

# Exploring Parental Responsiveness and Relationship Dynamics Among Young Adults in University

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## Abstract

The interdependent self-construal reflects how individuals see themselves in relation to others, shaping their approach to close relationships (Singelis, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Parental responsiveness—characterized by emotional support and availability—may influence how these relational patterns develop, as well as satisfaction in later romantic relationships (Millings et al., 2012). However, the potential role of self-construal in moderating this relationship remains unexplored. This study examines whether interdependent self-construal affects the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction among university students. Participants completed an anonymous online survey distributed via the McMaster SONA system and social media platforms. The results indicated that there was no moderating effect of interdependent self-construal on perceived parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction. Notably, one subscale of parental responsiveness—parental validation—was positively correlated with interdependent self-construal in this study. These findings highlight the importance of future research exploring how specific aspects of parental validation may be linked to romantic relationship outcomes.

**Keywords:** *parental responsiveness, self-construal, relationship dynamics*

## Exploring Parental Responsiveness and Relationship Dynamics Among Young Adults in University

The ability to form and sustain meaningful romantic relationships is shaped by a range of developmental and interpersonal factors, with parenting style playing a foundational role. Research shows that responsive parenting, characterized by warmth, attunement, and support, promotes emotional regulation and relational skills that carry into adulthood (Heshmati et al., 2024). In addition, an individual's self-construal, how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others, can influence how they engage in close relationships (Cross et al., 2000). Those with an interdependent self-construal may prioritize harmony and connection, potentially influencing how parental influence is internalized (Cross et al., 2000). These concepts are especially relevant for young adults, who are navigating a critical life stage for developing intimate relationships and forming long-term relational patterns (Erikson, 1994). In this research we examined the

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relationship between interdependence in one's self-construal, perceived parental responsiveness, and romantic relationship satisfaction among young adults in university.

## **Perceived Parental Responsiveness Influence on Relationship Satisfaction**

### ***Parental Responsiveness***

Perceived parental responsiveness is a fundamental aspect of child development, shaping not only a child's immediate well-being but also long-term social and emotional outcomes. Parental responsiveness is defined by things such as how attuned parents are to their child's needs, how well they provide consistent emotional support and encouragement, as well as their level of engagement in their child's development. Responsive parenting involves recognizing and appropriately responding to a child's cues, fostering secure attachment, social competence, and cognitive growth (Baumrind, 1991). Studies have shown higher levels of perceived parental responsiveness to be linked to favourable child outcomes, including improved communication skills, greater epistemic curiosity, and overall well-being (Iwasaki, Moriguchi, & Sekiyama, 2023). Furthermore, parenting styles that emphasize responsiveness tend to promote healthier emotional regulation and relationship-building skills in adolescence and adulthood (Baumrind, 1991; Sarwar, 2016). This study aims to explore whether the well-documented association between perceived parental responsiveness and both childhood and adult developmental outcomes also extends to romantic relationships in early adulthood—specifically by contributing to higher romantic relationship satisfaction.

A growing body of research supports the idea that the satisfaction of the parent-child relationship has lasting implications for romantic relationships in adulthood. Secure, supportive, and emotionally responsive parenting is closely linked to the development of secure attachment styles, which shape how individuals navigate intimacy, trust, and conflict in later romantic relationships (Simpson et al., 2007). For instance, children who experience warmth, consistent support, and open communication from caregivers are more likely to develop relational competencies such as emotional regulation, empathy, and mutual respect—skills essential for forming and sustaining healthy romantic partnerships (Auslander et al., 2009; Fincham & Cui, 2011). These outcomes align with intergenerational theories, which propose that children internalize relationship models based on family experiences, shaping their expectations and behaviours in close relationships (Obegi et al., 2004). Therefore, the environment cultivated through responsive parenting may not only influence early developmental outcomes but also serve as a foundation for emotional satisfaction and resilient romantic relationships in adulthood.

### ***Romantic Relationship Satisfaction***

To better explore the specific influence of parental relationships on children's later romantic relationship satisfaction, Reczek, Liu, and Umberson (2010) conducted a longitudinal study examining how relationships with parents influence the marital satisfaction of adult children over time. Utilizing data from the Americans' Changing Lives survey, researchers analysed responses from 520 individuals regarding their relationships with their mothers and 336 individuals regarding their relationships with their fathers. The findings indicated that supportive paternal relationships were associated with a slower decline in marital closeness over time, while strained maternal

relationships were linked to increased marital strain. These associations varied depending on the adult child's age, marital duration, and levels of family stress experienced during childhood. Specifically, younger adults and those with shorter marital durations were more susceptible to the influence of parental relationships on their marital satisfaction. This study underscores the lasting effects of early family relationships on adults' romantic outcomes, emphasizing the role of supportive parental interactions in promoting marital well-being, particularly among young adults (Reczek et al., 2010).

