regard love, and not marriage, as the prerequisite for sexual intercourse (Hill, Kok & Myburgh, 1992). However, this appears to be in opposition to their religious views and personal values, which places them in a difficult position by causing uncertainty with regard to their desired values and norms (Hill et al., 1992). Ansuini and Fiddler-Woite (1996) have pointed out that sex itself does not cause guilt or shame; these negative consequences are caused rather by erroneous information about sex.

Although parents are expected to be a child's primary source of sex education (since good parenting entails protecting children from ignorance in order to promote their well-

being), it has been found that they don't fulfil this role (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996; Maddock, 1997). In a study using 327 pairs of parents of a group of Afrikaans-speaking standard nine pupils, Kruger and Van den Bergh (as cited by Aldrich et al., 1994) found that the majority of participants failed to give their children adequate sex education.

In fact, it has been found that (poorly informed) friends, siblings or personal experiences provide children with a primary source of sex information, rather than parents or schools (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996; Dailey, 1997; Renshaw, 1991; Strong et al., 1998). Often, it is the source from which initial sexuality information is obtained that is responsible for problems associated with inaccurate information (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996). When children do in fact learn about sexuality from their parents, this learning takes place through observing their parents' behaviour as opposed to being taught by them (Strong et al., 1998).

The use of literature can also provide sex education, and in turn can give high school pupils an opportunity to expand their sexual knowledge and to learn valuable life lessons that can eventually help them to make responsible decisions in their own lives, as well as in their relationships. This use of literature is based on the concept that it can have educational value for the reader by giving pupils the chance to identify with the characters (Aldrich et al., 1994).

Research on reading therapy and the use of Afrikaans literature in family guidance and sex education found that it is not only parents who are not providing their children with sufficient sex education, but schools too (Aldrich et al., 1994). This results in children being uninformed about concepts relating to basic physical intimacy, which is a factor in relationship satisfaction.

As a source of sexual information, school health education programmes can play an important part in sex education (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996). South African research has found that there are no sex education programmes regarding heterosexual relationships being offered at any college of education in South Africa and less than one

tenth of 37 teacher-training institutions investigated offer any form of sexuality education (Hill et al., 1992; Van Rooyen as cited by Hill et al., 1992, p.385).

If students studying to be teachers did receive training with regard to heterosexual relationships, they would be better equipped to teach pupils about sexuality as part of their natural development. Although it is not the teacher's responsibility to teach pupils sex education, if parents are not fulfilling their duties in providing their children with the necessary information, then teachers should be equipped to do so if the pupils ask for it. At the same time, when parents and schools do provide children with some form of sex education, it is usually insufficient (Aldrich et al., 1994).

When sexuality has been addressed, sexuality educators have often failed to highlight the enhancement of sexual pleasure, an important part of intimacy that contributes to relationship satisfaction. Rather, the emphasis has been placed on the negative aspects of sexuality in an attempt to prevent sexual activity amongst young people (Dailey, 1997). Maddock (1997) points out that the universal power struggle between parents and children, old and young, teachers and pupils is what underlies the problems of providing sex education.

By believing that children are sexually ignorant, parents and teachers prevent them from obtaining accurate knowledge about sex (Renshaw, 1991). Healthy acceptance of one's own sexuality as well as that of others is a developmental aspect that needs to be incorporated into a relationships programme (Dickman, cited by Hill et al., 1992, p.385). It has been claimed that by teaching children about sex we are encouraging them to become sexually active at an early age, but this is not true (Renshaw, 1991). The main aim of sex education should be to create an awareness that can later lead to an environment for "healthy sexual expression and responsible self-fulfilment" (Dailey, 1997, p.96).

The reason for the lack of sex education, according to Maddock (1997), is that attitudes towards sexuality and sex education reflect fundamental existential issues that are

difficult, if not impossible, to agree upon: “What is life all about? What are the fundamental components of human nature? What are the goals of a society? What do present generations hope to pass on to future generations?” (Maddock, 1997, p.18). We need to be realistic when dealing with children, and even if we believe that children need to be protected, they still have the right to learn about both the positive and negative aspects of their sexuality.

For the purposes of this study, sex education will be operationally defined as measured by the sexual knowledge questionnaire in which the term sexual knowledge has been used.

### **Parenting Styles**

Attachment theories, such as Bowlby’s, are based on the premise that early socialisation experiences within the family influence the structure and function of adult interpersonal relationships (Parker, Barrett & Hickie, 1992). Therefore, the sense of self-worth and self-confidence created by secure mother-child or father-child attachment may be partially responsible for adult relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, the inability to form close adult interpersonal relationships may be partially due to negative mother-child or father-child bonding resulting from the experience of insufficient parental care (Parker et al., 1992).

More people who received an authoritative, or caring, parenting style are now secure in their intimate relationships, while fewer are secure if they received an authoritarian, or controlling, parenting style. Relationship security is not noticeable amongst people who received a permissive parenting style (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). Children of caring, authoritative parents have more positive perceptions on variables that indicate a person’s beliefs about other’s accessibility, trustworthiness, and responsiveness to one’s needs (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). Trustworthiness could be considered a necessary factor for assertive conflict resolution, just as accessibility is a prerequisite for intimacy.

Thus attachment is not the only variable affecting relationship satisfaction, as parenting styles also have an effect (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001; Parker et al., 1992). “[A]ttachment is the decisive factor in formulating the internal working model and although parenting styles seem to parallel attachment styles, in fact they do not” (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001, p.182). This statement was supported by the finding that 92% of participants who are secure within their relationships have caring, authoritative parents, while only 70% of participants with caring, authoritative parents are secure within their relationships (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001).

Furthermore, current patterns of intimacy and autonomy are related to early relationships with parents (Dresner & Grolnick, 1996). Autonomy is very similar to independence (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2002), which is a factor constituting relationship satisfaction. Autonomy in women’s current lives emerges from encouragement of independence in childhood (Dresner & Grolnick, 1996). Women in secure intimate relationships perceive themselves as having received more acceptance, or care, in childhood from their fathers than those involved in superficial or enmeshed relationships (Dresner & Grolnick, 1996). Similarly, men who experienced positive attachment to their mothers are more likely to experience positive attachment to their intimate partner (Tayler, Parker & Roy, 1995).

This supports attachment theories that suggest that models of early relationships may guide the types of adult relationships engaged in by determining the levels of intimacy with which one can relate and feel comfortable (Dresner & Grolnick, 1996; Tayler et al., 1995). Similarly, parental opinions regarding relationships, as well as the social environment of the person, influence young people’s opinions about relationships, as well as their relational career (Spruijt, 1995).

### **Family Structure**

The structure of a family may influence the relationship satisfaction of the children who were raised in these families. Children may have been raised in single parent families, families where parents are married or divorced, stepfamilies, or families where a parent

was deceased. There is a strong indication that the effects of parental divorce and death have negative consequences on relationship satisfaction, specifically a tendency to see deficiencies in the ability to relate in a healthy and stable way. (This includes problems with trust, commitment, control and being overly self-reliant) (Lauer & Lauer, 1991).

Hepworth et al. (1984) endorsed the fact that the loss of a parent has an effect on later intimate relationships. They found that less time passes between parental loss and dating when the loss is due to death, as opposed to divorce. Couples who have lost a parent to death appear to have relationships that last longer than the relationships of couples who have not experienced any form of loss and they exhibit greater variance for their level of sexual intimacy than other couples. When this loss occurred during adolescence, it indicated a tendency to move into intimate relationships at extremes, either more quickly or more slowly, than people who had not experienced any form of parental loss. This extreme behaviour was also reflected in sexual intimacy. Although these relationships are of a serious nature, rather than casual, it would be more likely for those who have lost a parent to death to actually avoid intimate relationships, including sexual intimacy (Hepworth et al., 1984).

On the other hand, parental loss due to divorce appears to result in more accelerated dating patterns, more interest in relationships, as well as a greater number of actual relationships (Hepworth et al., 1984). Where having lost a parent to death indicates involvement in either a serious relationship, or none at all (once again indicating extremes), having lost a parent to divorce indicates involvement in a relationship rather than being alone (Hepworth et al., 1984).

Similarly, people raised in intact-unhappy families are more likely to be in intimate relationships than those from intact-happy families (Lauer & Lauer, 1991).

It is suggested that those from disrupted and intact-unhappy families have an intimacy deficit that makes it more imperative for them to be in an intimate relationship, particularly the intense kind of relationship involved in marriage, cohabitating, or dating steadily (Lauer & Lauer, 1991, p. 289).

However, there is no evidence to suggest that they experience their relationships as more satisfying than those from intact-happy families.

Although Tayler et al. (1995) were unable to prove any effect of parental divorce on adult intimate attachment, it appears that students from divorced families have significantly more sexual partners than students from intact families (Gabardi & Rosén, 1992; Hepworth et al., 1984). Moreover, young people from single-parent families engage in sexual activity more often than young people from stepfamilies or intact families, and are more likely to have their first sexual experience with a casual partner (Spruijt, 1995). This may provide students from divorced families with a means of exploring intimate relationships; it may also be that these students have learnt from their parents that sexual activity does not need to occur within a committed relationship. Students from divorced families also appear to desire a higher frequency of sexual behaviours within their relationships than those from intact families (Gabardi & Rosén, 1992). However, the differences identified between students from divorced families and those from intact families pertain to expectations involving exclusive, committed relationships (Gabardi & Rosén, 1992).