Romantic relationship satisfaction is shaped by several key elements, such as affection, commitment, and emotional security, and often begins to develop during young adulthood (Erikson, 1994). In this developmental stage—particularly as young adults in university—individuals strive to develop meaningful connections with romantic partners and close friends while navigating academic, career and personal growth demands. Swenson et al. (2008) demonstrated that strong peer relationships significantly enhance students' academic and social adjustment during their college transition. Furthermore, Davila et al. (2017) shows that young adult's capacity for romantic competence and emotional closeness contributes to well-being and personal development in this life stage. Difficulties in forming intimacy can lead to increased loneliness and emotional distress, which may interfere with future relationship development (Erikson, 1994). Following this, it's important to recognize that young adulthood—particularly for those in university—is not only a period of building close relationships but also critical time for identity development and self-discovery. During this stage, individuals work to construct a coherent sense of self by negotiating personal aspirations alongside social and relational expectations, which plays essential role in the transition to adulthood (Sugimura et al., 2015).

### **Influence of Interdependent Self-Construal**

In many relationship contexts, individuals tend to define themselves through their interactions with others. According to Singelis (1994), a self-construal describes how individuals define themselves in relation to others—shaping their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours—while maintaining a sense of individuality. From this perspective, people often consider how others perceive them, and these perceptions can influence their self-concept. Self-construal's are comprised of two primary orientations, independent and interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). An independent self-construal emphasizes individuality and a sense of self that is autonomous from group affiliations (Voyer & Franks, 2014). In contrast, an interdependent self-construal reflects a self-image rooted in relationships and the importance of connectedness and social support (Voyer & Franks, 2014).

Individuals who lean toward either form of self-construal often align with broader cultural values of individualism or collectivism, which shape their perceived social obligations and relational behaviour (Gardner et al., 1999). This study focuses specifically on interdependent self-construal, as individuals with this orientation tend to prioritize relational harmony and the value of mutual support—qualities that are central to healthy romantic functioning (Cross et al., 2000). We aim to examine how these relational dimensions of interdependent self-construal influence romantic relationship dynamics, particularly among young adults in university.

Additionally, Morry & Kito (2009) found that individuals with high

relational-independent self-construal (RISC) were more likely to seek emotional support through strategies like cognitive reappraisal rather than emotional suppression, indicating that self-construal influences how people cope within relationships. These findings reinforce the importance of understanding self-construal as a factor that shapes interpersonal dynamics. While existing studies have highlighted the broad role of self-construal in social behaviour, there is less clarity on how this may function specifically in romantic relationships in young adults.

### **Current Research**

This study addresses a significant gap in the existing literature by examining how early parental experiences interact with self-construal to influence romantic relationship outcomes in young adults. Previous research has shown that perceived parental responsiveness plays a critical role in developing social and emotional competencies—such as secure attachment, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills—which in turn contribute to higher romantic relationship satisfaction later in life (Baumrind, 1991; Simpson et al., 2007; Reczek et al., 2010). Separately, self-construal—particularly interdependent self-construal—has been linked to behaviours such as emotional support-seeking, prosocial behaviour, and relational commitment, all of which are vital to romantic functioning (Cross et al., 2000; Day & Impett, 2017).

However, the interaction of these two domains—perceived parental responsiveness and self-construal—has received limited attention, especially for young adults in university. This study seeks to determine whether the positive effect of perceived parental responsiveness on relationship outcomes is amplified or diminished depending on an individual's level of interdependence. For example, individuals with high interdependent self-construal may be more attuned to family relations and more inclined to internalize parental support as a model for future relationships (Anikiej-Wiczenbach et al., 2024). In contrast, those low in interdependence may prioritize autonomy and emotional self-sufficiency, potentially weakening the impact of early caregiving on later romantic experiences. Prior studies indicate that individuals with an interdependent or relational-interdependent self-construal are often more accustomed to the emotional dynamics and social cues present in their close relationships (Cross et al., 2000). As a result, they may be more inclined to internalize early caregiving interactions into their relational schemas. This perspective supports the possibility that interdependence may heighten the influence perceived parental responsiveness on later romantic relationship satisfaction, aligning with the proposed moderation effect.