Parental conflict after the divorce is associated with more negative attitudes toward marriage, while parental conflict before the divorce has no significant effect (Gabardi & Rosén, 1992). The more recent the parental divorce takes place, the more sexual behaviours are desired. Similarly, a lower level of parental marital happiness is associated with more sexual partners, as well as negative relationship beliefs where students regarded their partners as unable to change (Gabardi & Rosén, 1992).

The indication is that it is not the marital status of parents that has an effect on the intimate relationships of college students, but rather the quality of parental relationships, whether married or divorced, and the amount of conflict between parents (Gabardi & Rosén, 1992). On the other hand, some studies have been unable to find any significant differences in the relationship satisfaction of either death-disrupted or divorce-disrupted

families, as well as intact-happy families or intact-unhappy families (Lauer & Lauer, 1991).

Young people from single-parent families become involved in relationships at an earlier age than those from stable intact families; they also have their first sexual experience at a younger age, and experience more problems with intimate relationships than their counterparts from stable intact families (Spruijt, 1995). These young people (from single-parent families) have the most experience in relationships, but it is young people from stepfamilies who exhibit more modern views on relationships than those from intact families. These views are depicted by hesitancy to have children, strong liberated beliefs of sexual roles, and being open to new forms of cohabitation (Spruijt, 1995).

Because of the gender differences between men and women, it is possible that certain gender differences exist with regard to relationship satisfaction. Double standards exist for men and women regarding premarital sex as well as career importance, which can result in problems in their relationships. For example, female virtuosity is regarded as more important than male virtuosity, and men's careers are regarded as more important than those of women (Hill et al., 1992). Further gender differences found regarding sexuality are that "men desire and experience more sexual activity and diversity in sexual activity than women" and "[w]omen experience a greater degree of intimacy and have more positive self-perceptions of their morality than men" (Garbardi & Rosén, 1992, p.46). Amongst men and women from single-parent families, it was found that women tend to leave their parental home at an earlier age than men, they cohabit earlier, break up relationships more often, and perceive their relationships more negatively (Spruijt, 1995).

This study focuses on investigating the role of child-rearing practices (sex education, perceived parenting styles and family structure) as predictors of relationship satisfaction of fourth-year hostel residents from the University of the Free State. Fourth-year university students will be the focus of this study because they are more likely to have been involved in an intimate relationship at some point in their lives. This is mainly

because they have had more exposure and opportunities to form relationships than students in the preceding year groups.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Sample

Questionnaires were handed to the total population of fourth-year university hostel residents at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein. The total number of questionnaires distributed was N=364, of which fewer than half were returned, a total of N=170. A number of techniques were employed to gather the outstanding questionnaires (such as physically visiting the hostel in order to collect them). However, these techniques were unsuccessful. Information pertaining to individual biographical variables was obtained from the 170 respondents. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the biographical variables that were measured on the nominal scale, and are presented in Table 1. The SAS-computer program (SAS Institute, 2001) was used for this purpose.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the sample group according to individual biographical variables

<b>Biographical variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender:</b>		
Female	82	48,8
Male	86	51,2
<b>Home language:</b>		
Afrikaans	116	68,2
English	10	5,9
South Sotho	25	14,7
Tswana	2	1,2
Xhosa	6	3,5
Zulu	4	2,4
Other	7	4,1
<b>Race:</b>		
Asian	0	0,0
Black	43	25,4
Coloured	4	2,4
White	122	72,2
<b>Family structure:</b>		
Single parent	12	7,3

Parents married	132	79,5
Parents divorced	11	6,6
One/both parents died	6	3,6
One/both remarried	5	3,0

It is clear from Table 1 that the sample is divided relatively equally in terms of gender. Two people failed to indicate their gender. The majority of respondents are Afrikaans speaking (68.2%) and White (72.2%). (The concepts of race and language are discussed further under the limitations of the study.) The variable pertaining to family structure indicates that the majority of respondents (79.5%) grew up in a home where their parents were married. Originally, it was planned to use this variable as one of the predictors in the study. However, due to the low frequency distribution in the remaining categories, it was decided that for further analysis, only the 132 respondents whose parents were married would be used. As a result, family structure is a constant for the group. Pertaining to this group (of 132), 62 (47.7%) of them are men and 68 (52.3%) are women. Two people did not indicate their gender. Ninety-two (69.7%) are Afrikaans-speaking and 73.5% are White. Only 33 of the 132 respondents (25.0%) are Black and four Coloured. The average age of the 132 respondents is 21.37 years with a standard deviation of 0.88 years.

## **Measuring Instruments**

The measuring instruments used in this study were the Parental Bonding Instrument, the Stevens Relationship Questionnaire, the Relationships Event Scale, a sexual knowledge questionnaire and a biographical questionnaire.

Perceived parenting styles were assessed with the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) developed by Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979). The PBI was used as a measuring instrument in the current research because it is concerned with identifying the parents' contribution to the formation of a parent-child emotional bond. Parker et al. (1979) identified two core factors influencing the relationship and bond between parent and child. The first variable pertains to the caring dimension, the second to the psychological exercise of control over the child, namely overprotection. The PBI is a self-administered

questionnaire providing information about the perceptions of the respondents concerning the degree of care and overprotection that they experienced within the first 16 years of their lives. The PBI consists of 25 items that are divided into two scales. For the purposes of this study, the PBI was rewritten into two separate questionnaires, one for each parent. This was done to make provision for respondents who were raised in a family where both parents were not present. The respondents answered the questions in terms of a five-point Likert scale. The following numerical values were applied to the answer options: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree and 1 = strongly disagree. Raw scores were used in the calculations, not standardised scores. Items were added together to provide high total scores, depending on which scale was added. These scores indicate either a high degree of care (pertaining to love, emotional warmth, empathy and closeness) or a high degree of overprotection (pertaining to control, interference, excessive contact, infantilising, as well as prevention of independent behaviour). The internal consistency of the PBI was measured by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficients with the aid of the SPSS-computer program (SPSS Incorporated, 2003). The coefficients are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scales of the measuring instruments

<b>Questionnaire/construct</b>	<b>a-coefficient</b>
<b>Criteria:</b>	
Independence	0,745
Intimacy	0,610
Romantic attitudes and behaviours	0,722
Assertive conflict resolution/communication	0,715
Equality of decision-making	0,020
Liberated beliefs of sexual roles	0,664
<b>Predictors:</b>	
Parental styles:	
Mother Care	0,862
Mother Overprotection	0,814
Father Care	0,914
Father Overprotection	0,827
Sexual knowledge	0,755

Relationship satisfaction was assessed with the Stevens Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ) (1994). This questionnaire is designed to provide information about the respondents' sexually intimate relationships (Stevens & Stevens, 1994). Its scales correlate as high as 0.70 with overall relationship happiness (Stevens & Stevens, 1994). The SRQ is a 74-item questionnaire. The respondents answered the questions in terms of a five-point Likert scale. The following numerical values were applied to the answer options: -2 = Strongly Disagree, -1 = Disagree, 0 = Neutral, 1 = Agree, 2 = Strongly Agree. Raw scores were used in the calculation, not standardised scores. Items were added together to provide high scores pertaining to the different criterion scales: Independence (freedom to make decisions and pursue interests and personal growth – with blessing of partner), Intimacy (perceived communication of feelings, self-disclosure, likes and dislikes, and ideas concerning respect, commitment and common goals), Romantic Attitudes and Behaviours (including attraction, fantasising and special favours), Assertive Conflict Resolution/Communication (the use of positive, supportive, direct and empathetic statements during discussions related to various levels of problem resolution), Equality of Decision-Making (how equal the two partners perceive their decision-making to be), Liberated Beliefs of Sexual Roles (non-traditional “liberated”, egalitarian beliefs regarding male and female roles within the context of an intimate relationship that focuses on lack of role specialisation). The scales of the SRQ have an internal consistency that is equal to the following Cronbach alpha coefficients (based on American populations): Intimacy (0.81), Romantic Attitudes and Behaviour (0.71), Assertive Conflict Resolution (0.86), Liberated Role Beliefs (0.79), Equality of Decision Making (0.06), and Independence (0.26) (Stevens & Stevens, 1995). The internal consistency of the SRQ (for this South African sample) was measured by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficients with the aid of the SPSS-computer program (SPSS Incorporated, 2003). The coefficients are presented in Table 2.

Sex education was assessed by means of a sexual knowledge questionnaire developed by Louw (2000). It is a 23-item questionnaire measuring the respondents' sexual knowledge. The respondents could answer a question with a Yes, No, or Uncertain. A value of 1 was attributed for a Yes answer, while a value of 0 was attributed to a No or

Uncertain answer. Raw scores were used in the calculations, not standardised scores. Items were added together to provide high total scores. A high score indicates a good sexual knowledge, while a low score is an indication of a lack of sexual knowledge. The internal consistency of the sexual knowledge questionnaire was measured by calculating the Cronbach alpha coefficients with the aid of the SPSS-computer program (SPSS Incorporated, 2003). The coefficients are presented in Table 2.