By adopting a moderation-based approach, this research moves beyond linear models to explore how individual differences in identity (as captured by self-construal) influence the translation of early parental experiences into adult romantic relationship outcomes. The findings will contribute to both theoretical and applied domains—including a better understanding of how young adults navigate romantic relationship development, how family dynamics shape long-term well-being, and how cultural values like independence and interdependence interact with relational functioning.

## Research Question and Hypotheses

*H1 (Main Effect): There is a significant positive main effect of perceived parental responsiveness on romantic relationship satisfaction.*

*H2 (Main Effect): There is a significant positive main effect of the level of interdependence in self-construal on romantic relationship satisfaction.*

*H3 (Moderation): There is a moderating effect of individuals' degree of interdependence in their self-construal on the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction.*

## Method

### **Participants and Procedures**

This project received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB), under protocol number MREB 7231.

Participants were recruited through the Social Psychology SONA research participation system and Instagram. On SONA, students received 0.5 participation credits upon completion. Instagram recruitment was conducted via personal stories shared by the research team, with the survey link. Participants accessed the study by clicking the link provided through the Instagram post or SONA recruitment system. Before beginning the survey, they were shown a letter of information outlining the study's purpose, inclusion and exclusion criteria, procedures, potential risks and benefits, compensation details, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality protocols, access to study results, and the research teams contact information. On the same page, participants were asked to indicate their consent to participate. Those who declined were automatically directed to a debriefing form, and the survey was terminated.

To meet the study's inclusion criteria, participants were required to be above 18 years old, currently enrolled in a university program, fluent in reading English, have had a caregiver or a parental figure present for more than 50 percent of their life up 18 years of age, and have experience with romantic relationships. Those whose responses on the eligibility screening questions did not meet these criteria were redirected to the debriefing form, and the survey was terminated.

Eligible participants completed demographic questions on things including gender, sexual orientation, and race, followed by the three primary study measures, which include an embedded attention check item. To account for differences in the number of parental figures reported by participants, the study included a prompt for participants to enter the initials of their parent or parental figures. Those who listed only one figure completed the perceived parental responsiveness questions once, while those who listed 2 figures completed the same set of questions twice—once for each parent. This approach ensured that each participant's experience was represented accurately, allowing for a consistent and fair comparison across participants. As a result, participants with one parental figure completed a total of 49 questions, whereas those with two completed 67.

A total of 101 individuals began the study, with 51 recruited via Instagram and 50 via SONA. Data from 11 participants was excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. An additional 10 participants failed the attention check, 1 completed less than 50 percent of Self-Construal Scale, and 1 completed less than 50 percent of Relationship Assessment Scale. These participants were excluded from analyses.

The final sample included 78 participants, primarily women, with a diverse range of racial, sexual, and relationship identities. Descriptive statistics for age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, and race/ethnicity are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Analysis Sample Demographics (n=78)*

	M (SD)	%	N
Age (in years)	21.46 (3.709)	--	78
Gender	--	--	78
Woman (cis- or transgender)	--	88.5%	69
Man (cis- or transgender)	--	7.7%	6
Non-binary	--	3.8%	3
Genderqueer	--	--	--
<b>Prefer to self-identify</b>	--	--	--
Relationship Status	--	--	78
Currently in a relationship	--	80.8%	63
Previously in a relationship	--	19.2%	15
Sexual Orientation	--	--	78
Asexual	--	1.3%	1
Bisexual	--	9.0%	7
Gay	--	1.3%	1
Lesbian	--	2.6%	2
Queer	--	3.8%	3
Questioning	--	3.8%	3
Pansexual	--	3.8%	3
Straight (Heterosexual)	--	74.4%	58
Two-spirit	--	--	--
Prefer to self-describe	--	--	--
Race/ethnicity	--	--	78
African/Black	--	3.8%	3
East Asian	--	21.8%	17
European/White	--	46.2%	36
Indo-Caribbean, Indo-African, Indo-Fijian, West-Indian	--	--	--
Latin, South or Central American	--	2.6%	2
Polynesian	--	--	--
South Asian	--	7.7%	6
Southeast Asian	--	2.6%	2
West Asian	--	2.6%	2
Indigenous within Canada	--	1.3%	1
<b>Prefer to self-identify</b>	--	11.5%	9

## Measures

### **Perceived Parental Responsiveness**

We assessed participants' perceptions of parental responsiveness using the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (PPRS) (Reis et al., 2017), adapted to refer to parental figures. The scale includes 18 items, divided into three subscales: general responsiveness (e.g., "My parent usually really listens to me"), understanding (e.g., "My parent knows me well"), and validation (e.g., "My parent values my abilities and opinions"). Responses were recorded on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all true) to 9 (Completely true). Higher scores indicated greater perceived responsiveness.