The Relationship Events Scale (RES) (a Guttman scale marking the progress in courtship) developed by King and Christensen (1983) was used to define the respondents relationship (level three was the minimum cut-off point). However, the majority of the respondents did not complete this questionnaire and it was therefore not possible to make use of the information. The biographical questionnaire contains questions concerning the respondents' gender, age, race, home language and family structure, *viz.* whether they grew up in a single parent family, a family where their parents were married, divorced, or a family where one/both parent had died, or remarried. Race was divided into four categories, *viz.* Black, White, Coloured and Asian. Home language was also divided into seven categories, *viz.* English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, South Sotho, Tswana and Other.

From Table 2 it is clear that higher and more acceptable coefficients were obtained for the perceived parenting styles (PBI) than for the SRQ scales. All four scales of the PBI combined with the sexual knowledge provide higher measurements of internal consistency. Only three of the six SRQ scales provide coefficients higher than 0.7. It is especially the "equality of decision making" scale that provides a very low coefficient. This scale was not used in any further calculations.

Relationship satisfaction was used as the criterion variable in this study, while sex education and perceived parenting styles were the predictor variables. Family structure was used as a constant.

## Statistical Techniques

In accordance with the research question of this study, it is clear that the criterion is relationship satisfaction. As previously mentioned, this variable is measured by five different scales, each of which was used as a criterion in the analysis. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to calculate the degree to which the variance of each of these relationship satisfaction scales of the respondents could be explained by the previously mentioned predictors.

The work method that was followed was to first calculate the total variance of the criterion that could be explained by the collection of predictor variables (complete model). Following that, each one of the predictor variables was removed in order to calculate that specific variable's contribution to the explanation of the variance in the criterion. The percentage of the variance that is explained by a specific variable is indicated by  $R^2$  (squared multiple correlation coefficient).

The hierarchical  $F$ -test was used in order to calculate whether a specific variable's contribution to the  $R^2$ -value was statistically significant. The manner in which this test can be calculated is as follows:

$$F = \frac{(R^2_{y,1...k_1} - R^2_{y,1...k_2}) / (k_1 - k_2)}{(1 - R^2_{y,1...k_1}) / (N - k_1 - 1)}$$

where:

$R^2_{y,1...k_1}$  = Squared multiple correlation coefficient for the larger number independent variables

$R^2_{y,1...k_2}$  = Squared multiple correlation coefficient for the smaller number independent variables

$k_1$  = Larger number independent variables

$k_2$  = Smaller number independent variables

$N$  = Total number cases

(Van der Walt, 1980)

When the significance of an increase in  $R^2$  is investigated, it is also necessary to calculate the effect size of the contribution of a specific predictor(s). The effect size provides an indication of the contribution to  $R^2$  in terms of the proportion of unexplained variance of

the complete model. According to Van der Westhuizen, Monteith and Steyn (1989) the effect size of the individual contributions in terms of  $f^2$  can be calculated with the help of the following formula:

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2 - R^2_1}{1 - R^2}$$

where:

$R^2$  = proportion variance explained by the complete model

$R^2_1$  = proportion variance explained by the smaller number independent variables

The guidelines that can be used according to Cohen (Steyn, 1999) are the following:

$f^2 = 0,01$  : small effect

$f^2 = 0,15$  : medium effect

$f^2 = 0,35$  : large effect

These effect sizes provide information about the practical importance of the relationships that can possibly be found between the variables.

The SAS-computer program (SAS Institute, 2001) was used to do the analysis.

## 4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) pertaining to the criterion and predictor variables of the sample are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations for the sample

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	s
<b>Criteria:</b>			
Independence	98	0,56	0,40

Intimacy	96	0,41	0,47
Romantic attitudes and behaviours	103	0,43	0,62
Assertive conflict resolution/communication	98	0,44	0,37
Liberated beliefs of sexual roles	108	-0,04	0,61
<b>Predictors:</b>			
Parental styles:			
Mother Care	124	51,42	7,70
Mother Overprotection	125	29,34	8,18
Father Care	126	47,19	9,61
Father Overprotection	123	28,85	8,30
Sexual knowledge	105	12,58	4,16

There is no data available indicating the mean scores of the norm group. The negative mean score of liberated beliefs of sexual roles is below the theoretical mean of zero. The mean score of sexual knowledge is 12.58 with a standard deviation of 4.16. The highest score is 22 and the lowest is 3 out of a possible total of 23.

Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was calculated in order to investigate the relationship between the predictor variables and the five scales of the criterion. It was calculated for the 132 respondents in the final group and the results appear in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlations between the criterion and predictor variables for the total group (N=132)

Predictor variables	Criterion variables				
	Independence	Intimacy	Romantic	Assertive	Liberated
Parental styles:					
Mother Care	0,24*	0,18	0,13	0,29**	0,01
Mother Overprotection	-0,30**	0,02	0,10	-0,08	0,02
Father Care	0,13	0,13	0,18	0,17	-0,03
Father Overprotection	-0,06	-0,25*	-0,11	-0,21*	0,15
Sexual knowledge	0,15	-0,01	-0,13	-0,04	0,22*

\*\* p ≤ 0,01

\* p ≤ 0,05

From Table 4 it appears that:

- a) On the 1% level there is a significant positive relationship between mother care and assertive conflict resolution and communication, while there is a significant negative relationship between mother overprotection and independence. In the

first case it suggests that that the more the respondent experienced their mother's parental style as caring, the more they tend to use positive, supportive, direct and empathetic statements during discussions. In the second case (i.e. negative), it suggests that the more the respondent experienced their mother's parental style as overprotective, the less they tend to behave independently in a relationship.

- b) On the 5% level there is a significant positive relationship between sex education and liberated beliefs of sexual roles (for the purposes of this study, sex education is operationally defined as measured by the sexual knowledge questionnaire in which the term sexual knowledge has been used). There is also a significant negative relationship between father overprotection and intimacy, as well as assertive conflict resolution/communication. The positive relationship suggests that the more sex education a respondent receives, the more they tend to have non-traditional, liberated, egalitarian beliefs regarding male and female roles within the context of an intimate relationship. The negative relationship suggests that the more the respondent experienced their father's parental style as overprotective, the lower the degree of intimacy they experience within a relationship, and the less they tend to use positive, supportive, direct and empathetic statements during discussions.

There is also a significant positive relationship between mother care and independence. This relationship suggests that the more a respondent experienced their mother's parental style as caring, the more they tend to experience both partners as having the freedom to make decisions and pursue individual interests and personal growth.

- c) None of the predictor variables display a significant relationship with romantic attitudes and behaviours (as one of the five criteria).

## Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis was done in order to investigate the contribution of the different predictor variables to the explanation of the variance in relationship satisfaction of fourth-year hostel residents from the University of the Free State. Since five different sub-scales were used to get an indication of the respondents' relationship satisfaction, the regression analysis was done separately for each of the five scales. Firstly, the  $R^2$ -values, as well as the  $F$ -values for the total model were calculated for each of these sub-scales (all the predictors form part of the regression comparison) to determine whether the predictors collectively provided a significant contribution to the explanation of the variance for each of the sub-scales. If it were found that there was indeed a significant contribution to the variance, the analysis would be followed up by means of hierarchical regression. In this case, the specific contribution that each predictor provides to the specified sub-scale's variance will be calculated, as well as the  $R^2$ -value with, and then without, the specified predictor. The significance of the difference that appears in  $R^2$  will be calculated by using the hierarchical  $F$ -test, while the effect sizes ( $f^2$ ) will also be calculated and shown.

The results of the first step are indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of the regression analysis for each of the five sub-scales for all the predictors collectively

Criteria/subscales	$f^2$	Sum of squares	$F$ -value	$p$ -value
Independence	5; 73	12,488	1,50	0,1994
Intimacy	5; 70	14,850	2,65*	0,0298
Romantic attitudes and behaviours	5; 78	31,577	2,17	0,0659
Assertive conflict resolution/communication	5; 74	10,309	2,00	0,0878
Liberated beliefs of sexual roles	5;79	28,643	1,76	0,1307

\*  $p \leq 0,05$

From Table 5 it is obvious that, on the 5% level, the predictors can collectively explain a significant percentage of the variance for the subjects only in terms of one of the five sub-scales, namely intimacy. Therefore, other factors contribute to the development of these remaining sub-scales of relationship satisfaction in adulthood. The analysis for this

criterion score (intimacy) was continued with the aid of hierarchical regression analysis as is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Contributions of the different predictors to the explanation of the variance in intimacy of fourth-year hostel residents from the University of the Free State

Variables in analysis	Variable left out	R <sup>2</sup>	Contribution to R <sup>2</sup>	F	f <sup>2</sup>
1. moc+mop+fac+fap+sex	-	0,1592	-	-	-
2. moc+mop+fac+fap	sex	0,1579	0,0013	0,11	-
3. moc+mop+fac+sex	fap	0,0295	0,1297	10,81**	0,15
4. moc+mop+fap+sex	fac	0,1495	0,0097	0,81	-
5. moc+fac+fap+sex	mop	0,1495	0,0097	0,81	-
6. mop+fac+fap+sex	moc	0,0912	0,0680	5,67*	0,08

Key: [sex=sexual knowledge; fap=father overprotection; fac=father care; mop=mother overprotection; moc=mother care]

\*\* p ≤ 0,01

\* p ≤ 0,05

The results in Table 6 indicate firstly that all the predictor variables collectively explain 15.92% (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.1592) of the variance in **intimacy** of fourth-year hostel residents from the University of the Free State. This calculated R<sup>2</sup>-value is significant on the 5% level (see Table 5).