### **Interdependent Self-Construal**

Participants' level of interdependent self-construal was measured using the 15-item interdependent subscale of the Self-Construal Scale (SCS) (Singelis, 1994). Items include statements such as, "I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact" and "I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in." Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Scores were calculated by summing up all item responses, with higher scores reflecting greater interdependence.

### **Romantic Relationship Satisfaction**

Romantic relationship satisfaction was assessed using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick et al., 1988), a 7-item measure of relationship satisfaction and perceived satisfaction. Sample items include, "How often do you wish you hadn't gotten in this relationship"? And "To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations"? Responses were rated on a 5-point continuous scale, and a composite score was calculated by averaging the items, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction.

Descriptive statistics for all measures are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Measures*

		n	M	SD	$\alpha$
Perceived	Parental	78	6.17	1.86	.977
Responsiveness					
Interdependent Self-Construal		78	71.30	8.46	.550
Relationship Assessment Scale		78	3.93	0.98	.942

## Results

### **Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses**

Correlations among all study variables are presented in Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between participants' romantic relationship satisfaction, perceived parental responsiveness, three subcomponents of perceived parental responsiveness, and interdependent self-construal. Results showed no significant correlation between romantic relationship satisfaction and perceived parental responsiveness ( $r = 0.003$ ,  $p = 0.978$ ). Similarly, the correlation between

romantic relationship satisfaction and interdependent self-construal was positive but nonsignificant ( $r = 0.083$ ,  $p = 0.469$ ). The relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and interdependent self-construal was weakly positive ( $r = 0.222$ ,  $p = 0.051$ ) and approached statistical significance.

**Table 3**  
*Correlations Among Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived Parental Responsiveness	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Perceived Parental Responsiveness -General Subscale		.955**	--	--	--	--
3. Perceived Parental Responsiveness - Understanding Subscale		.980**	.925**	--	--	--
4. Perceived Parental Responsiveness -Validation Subscale		.979**	.924**	.921**	--	--
5. Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	.003	-.015	-.040	.051	--	--
6. Interdependent Self-construal	.222	.187	.214	.227*	.083	--

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

### **Does Parental Responsiveness and Interdependence Predict Relationship Satisfaction?**

To examine whether perceived parental responsiveness and interdependent self-construal predicted romantic relationship satisfaction, two separate linear regressions were conducted. In the first regression, perceived parental responsiveness was entered as the predictor. The model was not significant,  $R^2 = 0.00001$ ,  $F (1,76) = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.978$ , indicating that perceived parental responsiveness did not significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction. The second regression tested the effect of interdependent self-construal on romantic relationship satisfaction. This model also failed to reach significance,  $R^2 = 0.007$ ,  $F (1,76) = 0.529$ ,  $p = 0.469$ , suggesting that interdependent self-construal was not a significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction. Together, these findings indicate that neither perceived parental

responsiveness nor interdependent self-construal significantly explained variability in relationship satisfaction among participants.

### Does Interdependence Moderate the Relationship?

A moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether interdependent self-construal moderated the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction. A hierarchical linear regression was used, with the main effect perceived parental responsiveness included in Step 1, the main effect of interdependent self-construal added in Step 2, and the interaction term added in Step 3.

In Step 1, perceived parental responsiveness alone did not significantly predict romantic relationship satisfaction ( $p = 0.978$ ). In Step 2, adding interdependent self-construal did not significantly improve the model,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.007$ ,  $\Delta F (2, 75) = 0.269$ ,  $p = 0.764$ . In Step 3, the interaction term (perceived parental responsiveness  $\times$  interdependent self-construal) was not significant ( $b = 0.003$ ,  $SE = 0.008$ ,  $t (74) = 0.373$ ,  $p = 0.710$ ). The final model was not significant,  $R^2 = 0.009$ ,  $F (3, 74) = 0.225$ ,  $p = 0.879$ , indicating that interdependent self-construal did not moderate the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction.

### Does Excluding Participants Who Reported on Past Romantic Relationships Change the Results?

Because this study included both participants who were either currently in romantic relationships or reflecting past relationships, we were concerned that retrospective bias could affect how participants reported on relationship satisfaction. To explore this, we conducted an independent samples t-test, comparing relationship satisfaction scores between those currently in relationships and those reflecting on past ones. Results indicated a significant difference in romantic relationship satisfaction between participants reporting on a current relationship ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) and those reporting on a past relationship ( $M = 2.36$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ),  $t (76) = 10.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . However, for the other key variables—perceived parental responsiveness and interdependent self-construal—no significant differences were found between the two groups (see Table 4).

Given the substantial difference in reported romantic relationship satisfaction, we reran our moderation analysis using only the data from participants currently in a relationship. The results remained consistent with the full sample analysis (see Table 5). That is, there were still no significant associations between romantic relationship satisfaction and either perceived parental responsiveness or interdependent self-construal, and interdependent self-construal did not moderate the relationship between parental responsiveness and relationship satisfaction.

**Table 4**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Independent t-Test for Study Variables by Relationship Status*

Variables	Currently in a Relationship (n=63)		Past Relationship (n=15)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD			
Perceived	6.32	1.83	5.58	1.91	1.39	.168	.40

Parental Responsiveness							
Interdependent Self-Construal	71.69	7.97	69.67	10.42	.83	.408	.24
Romantic Relationship Satisfaction	4.30	.60	2.36	.68	10.99	<.001	3.16

**Table 5**

*Moderator Analysis Predicting Romantic Relationship Satisfaction from Parental Responsiveness, Interdependent Self-Construal, and Their Interaction (Participants Currently in a Relationship Only)*

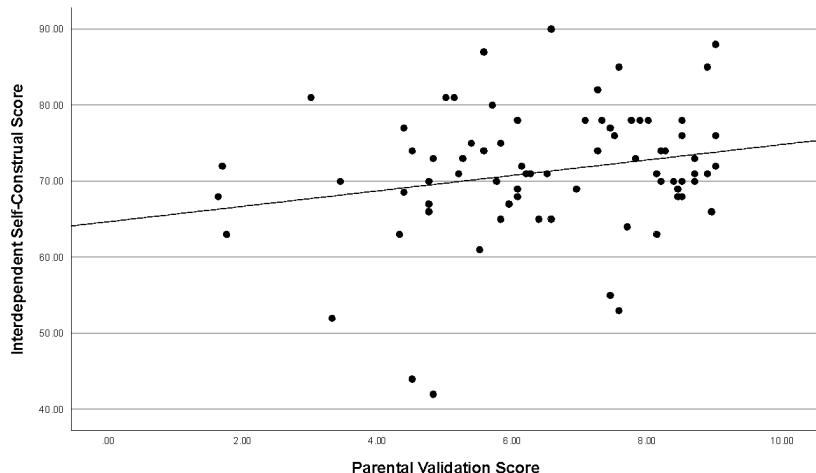
Effect		Estimate	SE	95% CI	p
Perceived Responsiveness	Parental	-.071	.042	[-.156, .013]	.097
Interdependent Self-Construal		.010	.010	[-.010, .030]	.324
Interaction		.005	.005	[-.006, .015]	.369

### Exploratory Analysis

Following our primary analyses, we conducted an exploratory correlation to further examine the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and interdependent self-construal. While our initial correlation between the full PPRS and the SCS approached significance ( $r = .222$ ,  $p = .051$ ), we investigated whether PPRS subscales might demonstrate stronger associations with interdependent self-construal. The original authors of the PPRS identified three subscales: general responsiveness, parental validation, and parental understanding. We re-grouped the items accordingly and conducted follow-up correlations. Notably, we found a significant positive correlation between the parental validation subscale and interdependent self-construal, suggesting that individuals who perceived greater parental validation also tended to report a more interdependent sense of self. This association was not hypothesized in advance and is therefore considered exploratory. As shown in Figure 1, the scatterplot illustrates a modest upward trend between perceived parental validation and interdependent self-construal ( $r = .227$ ,  $p = .046$ ), although this result falls just within the conventional threshold of statistical significance.

**Figure 1**

*Scatterplot of the Relationship Between Perceived Parental Validation and Interdependent Self-Construal*



## Discussion

### Findings of Planned Models

#### ***Parental Responsiveness and Relationship Satisfaction: No Significant Association Found***

Our findings suggest that perceived parental responsiveness during childhood is not a significant predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction in young adulthood. These findings stand in contrast to previous research that has identified a strong association between parental influence and adult romantic relationships (Reczek et al., 2010; Simpson et al., 2007; Fincham & Cui, 2011). In our sample, individuals' perceptions of their parental figure's responsiveness did not appear to meaningfully shape the satisfaction of their current or past romantic relationships.

The discrepancy between our results and prior findings may reflect the shifts in the relational experiences and development priorities of young adults today. More immediate relational factors—such as commitment, emotional appreciation, and sexual satisfaction—may now play a more influential role in romantic relationship satisfaction than early caregiver experiences (Joel et al., 2020). These evolving relational dynamics could diminish the long-term impact of childhood parental relationships on romantic satisfaction for young adults in university.