When the contributions to R<sup>2</sup> of the individual predictors are investigated, it is clear from Table 6 that two predictors, namely father overprotection and mother care, make a significant contribution on their own (on the 1% level and the 5% level respectively) to the explanation of the variance in intimacy of fourth-year hostel residents from the University of the Free State. Father overprotection explains 12.9% of the variance in the respondent's intimacy, while mother care explains 6.8% of it. With reference to the guideline values of the different effect sizes, it is obvious from Table 6 that father overprotection contributes a medium effect size and mother care shows a small to medium effect size.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study was prompted by the void in South African research investigating the role that child-rearing practices play in relationship satisfaction. With the bulk of international research indicating the negative effects that faulty child-rearing practices have on relationship satisfaction, research in this field is critical to serve as a database for further investigations.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role that child-rearing practices play in relationship satisfaction. The findings suggest that sex education is significantly related to liberated beliefs of sexual roles. As discussed earlier, liberated beliefs of sexual roles are one of the factors comprising relationship satisfaction (the remaining factors include independence, intimacy, assertive conflict resolution/communication, equality of decision-making, and romantic attitudes and behaviours). The literature supports this finding by implying that poor sex education, as well as a lack of sexual knowledge, can lead to lower relationship satisfaction (Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996; Dailey, 1997; Hill et al., 1992).

It is evident from the literature that sex education may raise awareness of sexual/gender stereotypes. In the world today, there appears to be a move towards an emphasis on androgyny within society (Cheng, 2005; Isaac & Shah, 2004). This implies that sex education can possibly promote androgyny, thereby doing away with traditional beliefs regarding sexual roles. From the literature (Aldrich et al., 1994; Ansuini & Fiddler-Woite, 1996; Dailey, 1997; Renshaw, 1991; Strong et al., 1998), one can identify parents, schools, siblings and peers as sources of sex education.

The study further found that more parental care and less parental control results in higher relationship satisfaction of the children raised in these families. This supports similar findings in the literature (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). The findings of the present study are consistent with the literature where more father overprotection results in less intimacy and assertive conflict resolution/communication in their offspring. This is demonstrated by Neal and Frick-Horbury's (2001) findings that parental care leads to higher

accessibility between partners (necessary for intimacy). Similarly, Neal and Frick-Horbury (2001) found that parental care leads to more trustworthiness (which is important for assertive conflict resolution). This supports the findings of this study that more mother care causes more assertive conflict resolution/communication, as well as more independence in children's relationships, while more mother overprotection results in less independence. These results correlate with Dresner and Grolnick's (1996) findings, although they found that women with high levels of independence perceived their fathers as caring. Although this study provided results pertaining to father overprotection, it was unable to find any relationship between father care and relationship satisfaction. A possible reason for this could be that society, specifically white South Africans, have not yet done away with traditional gender stereotyping that depicts mothers as caring and sensitive, and fathers as providers and disciplinarians.

The parental care associated with relationship satisfaction could be explained by the possibility that children who received more responsive and accepting parenting have more self-confidence, self-acceptance and higher self-esteem than those whose parents employed power tactics. Self-confidence, self-acceptance and good self-esteem may lead to more independence, assertive conflict resolution and greater intimacy in relationships. The high degree of positive parental care displayed by this sample may be due to the fact that almost all of the subjects were raised in intact, married families. The stability and security of being raised in an intact family, combined with parental care, may have a positive influence on one's self-perceptions (Lauer & Lauer, 1991; Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001).

In the current study, intimacy was the only sub-scale of relationship satisfaction explained by the predictors. From the literature (Gabardi & Rosèn, 1992; Hepworth et al., 1984; Hill et al., 1992; Lauer & Lauer, 1991; Maddock, 1997; Parker et al., 1992; Spruijt, 1995), one can surmise that parent-child attachment, parental opinions, family structure, sexual pleasure, gender differences, and the social environment, are amongst those factors that could possibly play a role in explaining the remaining sub-scales of relationship satisfaction.