Another factor that may help explain this pattern is that committed romantic relationships are increasingly viewed as a later stage milestone of adulthood, rather than an early priority. For many young adults in university this delay may reflect a combination of developmental factors and shifting priorities. Cherlin (2009) argues that marriage and long-term commitment have become capstone events rather than entry point into adulthood, especially in western contexts. Supporting this idea, Goldstein and Kenney (2001) found that women who pursue post-secondary education are more likely to postpone marriage but still exhibit high rates of eventual marriage. This trend may reflect the emphasis placed on academic achievement and career preparation during young adulthood for individuals in university, with romantic relationships taking a second

role. Additionally, some young adults may intentionally explore various relationship options before committing to a long-term partnership, contributing to a rise in short term or casual relationships during this stage of life. These more casual relationships may be less likely to be disclosed to parental figures and thus may not be as strongly shaped by perceived parental responsiveness as more serious or long-term relationships might be.

### ***Interdependent Self-Construal and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction: No Direct or Moderating Effect***

Previous research suggests that individuals with higher levels of interdependent self-construal tend to value close relationships, emotional harmony, and connectedness, which can contribute to greater relationship satisfaction (Cross et al., 2000; Cross et al., 2011). However, contrary to our hypothesis, interdependent self-construal was neither significantly associated with romantic relationship quality, nor did it moderate the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and romantic satisfaction. These non-significant predictive and moderating effects may be partially explained by the low internal reliability of the interdependent SCS in our sample, which raises concerns about whether the scale accurately captured participants' sense of relational identity and connectedness.

Some mechanisms may explain the absence of direct or moderating effect of interdependent self-construal on romantic relationship satisfaction. First, as previously discussed, the absence of a moderating effect may reflect the strong influence of more immediate relationship experiences, which may outweigh early-life parental influences in shaping romantic satisfaction (Joel et al., 2020). Another plausible mechanism is the temporal distance between childhood experiences and adult romantic relationships: self-construal may shift over time, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood—a developmental window marked by identity formation and social role transitions (Gudykunst & Lee, 2003).

As a result, the role of interdependent self-construal as a moderator may be more fluid and context-dependent than previously assumed. For instance, in childhood, a high level of interdependence might strengthen the internalization of parental responsiveness. However, as individuals grow and their self-construal changes, the lasting influence of those early relational experiences may diminish, especially if self-views evolve or are shaped by different relational environments (e.g., peers, romantic partners, cultural values). This transition is consistent with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which assumes that young adults strive to establish a coherent sense of identity, often distancing themselves from parental influence in the process (Erikson, 1950).

These null results may reflect both theoretical and methodological limitations. Although prior research supports links between parental responsiveness, self-construal, and romantic outcomes, the current study's small sample size ( $N = 78$ ) may have reduced power to detect subtle effects, particularly in the moderation model. Additionally, the relatively low internal consistency of the interdependent self-construal scale ( $\alpha = .550$ ) raises concerns about measurement precision. These limitations may have weakened potential associations and underscore the importance of replication using larger, more diverse samples and psychometrically stronger measures.

## Exploratory Analysis

Although our primary analyses examined overall perceived parental responsiveness, the results from the exploratory analysis revealed a positive correlation between the parental validation subscale and interdependent self-construal. Parental validation refers to a parent's ability to acknowledge, accept, and affirm their child's emotions and lived experiences (Shenk & Fruzzetti, 2014). This aspect of parenting plays a central role in shaping relational development, particularly in young adulthood, when romantic and social connections become highly salient. Prior research suggests that individuals who experience high levels of parental validation are more likely to form secure attachments and demonstrate healthier interpersonal behaviours, including empathy, effective communication, and constructive conflict resolution (Bühler et al., 2021). Conversely, a lack of parental validation may lead to difficulties in emotion regulation and increase the likelihood of relational dissatisfaction (Adrian et al., 2018).

Within the context of interdependent self-construal, parental validation appears to strengthen the connection between self-worth and interpersonal relationships (Adrian et al., 2018). When a parent consistently validates their child's emotions, it encourages emotional openness, trust in others, and the development of a relationally anchored sense of identity. This dynamic supports the formation of an interdependent self-construal, in which close relationships are seen as integral to the self (Shenk & Fruzzetti, 2014). Given the importance of relational development during young adulthood, understanding how specific forms of parental responsiveness—particularly validation—shape self-construal may offer valuable insight into how early family dynamics influence romantic functioning in emerging adulthood.

Future research should investigate how distinct components of parental validation, such as emotional support and autonomy-granting contribute to romantic relationship outcomes. For instance, Moreira et al.'s (2016) longitudinal work found that maternal attunement—a key validation behaviour—predicted more secure attachment and greater relationship satisfaction among young adults. These findings suggest that validation behaviours play a unique and influential role in shaping romantic dynamics, offering important directions for future longitudinal studies on the developmental foundations of healthy relationships in young adults in university (Moreira et al., 2016).

## Limitations and Future Research

### *Sample*

**Gender Imbalance.** The study's predominantly female sample presents a limitation in terms of generalizability. Prior research has shown that women tend to exhibit higher levels of interdependent self-construal, emphasizing relational and social connectedness, whereas men are more likely to display independent self-construal, prioritizing autonomy and personal achievement (Cross & Madson, 1997). These gender-based differences may have influenced the interdependent self-construal scores; having more women than men in the sample may have elevated the average compared to what might be observed in a more gender-balanced group. A sample composed mainly of women may therefore not reflect how these dynamics unfold in a broader, more gender-diverse population. To improve generalizability, future research should aim for more balanced gender representation. This would support a more inclusive and accurate understanding of how perceived parental responsiveness and self-construal jointly shape romantic relationship outcomes across diverse populations.

**Ethnicity.** While this study examined self-construal and romantic relationship satisfaction, it did not directly assess how cultural background may have influenced participants' responses. Our sample included racially and ethnically diverse young adults in university, with 21.8% identifying as East Asian, along with additional representation from South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Latin American, and Indigenous backgrounds. Cultural frameworks—such as individualism and collectivism—are known to shape how people understand themselves in relation to others, which in turn can influence how they experience emotional closeness, navigate conflict, and define satisfaction in romantic relationships. For instance, Joo, Lee, and Gjerde (2021) found that individuals from collectivist backgrounds were more likely to report self-change in response to romantic relationships, a pattern linked to greater relationship satisfaction in their study of Chinese and European American couples. Such cultural differences in relational norms and identity development may have affected how participants in our study perceived both parental responsiveness and their romantic experiences. Future research should consider including measures of cultural orientation or acculturation to better account for how cultural context may interact with self-construal and romantic functioning during emerging adulthood.

### **Recall Bias**

Another important limitation of this study is the potential influence of recall bias, given that participants were asked to retrospectively evaluate their experiences of parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction. Prior research suggests that memory for past relational experiences can be shaped by a range of factors, including current emotional state, psychological well-being, and the amount of time that has passed since the events occurred (Levine & Safer, 2002; Safer et al., 2001). For instance, Bonanno et al. (2011) demonstrated that individuals experiencing present emotional distress were more likely to recall prior events as more intense or negative, whereas those in a more positive emotional state tended to underreport previous distress. In this context, participants may have unintentionally distorted their recollections—either amplifying or minimizing the perceived quality of their parental relationships or romantic satisfaction—based on their current mental state. This introduces a threat to internal validity, as the data may be more reflective of participants' present emotional interpretations than of their actual past experiences.

To reduce the impact of recall bias, future research should consider using longitudinal designs that assess perceived parental responsiveness and relationship development in real-time, beginning in early childhood and continuing through major developmental transitions. Repeated assessments across time would reduce reliance on retrospective memory and provide a clearer understanding of how parental influence unfolds. Additionally, incorporating multiple sources of information—such as caregiver reports, peer evaluations, or observational data—would help validate self-reports and enhance measurement accuracy (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2005). These methodological improvements would significantly strengthen the internal validity and credibility of future studies. While this study provides important initial insights into how perceived parental responsiveness and self-construal relate to romantic relationship satisfaction, these limitations highlight the need for broader, more inclusive, and methodologically rigorous research to fully capture the complexities of these developmental and relational processes.

### ***Self-Report Bias***

Beyond recall bias, the exclusive use of self-report measures in this study introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, in which participants may adjust their responses to align with perceived societal expectations. This concern is particularly relevant for sensitive subjects like parental behaviour and romantic relationship satisfaction, where individuals might feel pressure to respond in a socially acceptable manner, even if it does not fully reflect their actual experiences (Van de Mortel, 2008). Such bias can distort findings by either inflating or deflating scores in a way that skews the relationships between variables. To mitigate this issue, future research should consider incorporating indirect measurement approaches, such as third-party reports or implicit association tasks, to complement self-report data. Additionally, using standardized instruments like the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale can help detect biased responding and allow researchers to control its effects in data analysis (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