Dresner and Grolnick's (1996) and Tayler et al. (1995) suggestion that intimacy is determined by parent-child attachment, may provide a possible reason for the finding that the predictors utilised in this study could only explain 15.92% of intimacy. Therefore, sexual pleasure and family structure, as mentioned in the literature (Gabardi & Rosèn, 1992; Hepworth et al., 1984; Hill et al., 1992; Lauer & Lauer, 1991; Maddock, 1997; Parker et al., 1992; Spruijt, 1995), may be considered with parent-child attachment as other factors that could possibly contribute to intimacy.

As mentioned earlier, relationship satisfaction refers to independence, intimacy, assertive conflict resolution/communication, equality of decision-making, and romantic attitudes and behaviours. The only sub-scale of relationship satisfaction that did not display a significant relationship with any of the predictor variables in this study was romantic attitudes and behaviours. Romantic attitudes and behaviours between partners are defined by Stevens and Stevens (1994) as attraction, fantasising and special favours. This would not necessarily always be evident for children to observe from their parents, as this behaviour could be private. Similarly, sex education does not cater for the romantic aspect of relationships. This implies that romantic attitudes and behaviours in relationships are explained by other factors (e.g. temperament).

From the original sample, 79.5% of the respondents were raised in families where their parents were married. Consequently, intact families were used exclusively. Due to this, different factors in terms of child-rearing practices in single parent families, stepfamilies, and families disrupted by death or divorce could not be investigated and/or compared to those utilised in intact families. Literature suggests that family structure is important for later relationship satisfaction (Gabardi & Rosèn, 1992; Hepworth et al., 1984; Lauer & Lauer, 1991; Spruijt, 1995). More specifically, Spruijt (1995) found that adult children raised in stepfamilies had stronger liberated beliefs of sexual roles than the adult children from other family structures. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the results of this study would have been different if the sample used had not comprised exclusively of respondents raised in married families.

In conclusion, this study was able to show that aspects of child-rearing practices do have an effect on relationship satisfaction in early adulthood. It was also able to highlight the different components of relationship satisfaction and factors related to these different components.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

A major limitation of this study was that fewer than half of the questionnaires were returned. This small return rate, combined with the fact that it was a small sample, proved to be problematic. As a result, White, Afrikaans-speaking fourth-year university hostel residents made up the majority of the sample. This sample is not representative in terms of race and language, and generalisations of the results should therefore not be made.

From the literature and discussion it appears that family structure is important for later relationship satisfaction. Because this sample consisted mainly of students from intact families, family structure could not be investigated as a predictor of relationship satisfaction. As this study was able to investigate the relationship satisfaction of children raised in intact families only, future research could investigate the effects of a non-intact family structure on relationship satisfaction.

Based on this study's findings, future research could also aim to investigate the reason that sex education results in liberated beliefs of sexual roles. Similarly, this study found that sex education had no effect on intimacy, as a component of relationship satisfaction. Therefore, future research could specifically investigate, with regard to sexual satisfaction and sexual knowledge, the role of intimacy as a prerequisite for sexual relationships. This, however, would be almost impossible to investigate with the sample used in this study (gauged from their responses) and would be more successful if investigated amongst married couples.

From the discussion, future research could aim to investigate the factors that lead to romantic attitudes and behaviours in relationships; as well as the contribution of parent-child attachment, family structure and sexual pleasure to intimacy within relationships. Similarly, parent-child attachment, parental opinions, family structure, sexual pleasure, gender differences, and the social environment could be investigated as factors that could possibly explain the remaining sub-scales of relationship satisfaction, namely, independence, equality of decision-making, liberated beliefs of sexual roles, assertive conflict resolution/communication, and romance.

On a practical note, the combination of five questionnaires into a booklet proved to be too long for the majority of the respondents (as measured by their response). Similarly, despite the assurance of confidentiality, some of the respondents were reluctant to answer intimate questions related to their relationship satisfaction.

Finally, most of the findings of the present study were similar, or somewhat similar, to international literature regarding the role of child-rearing practices in relationship satisfaction. However, some of the findings differed from what has been found elsewhere in the world, and should be taken note of. The current study has contributed to the under-explored field of relationship satisfaction. The findings might be employed as base-line data for future research in this field. It is hoped that the findings of the study will serve as supplementary information for professionals and parents alike.

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## **8. APPENDIX A**

Permission to make use of fourth-year hostel residents from the University of the Free State as participants in this study was granted by the University of the Free State.

## Key words

**Child-rearing practices**  
**Family structure**  
**Sex education**  
**Parenting styles**  
**Relationship satisfaction**  
**Fourth-year students**  
**Intimacy**  
**Independence**  
**Over-protection**  
**Care**