### ***Measures***

Although two of the study's measures demonstrated strong internal consistency, the low reliability of the SCS raises concerns about its precision and may have contributed to the non-significant findings involving this variable. To address this limitation, future research should consider using revised or alternative versions of the SCS that demonstrate higher psychometric quality. Additionally, pretesting or piloting scales prior to full data collection can help researchers identify issues with internal consistency and ensure that key constructs are being measured reliably. Future research should continue to explore the complexity of this topic. Our study focused exclusively on interdependent self-construal, but examining both interdependent and independent dimension may offer a more nuanced understanding of how identity orientation interacts with early caregiving to shape romantic outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

This study found no significant moderating effect of interdependent self-construal on the relationship between perceived parental responsiveness and romantic relationship satisfaction. By focusing on young adults in university—a group relatively underrepresented in this area of research—we sought to examine how early caregiving experiences might shape romantic relationship outcomes during emerging adulthood.

Although our findings diverge from initial hypothesis, they highlighted the possibility that other developmental or contextual factors may exert a greater influence on romantic relationship quality in early adulthood than parental responsiveness alone. While prior research has shown that early parental relationships contribute to the formation of interpersonal behaviours (Liu et al., 2022), our results suggest that this influence may be less direct or no more dependent on situational variables than previously assumed.

Despite the absence of significant main or interaction effects, our exploratory analysis revealed a positive association between the parental validation subscale and interdependent self-construal. This finding points to a more nuanced pathway by which specific aspects of parental responsiveness—such as emotional affirmation—may shape how individuals understand themselves in relations to others, particularly in relational contexts.

Together, these results underscore the need for continued research on the interplay between early relational experiences, self-construal, and romantic functioning. Future studies should consider extending this work to older populations who are more likely to be engaged in long term, committed, or marriage-oriented relationships. Additionally, examining both interdependent and independent self-construal may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how identity development influences the formation and maintenance of close romantic relationships during and beyond young adulthood.

### **Author Contributions**

This thesis was completed as part of the requirements for the Honours Bachelor's degree in Social Psychology, at McMaster University. The preliminary idea generation and literature review were conducted by Ella Proulx, Haniya Rahman, Megan Nerbonne, Wanrong Jiang, and Xiwen Zhang. This team was also responsible for preparing the first draft of the ethics application.

The final draft of the preregistration and ethics application was carried out collaboratively by Amelia Burt, Ella Proulx, Haniya Rahman, Megan Nerbonne, Wanrong Jiang, and Xiwen Zhang. The research team revised the ethics application during the second and third rounds, securing ethics approval for the study.

Amelia Burt was responsible for formatting and inputting the approved survey materials into Qualtrics and Sona, providing subsequent codebooks for questions. All members of the research team shared responsibility for overseeing and monitoring data collection. Wanrong Jiang and Xiwen Zhang conducted data cleaning and statistical analysis.

Amelia Burt authored the following sections and subsequent subsections for the Final Paper: Perceived Parental Responsiveness Influence on Relationship Satisfaction, Current Research, Research Question and Hypotheses, Results (including the subsections Did Interdependence Moderate the Relationship? and Exploratory Analysis), Limitations and Future Research (addressing Sample, Recall Bias, Self-Report Bias, and Scale Internal Reliability), and conclusion for both the rough and final drafts.

Xiwen Zhang authored the following sections for the Final Paper: Methods (including Measures and Table 1 Sample Demographics), Results (including Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Measures, Table 3 Correlation Among Study Variables, Table 4 Descriptive Statistics and t-Test by relationship status, Table 5 Moderating Analysis of current-relationship participants only, Figure 1 Scatterplot of Exploratory Analyses, and all the analysis of these tables), and Discussion of the findings of Planned Models for both the rough and final drafts.

Wanrong Jiang authored the following sections for the Final Paper: Results (including the subsection Does Excluding Participants Who Reported on Past Romantic Relationship Change the Results and Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Measures, Table 3 Correlation Among Study Variables (including analysis), Methods (including the Participants and Procedure, and Table 1 Sample Demographics) for both the rough and final drafts, and checking and correcting the References list.

Haniya Rahman authored the following sections for the Final Paper: Methods section (including the Participants and Procedure subsection.), Discussion of the findings on the exploratory analysis on parental responsiveness and future directions for both the rough

and final drafts. Xiwen Zhang, Wanrong Jiang, and Amelia Burt collectively edited the final paper from start to finish.

Ella Proulx authored a section of the Introduction for the rough draft. As well as edited sections throughout this paper.

Megan Nerbonne authored a section of the Introduction for the rough draft. As well as edited sections throughout this paper.

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